

Scarcity, Government, Population

The Problem of Food in Colonial Kenya, c. 1900–1952

James Duminy

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Abstract

Food security in Africa is a foremost development challenge. Dominant approaches to addressing food security concentrate on availability and increasing production. This 'productionist' focus arguably limits the capacity of government policies to address contemporary food problems. It does so by obscuring both the specific food insecurity dynamics linked to the continent's ongoing urban transitions, as well as the potential for more systemic food strategies. Yet existing research provides an inadequate historical understanding of how a production and supply-oriented bias has emerged and become established in the African context. This undermines the capacity of scholars and policymakers to critique and reform food security thought and practice.

The thesis addresses this gap in knowledge by critically and historically examining the emergence of food scarcity as a specific problem of government in a particular African context: colonial Kenya.

Understanding how colonial officials and other actors conceived of and responded to food scarcities in Kenya is the primary question addressed. The specific roles and duties of the state in relation to this problem are also investigated.

The thesis employs a Foucauldian-inspired approach to the historical analysis of government and problematizations. Primary data were gathered from archives in the United Kingdom.

The argument is that food scarcity, as a problem of government, shifted from an uncertain and localized rural issue to a risk encompassing the balance between market supply and demand at a territorial scale. The role of the state shifted from a last-resort provider of relief to a regulator of maize production and demand, with a focus on ensuring adequate supply for territorial self-sufficiency. Accordingly, anti-scarcity techniques became increasingly economic and calculative in nature, and longer term in focus. This mode of conceiving and addressing food scarcity existed in Kenya by the end of the Second World War, and was stabilized in the immediate post-war period. Elements of this system are recognizable in contemporary food security policies in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa.

The thesis contributes to historical knowledge of African food insecurity and colonial government. It moves beyond previous work by focusing on Kenya, and by examining food scarcity as a distinct problem of colonial government. It enhances knowledge of the conditions under which contemporary modes of food governance have come into existence.

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Abbreviations

APSB	Agricultural Production and Settlement Board
EAPSC	East African Production and Supply Council
FSC	Food Shortage Commission
GOK	Government of Kenya
ILO	International Labour Organization
KCDB	Kenya Commodity Distribution Board
KFA	Kenya Farmers Association
KSB	Kenya Supply Board
Legco	Legislative Council
LNC	Local native council
MPC	Maize and Produce Control
NCPB	National Cereals and Produce Board
NA	Native authority

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1. Introduction

This is a study of how food scarcity emerged as a problem of government. It is a study, also, of the tensions at the heart of that process. The focus is on a particular African context: colonial Kenya.¹ The thesis seeks to contribute to our knowledge of the historical nexus between food scarcity and colonial government in Kenya as well as Africa more generally. In doing so, it aims to improve our critical understanding of contemporary food governance practices.

The chapters that follow tell a certain story. That story centres on how officials and other key colonial actors thought about and responded to the problem of food scarcity, and how this changed over time. It begins in the late nineteenth century, when the East Africa Protectorate was declared, and when, for the first time, famine became a matter for colonial state intervention. It ends with the escalation of the Mau Mau Uprising and the declaration of a State of Emergency in Kenya.

In this period, spanning over half a century of colonial rule and white settlement, preventing and managing food scarcity emerged as an important responsibility and function of state administration. The means used to do so differed in time and space, as did the arguments advanced to justify those means. Many colonial-era practices and their objects – like sacks of famine relief, food-for-work programmes, government price controls, supply-demand calculations, consumer subsidies, as well as ‘objective’ minimum wage calculations – continue to feature as part of food security strategies pursued by African governments. I argue that examining the situated emergence of these practices can aid our understanding of why food problems are thought about and addressed in the way that they are. This understanding can, in turn, enhance our capacity to critique problematic arrangements of knowledge and practice.

The thesis has been structured according to what Dunleavy terms the ‘opening out’ model.² The first element of this model – this introductory chapter – comprises a ‘deliberately short and terse’ explanation of the research motivation and questions. It treads closely to the immediate issue to be investigated, with a brief discussion of the more recent and relevant literature to be applied, while presenting only a small amount of essential background information. The text then moves on the second and most significant element: the sequence of empirical chapters, here numbered 2 to 7. These chapters present and explain the research findings according to a broadly chronological pattern. Some analysis and discussion of the wider theoretical implications of the findings are

¹ The colonial territory that would become independent Kenya was founded as the East Africa Protectorate in 1895. In 1920, it was reconstituted as the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, as it remained until Kenya achieved independence from British rule in 1963. For the sake of consistency, this thesis will refer to ‘Kenya’ throughout. In cases of other colonial African territories, I have preferred to use the original colonial names, such as ‘Tanganyika’ (for Tanzania), ‘Northern Rhodesia’ (Zambia) and ‘Southern Rhodesia’ (Zimbabwe).

² Dunleavy, *Authoring a PhD*, chapter 3, here pp. 59–60.

included within the concluding section of each chapter. Finally, the thesis concludes (chapter 8) with a more expansive discussion of the theoretical implications of the work, signalling pathways for future research in the field.

In this introduction, as the first element of this ‘opening out’ structure, I start by setting out the motivation for the research. I then provide a critical overview of key existing works on the history of food scarcity and colonial government in Africa, indicating the gaps in knowledge to which the study responds. This provides the context for the definition of the research problem, questions and major arguments. I describe the conceptual and methodological approach used to make these arguments, before discussing the study’s scope and scale, as well as the sources of evidence used and their limitations. Finally, I present the outline of the thesis.

1.1 Motivation

African ‘food security’ is a major developmental challenge.³ Millions of people on the continent suffer from the effects of food scarcity, whether in the form of absolute hunger or, more commonly, through the ‘triple burden’ of undernutrition, obesity and micronutrient deficiency.⁴ The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reports that 153 million sub-Saharan Africans suffered from ‘severe food insecurity’ in 2014–15, representing the highest prevalence of any world region.⁵

Kenya is no exception to these trends. In February 2017, the number of food-insecure people in Kenya reportedly increased from 1,3 to 2,2 million. The government declared the ongoing, El Niño-linked drought a national disaster.⁶ At the time of writing in July 2017, the website of the Famine Early Warning Systems Network indicates that Kenya should expect ‘atypical high food insecurity’ through to the end of September 2017. ‘Nationally’, it reads, ‘food security is gradually declining’. The chief cause has been the drop in marketed food supply and imports, alongside increasing levels of demand. The outlook is bleak: ‘an analysis of available maize stocks’ against ‘expected utilization’ indicated that the country would hold a maize surplus of 250,000 metric tons at the end of May 2017 – well below the average for that time of year.⁷

The 2011 Kenyan National Food Security and Nutrition Policy notes the government’s main ‘policy objective’ with respect to ‘food availability and

³ The 1996 World Food Summit defined ‘food security’ as a state that exists ‘when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life’. Food security therefore consists of three main dimensions: availability, access and utilization; ‘World Food Summit: Rome Declaration on World Food Security’, FAO, accessed 9 August 2017, <http://www.fao.org/WFS/>.

⁴ FAO, *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Africa 2016*, p. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶ Food Security Information Network, *Global Report on Food Crises 2017*, p. 20.

⁷ ‘Kenya: Food Security Outlook’, Famine Early Warning Systems Network, accessed 5 July 2017, <http://www.fews.net/east-africa/kenya/food-security-outlook/february-2017>.

access'. This is: to 'increase the quantity and quality of food available and accessible in order to ensure that all Kenyans have an adequate, diverse and healthy diet'. This goal will 'be achieved by working towards sustainable production increases for food that is diversified, affordable and helps meet basic nutrition requirements'.⁸ The Policy goes on to identify several other strategic interventions. These include improving storage and processing, maintaining strategic reserves, promoting trade and well-functioning markets, as well as increasing employment and income in both urban and rural areas. Moreover, enhanced trade between East African countries will help to achieve 'regional food self-sufficiency'.⁹

The descriptions of Kenyan food insecurity cited above, taken together with the country's National Food Policy objectives, express a 'production-oriented' perspective on food problems. This perspective assumes a state of resource scarcity, and emphasizes the need to increase total production as the foremost strategy to achieve food security. It is not specific to Kenya. Indeed, promoting food availability is the dominant response to food problems in Africa more generally. As argued by Haysom, 'productionist' framings of food security tend to result in national-scale policies and strategies that are preoccupied with 'ensuring a positive food trade balance'.¹⁰

Why is this the way in which the problem of food is understood? Why is food something to be 'secured' and made 'sufficient'? Why is this a domain of national state responsibility? Where did this notion of food security as a calculative, state-driven, market-mediated balance of availability and demand, measured at a territory-wide scale, come from? Why are 'production increases' listed as the first of the Kenyan government's strategic interventions to promote food security?

Answering these questions is of more than academic interest. Numerous critiques have been made of production-oriented food strategies that function against a background assumption of scarcity. Sometimes these are enrolled within wider critiques of neo-Malthusian framings of African developmental and environmental 'crises'; framings that have persisted since at least the 1970s, when they were enthusiastically endorsed by organizations like the Club of Rome.¹¹ In policy terms, a totalizing focus on population growth and production tends to underplay the specific cultural, political and economic factors that affect processes of food supply, distribution, access and utilization. Moreover, Mehta reminds us that the 'scare of scarcity', when naturalized within academic and policy debates, has profound implications at a political-economic level. Powerful interests may use the threat of scarcity, and the figure of imminent Malthusian crisis, as a strategy to secure control over vital and valuable resources.¹²

⁸ Government of Kenya (GOK), *National Food and Nutrition Security Policy 2011*, p. viii.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁰ Haysom, 'Food System Governance', pp. 5–8; also 'Food and the City', p. 266.

¹¹ Djurfeldt et al., *African Food Crisis*, p. 10; Gould, 'Malthus', pp. 155–60; Leach and Mearns, 'Environmental Change'.

¹² Mehta, 'Scare, Naturalization'.

Recently, scholars writing from an urban perspective have delivered a strong critique of the 'received wisdom' of African food security thought and policy. Here production-oriented strategies stand charged with overlooking the precise food security challenges arising at subnational and urban scales.¹³ These strategies tend to assume that the most pressing problems of poverty and food insecurity manifest in rural African areas. Organizations like the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), therefore, see improved agricultural productivity as the principal means to solve rural and national food security problems while boosting rural smallholder incomes and driving rural transformation.¹⁴ Yet poverty in Africa, including food poverty, is both increasingly urban and increasingly a problem of access and malnutrition rather than supply and hunger.¹⁵ The upshot is that productionism, as a strategic food security approach vested at a macro-governance level, is poorly equipped to respond to the variegated urban transitions driving contemporary social, economic and political dynamics on the continent.¹⁶ Responses to urban food insecurity tend to take the form of 'welfarist' or project-based interventions that 'lack strategic focus', including food aid, nutritional supplementation and social safety net programmes.¹⁷ The net result is a twin-track approach to food security, usually weighted towards large-scale production initiatives, which obscures the possibilities for a 'systemic' policy approach. A more systemic food strategy might, for example, take greater account of how food security dynamics are linked to those of structural poverty, market structures, value chains, relative affordability of food items, food safety issues, as well as the availability of domestic facilities for food storage and preparation.¹⁸

Given the strength of these critiques, we require an accurate understanding of why and how production-oriented modes of conceiving and addressing food problems exist, and retain such dominance, in the African context. To gain this understanding, perhaps we should look to standard histories of the concept and evolution of 'food security'. This kind of history might outline the origins and early efforts of the FAO following the Hot Springs Conference of 1943.¹⁹ It might identify the 1974 World Food Conference as the origin of 'food security' as a formal concept, with its neo-Malthusian emphasis on food availability, on boosting worldwide cereal stocks to meet global population growth, as well as on national food production and reserve programmes.²⁰ 'Food security' might then be traced through its various definitions, noting shifts in emphasis between the poles of production and, from the 1980s, access.²¹ It might also identify

¹³ Battersby, 'MDGs to SDGs'; Crush and Frayne, 'Invisible Crisis'; Haysom, 'Food System Governance'.

¹⁴ FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2017*.

¹⁵ Battersby, 'MDGs to SDGs'.

¹⁶ On urban transformations in Africa generally, see the contributions to Parnell and Pieterse, *Africa's Urban Revolution*.

¹⁷ Battersby, 'MDGs to SDGs'; Haysom, 'Food System Governance', p. 5.

¹⁸ Battersby, 'MDGs to SDGs', p. 118.

¹⁹ McKeon, *Food Security Governance*, chapter 1; Shaw, *World Food Security*, chapter 1.

²⁰ 'Implementation of the International Undertaking on World Food Security', FAO, accessed 19 October 2014, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x5589e/x5589e00.htm#Contents>.

²¹ Maxwell, 'Evolution'.

changes in the scale of food security analyses and objectives, for example, from global or national self-sufficiency to household access.²²

These kinds of histories focus on the articulation and evolution of food-related discourses and programmes at the global level. The implicit assumption is that these ideas and techniques have subsequently diffused to various African contexts to structure food policies and interventions.²³ Such a perspective leaves little room for local forces and dynamics in giving rise to contemporary food governance thought and practice. A similar point can be made about some works examining the roots and emergence of arch-discourses such as ‘development’, or the discursive framing of colonial and African development problems.²⁴ African settings are seen as passive stages for the travelling band of developmentalism. Moreover, and perhaps more significantly, explanations of food security’s conceptual origins and evolution fail to account for the conditions under which a state-driven, market-based and calculative notion of ‘food security’ was possible in the first place. In assuming these realities, they take as the explanation that which needs to be explained.²⁵

In this thesis I will show that this kind of market-based calculus of food production versus demand, and a set of practices for managing that relationship, emerged as a responsibility of government in Kenya well before the 1974 World Food Conference, and even prior to the formation of the FAO in October 1945. As such, we require a deeper historical understanding of how food-related practices have emerged and become established in context. At least three bodies of existing research might help us to gain this understanding: histories of African famine and food insecurity, histories of African colonial government, and Foucault-inspired work on ‘colonial governmentality’. The following sections critically discuss these literatures, highlighting what they do and do not tell us about the colonial connections between food and government.

1.2 African famine history and government

In this and the following section, I will present and discuss critically several key works accounting for the historical intersections of food scarcity and colonial

²² Jarosz, ‘Comparing’.

²³ For a general critique of ‘diffusionist’ models of historical writing, and their links to the ideologies of colonialism, see Blaut, *Colonizer’s Model of the World*.

²⁴ For example, Leach and Mearns look to dynamics in the sociologies of science and development to explain ‘the origins and persistence of received wisdom about environmental change in Africa’; ‘Environmental Change’, p. 463. Cowen and Shenton focus on the genesis and intellectual roots of ‘development’ discourse as a European phenomenon, without significant attention to the role of colonial settings; *Doctrines of Development*. Authors like Hodge focus on these dynamics at an imperial scale, but emphasize metropolitan events and debates; *Triumph of the Expert*. A more localized perspective on the emergence and application of ‘colonial development’ in African contexts is provided by the various contributions to Hodge et al., *Developing Africa*. Moore has critiqued the ‘discursive determinism’ found in poststructural studies of development – they rely on textual representations, thereby reinforcing the image of a single monolithic discourse that overlooks local dynamics and political struggles, and ignoring older patterns of more recent developmental interventions; ‘Crucible’.

²⁵ Elden, *Birth of Territory*, p. 3.

government in Africa. The object is to show two things. One, that the historical literature on African food insecurity and famine fails to account adequately for the range of ways in which colonial actors thought about and governed food problems. Moreover, Kenya as a specific context has been underexamined. Second, that historical studies of colonial government tend to overlook or underplay the significance of food problems. The net result is that we have an insufficient grasp of food scarcity as a *distinct problem of government*. The thesis responds to this gap in knowledge.

Much of the work on the history of African famine and food issues was written in the context of the so-called African 'food crisis' of the 1980s. The decade witnessed the publication of a number of important studies testing academic and policy interpretations of the nature and causes of that crisis.²⁶ Moreover, a series of scholars writing from various disciplines, recognizing the ambiguities inherent in competing crisis narratives, employed critical historical perspectives to shed light on contemporary dynamics of food supply, insecurity and governance.²⁷ African famine historians like Watts positioned their work within a wider critique of neo-Malthusian theories and their framing of human hunger within the causal bounds of resource scarcity, population pressure and ecological degradation.²⁸ Sen's work on famine as a form of 'entitlement failure', for one, can be seen as an early shot in a critical broadside against the notion that the chief cause of famine is a decline in the total availability of food.²⁹

What, then, does the literature on the history of African famine and food insecurity tell us about the dynamics of colonial government? The 1980s saw several important studies recognizing the mutual constitution of dearth, famine and processes of colonization. Scholars of African famine, as those of Ireland and India, examined how colonial policies and the extension of capitalist market processes – forms of structural and 'political violence' – acted to generate and drive 'the violence of hunger'.³⁰ Yet the 'socio-political production' of African famine has been approached from different perspectives. To illustrate some of these perspectives, with their respective strengths and weaknesses, I will briefly discuss three significant works by Watts, Bryceson and Vaughan.

Influenced by the tide of 1970s 'peasant studies' and debates in dependency theory and structural Marxism, Watts' *Silent Violence* rooted the genesis and character of food crises in northern Nigeria to the history of colonial rule and capitalist expansion in the region. This study was path breaking in linking the causes and effects of individual famine events into a longer historical process of rural transformation as a means to explain more recent dynamics. Watts' specific concern was to see how the 'contradictions embodied in the colonial state' – the

²⁶ For a critical review of work postulating the 1980s African 'food crisis', see Berry, 'Food Crisis'.

²⁷ Contributors to the volume *Feeding African Cities*, edited by Guyer, for example, strove to enhance our knowledge of how African food supply systems have functioned historically, while overcoming the tendency to analytically separate African material and economic life from the domain of government plans and policies. See Guyer, 'Introduction'.

²⁸ Watts, *Silent Violence*, p. lxxiv.

²⁹ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*.

³⁰ Nally, *Human Encumbrances*, pp. viii, x. See also Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, pp. 8–11.

fact that state exactions depended on yet undermined peasant production – ultimately acted to jeopardize ‘the simple reproduction of rural producers’. The imbrications of capital, state and famine ensure that colonial food crises provide ‘useful instruments’ to understand both the historical conditions of rural poverty, as well as ‘the evolution and penetration of capitalist relations under the aegis of the imperial state’.³¹ This reflects his analytical focus on the historical drivers and character of famine and vulnerability in northern Nigeria.³²

Watts’ emphasis on the dialectic of famine and food subsistence, on one hand, and the changing priorities and strategies of colonial political economy, on the other, is salutary. Iliffe did similarly in his longitudinal study of famine in colonial Zimbabwe.³³ However, my analytical focus and objectives are somewhat different. I am less interested in *why* colonial famines occurred, and more in how governing actors, including but extending beyond the state, thought about and responded to scarcity, and how these modes of thinking and acting shifted in conjunction with broader historical dynamics. Put differently, I am interested in the origins, dynamics and effects of food scarcities, but only insofar as these realities helped to shape the changing nature and institutionalization of the governmental responses addressed to these realities. This accords with my particular historiographical approach, which is to understand the rationalities and practices of government as emerging through situated events, conditions and problems, rather than through their formal relation to capitalism. As such, and following Dean, I believe that it is possible to understand the historical government of food ‘in terms of the measures and the goals of the specific programmes and policies in which it is embodied, rather than its relation... to capitalism’.³⁴

Now, consider a second historical study of the nexus between food insecurity and government in an African context: Bryceson’s analysis of colonial Tanganyika and post-colonial Tanzania.³⁵ Bryceson’s approach, rooted in historical sociology, sought to explain why the state and market were not as effective in promoting household food sufficiency as, in theory, they should have been. She explains how food insecurity was produced in cyclical fashion in the tension between clientage networks and household strategies, on one hand, and state and market functions, on the other. The analysis is cognizant of how government actions – including famine relief practices, efforts to feed labour, as well as food policies devised during the Second World War – influenced the longer-term dynamics of household food security in Tanzania. Food insecurity, in turn, affected the social division of labour. Eventually, it undermined relations between society, state and market, leading to increasing reliance on household and clientage networks.³⁶

³¹ Watts, *Silent Violence*, pp. 272–3.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 274.

³³ *Ibid.*, especially chapter 6; Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*.

³⁴ Dean, *Constitution of Poverty*, p. 22.

³⁵ Bryceson, ‘Food Insecurity’.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

Yet, arguably, Bryceson's formalistic approach limits the extent to which colonial government can be historicized within the analysis. The state is defined in Weberian terms of bureaucratic action and accountability determined by 'fixed legal norms'.³⁷ In the Tanzanian context, it acted as one of four main social institutions alongside clientage, household and market. State agents operated in a manner according to their training, within the bounds set by established norms, just as market actors expressed a unitary profit-maximizing rationality, while the 'peasant household' sought to avert risk. Moreover, in colonial times, officials worked with reference to an external context and paternalistic ideology making them 'relatively impervious' to surrounding social realities and relationships.³⁸ Where Watts might have seen official action within the broader logic of capitalist function, Bryceson sees the expression of social rules and habitus. We only occasionally peer behind the formal façade of accountability and ideology to see the specificities of thought and action, and their relation to problems emerging in the political field.

Finally, consider Vaughan's interdisciplinary analysis of a major famine that beset Nyasaland, now Malawi, in 1949.³⁹ Incorporating ethnographic research, she aimed to develop a 'total picture' of the famine event. To do so, she drew the famine within a much longer timeframe of household, gender and official dynamics – changes that destabilized rural food availability and access in a gradual and uneven manner. A similar approach was taken in a later study, co-authored by Vaughan, focusing on food supply problems in northern Zambia.⁴⁰ Vaughan assessed the veracity of competing theories used by contemporaries to explain the 1949 famine's causes, each of which has an equivalent in present-day theories of food insecurity: neo-Malthusian, 'food versus cash crop', and state mismanagement. Moreover, she drew on Sen's entitlement theory to highlight the specific ways in which socio-economic and institutional relations led to some groups of people, particularly unemployed women, suffering more than others.⁴¹

Vaughan's historical sense of the coproduction of famine, economic forces, household accumulation, gender relations, coping strategies and the colonial state is valuable.⁴² Yet, despite this historical perspective, one is left with a relatively static and localized notion of colonial government, with its actions and entitlement relations. If food entitlements (in the form of relief supplies) were heavily biased towards African males employed by settlers, we have little sense of *why* this was so, or whether it had ever been otherwise. She tends to underexamine how such 'class-based entitlements' arose and changed.⁴³ This sense is enhanced by the way historical data are employed when explaining single episodes of famine.⁴⁴ The analytical vector sees historical dynamics as

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

³⁹ Vaughan, *Story of an African Famine*.

⁴⁰ Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees*.

⁴¹ Vaughan, *Story of an African Famine*, chapters 4 and 5.

⁴² For similar approaches, see Maddox, 'Gender and Famine'; Maddox, 'Mtunya'; Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees*.

⁴³ For a general critique of Sen's entitlement theory along these lines see Watts, 'Black Acts'.

⁴⁴ See also Maddox, 'Mtunya'; Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices'.

driving and shaping a single event, rather than how that event fits within, and affected, a longer history of government and problematization.

All three of these important studies focus on the generators and drivers of African food insecurity or famine. In this respect, they are all interested in the transformation of social relations wrought by colonization and foreign rule. Their emphasis is on the *effects* of state action and market dynamics for food supply and access, rather than how scarcity *has been governed*. By contrast, other famine scholars have focused more closely on the anti-scarcity interventions of African colonial states. In Tanganyika, a relatively 'progressive' case, these were assembled within a policy of local food self-sufficiency that formed the basis and priority of colonial administration.⁴⁵ Some British African settings saw the creation of 'famine codes', like those of nineteenth-century India, to guide state relief functions.⁴⁶ That colonial officials were willing to provide famine relief or pursue anti-famine strategies is usually depicted as being motivated by a combination of paternalistic ideology and sense of administrative duty.⁴⁷ Yet, in many cases, official will to relieve suffering was tempered by a reluctance to interfere with the 'invisible hand' of the market or, in settler contexts, by local political pressure.⁴⁸ This meant state anti-famine interventions commonly took the more *ad hoc* forms of emergency famine relief.

Scholars like De Waal emphasize the limitations of colonial anti-famine efforts for alleviating African mortality and suffering.⁴⁹ For the most part, he suggests, these efforts 'remained at best an administrative obligation'.⁵⁰ As argued by Anderson, 'it was only when drought became famine that the colonial administration generally concerned itself with the consequences'.⁵¹ Iliffe, by contrast, sees the technology, infrastructure and distributive operations of the colonial state and market as becoming more effective in decreasing famine mortality over time.⁵² Before the outbreak of the Second World War, 'famines that kill' had basically come to an end in Southern Rhodesia. Yet, as capitalist development intensified, and market relations became more generalized across the territory, the nature and geography of both scarcity and state relief changed. A new kind of dearth emerged: more widespread, lingering patterns of scarcity, and hunger suffered mainly in the form of malnutrition.⁵³ Increasingly, the people and regions that suffered most acutely from scarcity were those most affected by the exactions of white settlement. Famine relief functions also shifted from the Native Affairs Department to the settler-dominated state marketing system. Iliffe's approach is instructive, but leaves us with an incomplete picture

⁴⁵ Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity'.

⁴⁶ Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, pp. 58–9; De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, pp. 28–9; Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, chapters 6 and 7; Watts, *Silent Violence*, pp. 312–14.

⁴⁷ Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity', chapter 3; Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach*, chapters 3 and 4; Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, p. 62.

⁴⁸ Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, p. 87, also chapters 4–6; Watts, *Silent Violence*, pp. 302–4.

⁴⁹ De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, chapter 2; Watts, *Silent Violence*, chapter 6.

⁵⁰ De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, pp. 30–1.

⁵¹ Anderson, 'Depression', p. 331.

⁵² For an earlier version of this argument in the case of Tanganyika, see Iliffe, *Modern History*, pp. 471–2, 351–2. For a similar argument for colonial India see McAlpin, *Subject to Famine*.

⁵³ Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, p. 79.

of official action. His narrow focus on famine relief practices tends to exclude the wider set of government policies and practices that were used to manage food problems. We see only a glimpse of how and why food scarcity bothered and energized colonial officials, of the arguments and conflicts informing their actions.

Across this work, authors have recognized the role and impact of governmental acts in transforming and driving food scarcity. Yet, arguably, in these analyses the colonial state itself tends to retain a relatively unitary and coherent character. This character stems either from the state's conceived functions in relation to capitalism, from established social and ideological norms, or from the dynamics and contradictions of political economy. This 'black boxing' of the state is even more pronounced in the historical work on African coping strategies. Here the adaptive anti-scarcity strategies pursued by households and individuals are noted to have incorporated state relief and forms of market access. Yet even Nangulu's careful historical study of western Kenya casts the colonial state as a background actor, among many others, in the drama of marginalization, hunger and adaptability.⁵⁴

We should, however, note several important exceptions to the analytical tendency to 'unitize' the state. Moore and Vaughan's study of rural food supply problems in northern Zambia, for example, pays close attention to the interests and actions of district and provincial commissioners. Ultimately, their analysis aims to explain local dynamics. We learn of the beliefs, arguments and interventions of these officials, rather than how food problems were being grasped at multiple scales and governed centrally. The local empirical focus means that we tend to encounter the state in two forms: either as the individual rationalities of local administrators, or as the Colonial State with a more or less homogenous set of political and economic interests.⁵⁵ The result is that local acts of government are insufficiently located within their wider strategic and political context.

In sum, the literature on the history of African famine and food insecurity emphasizes the role of colonial governmental interventions in driving and reproducing the realities of scarcity. However, the *government* of scarcity tends to be underexamined in certain respects. Often we hear little of the specific motivations, contingencies, conflicts and strategies that informed anti-scarcity responsibilities and techniques of government. Put differently, we are left with an incomplete sense of the 'tensions of empire' that underlay acts of governing.⁵⁶ Moreover, when compared to the existing scholarship on African colonies such as Southern Rhodesia, Nigeria, Nyasaland and Tanganyika, colonial Kenya has not been studied extensively. To date, no scholars have focused on the specifically Kenyan problems of food scarcity and governance longitudinally and at a territorial scale. As a corrective, one might turn to work examining the

⁵⁴ Nangulu, *Food Security*. A prominent exception is Maddox's analysis of a single famine in Tanganyika, which emphasizes the interdependence of official policy and local coping strategies; 'Mtunya'. Also see Vaughan, *Story of an African Famine*.

⁵⁵ For an example of the latter usage, see Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees*, p. 115

⁵⁶ Cooper and Stoler, *Tensions of Empire*.

history of colonial government in Africa, and Kenya in particular. What does this have to say about issues of food scarcity? The following section responds to this question.

1.3 Colonial government and food scarcity

Scholars of African history and political economy have recognized that food shortages and famines were important drivers of change for African social and political systems, production and trading patterns, as well as socio-ecological relations. So too were they for colonial systems of authority.⁵⁷ Scarcity events could destabilize indigenous systems of authority, presenting colonial officials with opportunities to extend and secure control over aspects of territory, society and economy, including labour and agricultural production.⁵⁸

Yet food problems could play a significant political role even in times of relative plenty. As argued by Mosley, in African settler colonies, the question of who grew and supplied food sat at the centre of the rivalry between indigenous and foreign farmers, who competed for control over local markets and state support.⁵⁹ In Kenya, efficient peasant producers offered a threat to settlers, both to their labour supply and to their produce market. As a result, settlers pressed officials to employ extra-economic means of coercing labour.⁶⁰ White producers further called for the state to control, partition and allocate shares of the agricultural market in their favour.⁶¹ Moreover, in settler contexts generally, officials and other interest groups regularly mobilized concerns over the security of food supplies as arguments in favour of increased state intervention in areas such as agricultural marketing, environmental conservation and demographic planning.⁶² These interventions, in turn, affected the nature and operation of local food systems. Government control over production and marketing invariably favoured settler interests and inhibited the development of systems of African cash cropping that might otherwise have provided a more regular food supply.⁶³

⁵⁷ See, for example, Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, chapters 2 and 12; Van Zwaneberg and King, *Economic History*, p. 6. The socio-ecological effects of famine are noted by Iliffe in *Modern History and Africans*, both *passim*. On precolonial trading patterns in East Africa see Cohen, 'Food Production'.

⁵⁸ That famines could provide opportunities to secure labour control is noted in Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*; Cooper, *African Waterfront*; Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*. Ambler notes the importance of famine in enabling the establishment of British rule and white settlement in Kenya; *Kenyan Communities*. Also see Tignor, *Colonial Transformation*, pp. 11, 16.

⁵⁹ Mosley, *Settler Economies*, pp. 5–8.

⁶⁰ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 59.

⁶¹ Mosley, *Settler Economies*, p. 181.

⁶² Scarcity-related arguments for marketing control are noted by Anderson and Throup, 'Myth'; Lonsdale, 'Depression'; McCann, *Maize and Grace*; Van Zwaneberg and King, *Economic History*. For food scarcity problems as an impetus to demographic planning, see Ittmann, 'Population Question', pp. 68–70.

⁶³ For variations on this central argument, see the contributions to Rotberg, *Imperialism, Colonialism, and Hunger*.

Historians of Africa have thus recognized the dialectic between food problems and the dynamics of colonial political economy. Some, like Watts, have specifically mobilized food and famine as an analytical key to understanding the contradictions of the colonial state more generally.⁶⁴ Yet, this kind of approach – using food as a ‘lens’ to understand the inner workings of colonial government – is perhaps less pronounced in other accounts of African history, as well as in previous studies of Kenya. Berman’s authoritative treatise on the Kenyan colonial state, for example, provides important insights into how famine events shaped the ideas and activities of administration, and how food concerns infused the politics of district collaboration, agriculture and labour.⁶⁵ Yet his analysis leaves us with little sense of how food scarcity presented Kenyan officials with a profound and distinct problem on its own terms – a problem calling for responses that mobilized a variety of governmental rationalities, practices and forms of scientific knowledge.⁶⁶ For Berman and others, food dynamics can help explain the nature of colonial statecraft and political economy, but they do not constitute the primary object of historical analysis.

The impact of different forms of scientific knowledge on the objectives and practices of colonial government is the domain of a separate body of work, one that also holds relevance to the historical study of African food problems. This links with research on the emergence of ‘developmental’ forms of colonialism, as well as that on the empowerment of scientific and technical ‘experts’ within colonial administration.⁶⁷ Here scholars are generally interested in the construction of particular bodies of knowledge, their relationship to institutional dynamics, and the resulting transformations wrought on the problems and techniques of colonial government. Two specific lines of analysis found in this work are relevant to the question of food scarcity and its government. The first examines the history of nutritional science, and the politics of nutritional knowledge, in colonial Africa. The second focuses on ecology and the significance of ideas and practices surrounding environmental conservation.

Recent studies of the history of food and nutrition have noted how advances in nutritional science in the early twentieth century changed the meanings of ‘hunger’, giving it an enumerative character through which food could emerge as a ‘material instrument of statecraft’ and humanitarianism.⁶⁸ This biochemical knowledge of food provided seemingly objective standards to measure poverty, boost labour productivity and improve standards of living in both Britain and the colonial empire.⁶⁹ This, in turn, involved complex exchanges of ideas and techniques within and across the imperial world. Just as colonial settings

⁶⁴ Watts, *Silent Violence*.

⁶⁵ For the relation between food and labour problems in Kenya, see Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*; Cooper, *African Waterfront*.

⁶⁶ Berman, *Control and Crisis*.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Clarke, ‘Research Council System’; Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*; McCracken, ‘Experts and Expertise’; Tilley, *Living Laboratory*; Hodge et al., *Developing Africa*; Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*.

⁶⁸ Cullather, ‘Foreign Policy’, p. 338. On the effects of nutritional science for the changing meanings and practices of hunger in Britain, see Vernon, *Hunger*, chapter 4. On the impact of nutritional science on humanitarian thought and practice, see Scott-Smith, ‘Defining Hunger’.

⁶⁹ Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach*, chapter 4.

provided 'laboratories' for nutritional research and experimentation, the transfer of nutritional survey techniques from metropole to colony drove the 'discovery of colonial malnutrition' as an imperial-scale problem.⁷⁰ This constituted part of a wider move in Depression-era imperial policy that sought to drive colonial development for Britain's economic benefit. The malnutrition of colonial subjects became seen as a hindrance to that development.⁷¹ In these ways, nutritional science 'made possible the discourse of colonial development'.⁷² Moreover, in the context of the 1930s Depression, it enabled the political economy of empire to be rethought in the direction of a more 'welfarist' agenda centred on basic human needs.⁷³

The use of 'objective' standards and measures of nutrition and poverty in the colonial world was interwoven with complex processes of politicization and depoliticization. In contexts like South Africa, this knowledge could be applied to reveal the plight of the poor and critique the 'native policy' of the state.⁷⁴ In other settings, nutritional research helped to construct racial categories – like the notion of the 'tribal diet' – that could be understood by the colonial state and potentially made amenable to government intervention.⁷⁵ Often this research tied directly into pressing colonial problems of the day, including labour issues.⁷⁶ Nutritional knowledge enabled colonial experts and officials to rephrase deeply political matters of labour, poverty and class struggle into technical terms of 'development'. Solutions to these problems could then hinge upon 'the scientific determination of nutritional and social norms'.⁷⁷

That scientific knowledge could have both politicizing and depoliticizing effects, at multiple scales, is an argument shared by histories of colonial ecology and environmental conservation.⁷⁸ Like nutritional science, the synthetic science of ecology offered imperial and colonial administrators a means to rethink the objectives and modalities of colonial rule and 'development'.⁷⁹ More specifically, in colonies like Kenya officials and settler advocates deployed ecological arguments – premised on the sanctity of the soil's fertility – to justify land alienations, socio-spatial segregation, unequal market segmentation and increased official control over African areas.⁸⁰ These arguments presented African agricultural practices as inherently destructive, and posed technical solutions to complex political problems of dispossession and inequality. In many cases, Africans put up stiff resistance to state-coerced conservation

⁷⁰ Vernon, *Hunger*, pp. 104–16; Worboys, 'Discovery'.

⁷¹ Vernon, *Hunger*, p. 112.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 112; Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*, chapter 5.

⁷⁴ Vernon, *Hunger*, chapter 3; Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach*, chapter 4.

⁷⁵ Brantley, 'Kikuyu-Maasai Nutrition', pp. 50–2; Davie, *Poverty Knowledge*, chapter 3; Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees*, p. 6.

⁷⁶ Brantley, 'Kikuyu-Maasai Nutrition', p. 75; Moore and Vaughan, *Cutting Down Trees*; Tappan, *Riddle of Malnutrition*.

⁷⁷ Cooper, *African Waterfront*, p. 74; Vernon, *Hunger*, p. 119.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*.

⁷⁹ Anker, *Imperial Ecology*; Duminy, 'Ecologizing Regions'.

⁸⁰ Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, pp. 8–15; also Anderson, 'Depression'.

programmes.⁸¹ At the same time, ecologists and conservationists sometimes raised questions and proposals that ran counter to the status quo of colonial thought.⁸²

In fact, colonial nutritional and ecological science complemented one another in several important ways. Both nutritionists and ecologists were concerned with examining systemic relations between organisms and matter. Both kinds of studies were often combined in colonial research projects of the 1930s and 1940s.⁸³ Moreover, environmentalists linked together concerns over famine, population, malnutrition and soil degradation within capacious notions of ‘crisis’, which in turn informed state policies aimed at ‘bettering’ African agriculture and society.⁸⁴ Problems of food and soil were thus closely interlinked and bound up with emerging notions and practices of colonial ‘development’ and ‘welfare’.⁸⁵

While the literatures on colonial nutrition and ecology provide important touchstones for thinking about the historical intersections of scientific knowledge and government, one can identify at least two areas of relative weakness in relation to the present topic. First, neither body of work orients their analysis towards the problem of food *scarcity*. As such, we fail to see precisely how efforts to boost nutrition or conserve the soil related to, for example, concerns over food production and supply. Second, there has to date been little effort to integrate these areas of research. Scholars rarely make the empirical and conceptual links between the colonial problems of malnutrition and soil degradation.⁸⁶ The effect, with respect to our understanding of colonial food issues, is fragmentary. We have little sense of the *overall* problem that food posed – how different aspects and processes, including food production and consumption, were drawn within a single frame.

1.4 Food, biopolitics and colonial governmentality

The previous section argued that existing work on the nature and workings of colonial government provides important entry points to understand the historical governance of food problems in Africa. However, few studies, particularly of Kenya, have positioned food as the central object of historical

⁸¹ Beinart, ‘Introduction’.

⁸² Grove, ‘Early Themes’; Duminy, ‘Ecologizing Regions’.

⁸³ Lord Hailey’s *African Survey* is one prominent example; see Tilley, *Living Laboratory*, *passim* and, for another specific example, p. 325. The Human Nutrition Research Unit of the British Medical Research Council conducted African nutritional surveys in the late 1930s and early 1940s with an emphasis on medical analysis, but also including ecological and agricultural issues; see Berry, *Culwick Papers*; *Gambia Experiment*; Berry and Petty, *Nyasaland Survey*.

⁸⁴ Anderson, ‘Depression’, p. 342; Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, pp. 162–3; Rocheleau et al., ‘Environment’; Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*, pp. 166–77.

⁸⁵ Anderson, ‘Depression’, p. 343; Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*, chapters 4 and 5.

⁸⁶ An important exception to both these tendencies is Moore and Vaughan’s study of the historical production of rural food supply problems in northern Zambia, which explores agricultural, nutritional and social changes in relation to colonial discourses of ecology and malnutrition, *Cutting Down Trees*, especially chapter 2. More commonly, authors have noted the links between nutritional and ecological knowledge at a wider international scale. For example, Tilley, *Living Laboratory*; Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*, chapter 5.

analysis. Those examining the impacts of science on colonial government have not yet examined the precise connections of different bodies of scientific knowledge surrounding food issues. As a result, we are left with a somewhat fragmented understanding of how different governing actors grappled with the central problems of food and hunger.

By contrast, food issues are practically absent from the small body of work taking a Foucauldian approach to the study of 'colonial governmentality' in Africa. This literature tells us remarkably little about colonial food problems and their relation to rationalities and practices of governing.⁸⁷ Sexuality and medicine have proven far more popular topics of study.⁸⁸ This 'blindness' to food problems can be contrasted with the generally more extensive work on colonial governmentalities in South Asia. Here scholars like Kapalgam have considered the application of enumerative and calculative techniques for the bureaucratic management of Indian famines – techniques that gave rise to a more 'modern' politics of population and government.⁸⁹ Amrith has outlined the emergence of a discursive link between food and welfare that helped to position food as central to the exercise and legitimation of Indian governmental power.⁹⁰ Others, too, have examined the changing technologies of British famine relief in India, describing the stabilization of a particular 'set of routines and practices' that ultimately were extended to other parts of the post-colonial world.⁹¹

The neglect of food in studies of African colonial governmentality is all the more surprising considering the importance that Foucault himself devoted to the topic. In his *Security, Territory, Population* lectures series, Foucault positioned the problem of grain scarcity as a central factor in his genealogical account of the emergence of a 'liberal art of government' in eighteenth-century Europe. The problem of grain scarcity, recognized as a foremost 'crisis' or 'catastrophe' of government, drove the elaboration of new political rationalities and practices.⁹² Whereas 'disciplinary' forms of power, which emerged over the course of the eighteenth century, were addressed to individual bodies, attempting to boost their 'productive force', the end of that century saw the emergence of a rationality and technology of governing designed to invest, optimize and secure the life of the 'population' at large, and in favour of various objectives.⁹³ For the French physiocrats, among others, 'population' was graspable as a 'mass' of living people, a 'multiplicity of individuals', within which certain dynamics could be discovered, explained and manipulated.⁹⁴ Such dynamics might include overall birth and death rates, life expectancy, morbidity, hygiene, as well as 'patterns of diet and habitation'.⁹⁵ These variables of population, in turn, were

⁸⁷ For example, Adebani, 'Two Publics'; Frederiksen, 'Authorizing'; Morgensen, 'Settler Colonialism'; Pesek, 'Foucault Hardly Came to Africa'.

⁸⁸ Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills*; Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*.

⁸⁹ Kapalgam, *Rule by Numbers*, pp. 162–6; also Hodges, 'Governmentality, Population'.

⁹⁰ Amrith, 'Food and Welfare'.

⁹¹ Sasson and Vernon, 'Practising'.

⁹² Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, chapter 2, here p. 30.

⁹³ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, pp. 242–3; Li, 'Governmentality', p. 275.

⁹⁴ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 21, 367; *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 242.

⁹⁵ Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 317; *History of Sexuality*, p. 25; Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 243.

seen as 'naturally' dependent on a range of 'artificial' factors, such as the system of taxation, the distribution of profit, urban development, or the 'activity of circulation'.⁹⁶ So, gradually a political practice emerged that sought to 'rationally analyse' this natural dependence, and to regulate and secure the dynamic vital processes of population through factors that could be artificially modifiable.⁹⁷ This constitutes 'biopolitics' – Foucault's term for the continuously expressed, scientific power to 'make live', to be contrasted with the sovereign's traditional, juridical authority to 'make die'.⁹⁸ Regulations of the population and disciplines of the body emerged, in concert, as the two major 'poles' within the wider art of the 'government of life'.⁹⁹ It is this wider art that Foucault terms 'governmentality', and he argues that it was the former, regulatory logic that increasingly came to instruct the modern liberal rationality of government from the late eighteenth century.¹⁰⁰

In its Foucauldian formulation, government, as a mode of political practice, addresses all the various relations between people and 'things': wealth, food, resources, the means of subsistence, territorial arrangements, customs, accidents, and so on.¹⁰¹ Ultimately, it seeks the right 'disposition of things', arranged to 'lead to a suitable end'.¹⁰² It aims to promote beneficial relations, processes and circulations while mitigating negative or dangerous ones.¹⁰³ How is this to be accomplished? At one level, governing consists of conducting the ways in which subjects conduct themselves. Put differently, it guides 'the possibility of conduct' by making human beings into certain kinds of 'subject'.¹⁰⁴ It does so, not by directly coercing all the individual acts of every member of the population, but by educating their desires, habits, aspirations and beliefs.¹⁰⁵ For Foucault, government works in accordance with a notion of the free individual economic subject, the 'subject of interest' – one who rationally follows their own self-interest, and by attempting to maximize their utility or profit, produces harmonious results at a more general scale.¹⁰⁶ It arranges conditions such that certain effects, desirable at the level of the entire population, will be produced through the incentives and responses of individual subjects.

At another level, the governing techniques brought to bear on the population from the eighteenth century onwards were increasingly rationalized and calculative. The desire for exactitude and predictability were most clearly embodied in the development of political arithmetic, population and

⁹⁶ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 366.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*; Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 246.

⁹⁸ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, pp. 139–40; *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 247.

⁹⁹ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 139.

¹⁰⁰ Gordon, 'Governmental Rationality', p. 20.

¹⁰¹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 99.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 18; Li, *Will to Improve*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 108–9; 364; 'Subject and Power', p. 789.

¹⁰⁵ Li, *Will to Improve*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ Foucault writes of the emergence of this new governmental reason in the eighteenth century: 'At the point of intersection... of the empirical conception of the subject of interest and the analyses of the economists, a subject can be defined who is a subject of interest and whose action has a multiplying and beneficial value through the intensification of interest, and it is this that characterizes *homo economicus*'; *Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 276.

geographical statistics, and the science of political economy.¹⁰⁷ Government, as such, increasingly sought to evaluate policies and interventions through calculations of comparative cost, and through calculations of the possible and probable.¹⁰⁸ Risk was thus embraced as something to be calculated and factored into acts of governing.¹⁰⁹ The market, in turn, emerged as the site in which the effects of governmental interventions could be measured and tested.¹¹⁰ Ultimately, these two levels of technique intersect in significant ways: modern government seeks to make individual subjects into calculable entities. Political arithmetic, for example, works to objectify 'individuals and their activities as calculable component elements and forces contributing to the state's wealth and strength'.¹¹¹ Moreover, governing involves efforts to foster reflexive subjects who calculate about themselves in order to improve those selves in favour of certain societal and economic objectives.¹¹²

Returning the major European problem of grain scarcity, then, the modern liberal art of governing, proposed by the physiocrats and others, saw solutions in the 'natural' processes of the market, in the interplay of supply and demand, with their implications for prices and income incentives. This notion of how to govern was posed as a direct critique to the anti-scarcity system that developed during the mercantilist era – an approach that attempted to prevent scarcity by exhaustively policing and supervising the operations of the grain market.¹¹³ By simply providing the conditions for people to follow their own self-interest on the market, liberal reformers of government hoped not to *prevent* scarcity, but to 'cancel' it, or at least to regulate, mitigate and limit it, with as little interference from the state as possible.¹¹⁴

However, while 'population' emerged as both a domain of knowledge and the principal object of modern government, and hence government itself became invested in a 'politics of population', at the same time a caesura was introduced within this object. With the rise of a biopolitical or governmental logic:

[T]here will no longer be any scarcity in general, on condition that for a whole series of people, in a whole series of markets, there was some scarcity... and it may well be that some people die of hunger after all. But by letting these people die of hunger one will be able to make scarcity a chimera and prevent it occurring in this massive form of the scourge typical of the previous systems... The scarcity-scurge disappears, but scarcity that causes the death of individuals not only does not disappear, it must not disappear.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁷ Burchell, 'Will to Improve', pp. 123–4; Elden, 'Governmentality'; Hacking, 'History of Statistics'; Rose, *Inventing Our Selves*, p. 89.

¹⁰⁸ Gordon, 'Governmental Rationality', pp. 20, 35.

¹⁰⁹ Ewald, 'Insurance and Risk'.

¹¹⁰ Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 320.

¹¹¹ Burchell, 'Will to Improve', p. 124.

¹¹² Rose, *Inventing Our Selves*.

¹¹³ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 32–3.

¹¹⁴ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 37, 47, 59, 65; Scott, 'Colonial Governmentality', p. 202.

¹¹⁵ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 42.

As such, for Foucault, grain scarcity was one example of a central problem around which modern governments came to balance the needs of two kinds of subjects: a 'population', whose vital processes would be cared for through the knowledge of political economy and the biopolitical techniques of security (through laws, but also via 'changes in attitudes, ways of doing things, and ways of living'), and a more or less disposable set of 'people' seen as a threat to the very existence of both the state and the life of the population.¹¹⁶

Several important critiques have been made of Foucault's empirical and historical work on biopolitics and governmentality. Elden, for example, has pointed to historical inaccuracies in Foucault's analysis and placement of 'territory', in relation to 'population', within the genealogy of modern government.¹¹⁷ Dean, meanwhile, has critiqued the 'neglect' of the Malthusian paradigm within Foucault's account of the liberal government of population, such that his analysis is too heavily biased towards governing techniques aimed at the market and the interests of the free economic subject.¹¹⁸ Moreover, scholars of colonial history have driven an important debate over the applicability of the governmentality concept and approach to colonial or 'non-liberal' contexts. Vaughan, for example, has noted that colonial government was often oriented towards Africans as 'members of collectivities', notably in the form of 'tribes' or cultural groups, rather than operating through 'the minute specification of the features of individuals' as Foucault described for modern European systems of political rule. Moreover, she argues, colonial power tended to *objectify*, rather than create governable *subjects*.¹¹⁹ Indeed, Africa is sometimes envisaged as a 'limit' to liberal governmentality, staking the boundaries of its utility as a concept.¹²⁰ This kind of argument has, however, been roundly critiqued by scholars who posit that Foucault's framework *is* capable of grasping the punitive and coercive aspects of liberal modes of political rule. Hindess, for example, argues that authoritarian rule, or the 'government of unfreedom', has always played an important role in the government of states committed to the liberty of individual subjects.¹²¹ As such, Foucauldian notions of governmentality and biopolitics, if and when mobilized in an empirically-oriented way, *can* 'travel' to non-European or Northern contexts, both past and present.¹²²

The majority of these critiques of the governmentality concept have sought to extend and supplement Foucault's work rather than reject it outright. Likewise, with respect to the specific domain of food scarcity, Nally identified Foucault's oversight of colonial production in his account of biopolitics, and proceeded to extend Foucault's discussions to encompass colonial dynamics. Writing with British-colonized Ireland in mind, Nally notes that colonial expansion, dispossession and commercialized production were critical for enabling the

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 42–4, 366.

¹¹⁷ Elden, 'History of Territory'.

¹¹⁸ Dean, 'Malthus Effect'.

¹¹⁹ Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills*, p. 202–3; also Pesek, 'Foucault Hardly Came to Africa'.

¹²⁰ For a critique, see Death, 'Governmentality at the Limits'.

¹²¹ Hindess, 'Liberal Government of Unfreedom', p. 94; also Dean, 'Liberal Government'.

¹²² Death, 'Governmentality at the Limits'.

emergence of a 'global provisioning system', the development of capitalism and wage labour, plus the operations of a market-based anti-scarcity regime in Europe.¹²³ Colonial settings acted as laboratories of government: sites where new, often coercive combinations of political techniques could be applied to force the commercialization of agriculture and the creation of capitalist markets.¹²⁴ Famines, in particular, provided colonial authorities with opportunities to subsume relief practices within the objectives of development. They were chances to sweep away 'human encumbrances' and 'improve' (that is, rationalize and commodify) colonial production.¹²⁵ Nally's account of the place of colonial settings within the genealogy of biopolitical regimes is useful in pointing to the ways in which the 'security' of grain supplies in early modern Europe depended on dispossession and coerced production in some colonial peripheries. Yet, his analysis does not account for the specificity of local forces influencing acts and logics of colonial government in the context of twentieth-century Africa. As I will show, British colonial authorities in Kenya faced a particular set of challenges, and local events, interests and conflicts profoundly shaped their responses to food scarcity problems.

In this and the previous two sections, I have described three bodies of literature relevant to the topic of food and colonial government. Each offers its own insights and limitations. First, studies of colonial famine and food insecurity invite us to consider the mutual imbrications of scarcity and acts of government. However, they tend to underexamine the range and specificities of governmental ideas and practices surrounding food problems, and how these shifted over time. Second, studies of colonial government alert us to the political-economic and scientific dynamics surrounding food problems, but leave us with a relatively fragmented understanding of the overall significance of food as a discrete problem of government, particularly in the Kenyan context. Third, Foucault-inspired analyses of colonial governmentality in Africa have not specifically examined the regulation of food, and those who have done so for colonialism more generally do not focus on the dynamics of twentieth-century Africa. In sum, we lack an adequate understanding of the full significance of food scarcity as a problem linking multiple domains of colonial knowledge and intervention in Africa, and particularly so for Kenya. This has several important consequences. Without knowing precisely why food-related issues were conceived and conducted in particular ways, we are less able to account for the emergence and persistence of dominant modes of addressing food problems.

Having outlined the key areas of literature that surround and inform the research topic, the following section presents the specific research problem and questions to which the study responds.

¹²³ Nally, 'Food Provisioning', p. 43.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 38, 41–4.

¹²⁵ Nally, *Human Encumbrances*; 'That Coming Storm'.

1.5 Research problem, questions and argument

As outlined above, there is a gap in knowledge surrounding the specific historical dynamics of food scarcity and its government in Kenya. More generally, we require an enhanced historical understanding of food scarcity as a discrete problem of colonial government in Africa. In order to respond to these problems, this thesis examines how food scarcity emerged as a problem of government in the particular colonial context of Kenya.

The research is oriented around a core set of questions. First, I am interested in the details and history of how food scarcity was understood and addressed. I ask: How did colonial officials in the central state, along with other governmental actors, conceive of and respond to food scarcity? How did this change over time? Second, I am interested in the colonial state's responsibilities surrounding food shortages. As such, I ask: How did these actors conceive of the roles and duties of the state, in relation to other actors and institutions, in addressing scarcity? These queries informed the processes of collecting and analysing data. Finally, with an eye towards understanding more contemporary dynamics, I ask: How does this history help us to understand contemporary modes of governing food security in Kenya, and potentially other African contexts?

In responding to these questions, I make several interlocking arguments. First, I argue that the conception of the problem of scarcity, the definition of the state's anti-scarcity roles and duties, plus the techniques used to respond, all shifted in conjunction with the changing realities of the food system and patterns of dearth. Food scarcity was increasingly experienced and governed through the market.

Second, I argue that the way the problem of food scarcity was conceived shifted from that of a localized natural calamity to a risk encompassing the relationship between aggregate levels of supply and demand in the territory. This problem called for long-term mitigating measures.

Third, I argue that the roles and duties of the state shifted from that of a last-resort provider of relief, to stave off rural famine, to a more comprehensive responsibility to secure market supply and demand. State responsibility for preventing and addressing scarcity was increasingly, if unevenly, centralized. Moreover, this responsibility targeted specific groups and problems, rather than the territorial population as a whole.

Fourth, I argue that the governmental techniques employed to address scarcity grew from providing rural relief to encompass various combinations of coercive tactics, practices of African agricultural 'betterment', as well as more economic and calculative techniques.

Finally, I argue that this mode of conceiving and addressing food scarcity emerged in Kenya by the end of the Second World War, and stabilized in the post-war period. Elements of this system can be identified in food security practice to this day.

In order to make these arguments, I have employed a particular conceptual approach. My reading of the existing literature, presented above, and my understanding of its limitations, helped to inform this choice of approach. At least, it should allow one to do the following: First, to account for local or territorial dynamics in the emergence of food-related practices, rather than reading these from the international origin and evolution of discourses surrounding food security and development. Second, to account for the emergence of food scarcity as a domain of government and state responsibility without reducing the strategic functions of the state to the individual rationalities of local officers, to defined social norms, or to the state's functional relation to capitalism. And third, to account for food scarcity as a problem of central importance for government and state-building across multiple domains and scales of practice, rather than as a peripheral state activity.

To meet these criteria, I undertake a historical 'analysis of government', as developed by Foucault and his later interpreters. I elaborate on this approach in the following section.

1.6 Conceptual approach

Dean notes that a Foucauldian 'analysis of government' is primarily concerned with:

[T]he means of calculation, both qualitative and quantitative, the type of governing authority or agency, the forms of knowledge, techniques and other means employed, the entity to be governed and how it is conceived, the ends sought and the outcomes and consequences.¹²⁶

This kind of analysis seeks to examine two main aspects of how people govern: *practice* and *thought*. The practice of governing is seen as intimately concerned with *conduct*, with influencing the ways that people behave in order to secure the wellbeing of the population.¹²⁷ The point is to examine 'the conditions under which regimes of practices come into being, are maintained and are transformed'.¹²⁸ Regimes of practices are, in turn, embedded in and shaped by programmes of thought employing various types of knowledge. Thought and practice are thus mutually constitutive. With this understanding, the analysis strives to uncover the overall 'strategic logic' expressed by a regime of practices – an intentional, nonsubjective logic constituted as a sum of a regime's total constituent parts – and how this has shifted over time.¹²⁹ It therefore 'takes as its central concern how we govern and are governed within different regimes, and the conditions under which such regimes emerge, continue to operate, and are transformed'.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Dean, *Governmentality*, p. 18.

¹²⁷ Li, *Will to Improve*, pp. 5–6.

¹²⁸ Dean, *Governmentality*, p. 31.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Such an 'analytics of government' differs from conventional social scientific analyses that tend to envisage the state as a more or less 'unified actor', or at least a 'relatively unified set of institutions', and proceed to debate the source of state power, who holds it, and how that power is legitimized.¹³¹ Rather, the multiplicity of actors and institutions involved in governing is examined. Emphasis is placed on the various technical aspects of how people govern, and how these practices form the basis upon which emerging problems are elaborated and addressed. Moreover, an analytics of government enjoins us to recognize the politics of conduct, or the ways in which subjects are 'differently formed and differently positioned' in relation to governmental programmes and techniques, being allocated particular possibilities and capacities for 'action and critique'.¹³²

Important critiques have, however, been directed at the limitations of this kind of Foucauldian approach. Writing from the discipline of international relations, Death summarizes some of these limitations: First, it is oriented towards critique rather than solving pressing policy problems. Second, it may not be well suited for analysing the strategic motivations, intentions and actions of actors. Third, it provides an ambiguous normative and ethical basis for assessing the desirability of different forms of political organization and power relation.¹³³ Nevertheless, an analytics of government also holds specific strengths: its strong empirical focus on practices of power at their point of application, its potential to uncover similarities in practices that cut across binaries like state/society or domination/resistance, as well as its capacity to reveal how different kinds of techniques may be combined in pursuit of specific governmental objectives.¹³⁴

The approach employed in this thesis therefore resembles that which is commonly termed 'governmentality'. However, this word does not litter the pages that follow. Neither shall the reader find the text weighed down with other working historical concepts developed by Foucault, such as 'biopolitics'. I wish to steer clear of a notion of governmentality as a 'grand concept' of power, referring to a particular historical mode of European liberal state regulation.¹³⁵ As argued by Barnett, some strands of governmentality studies have tended to deploy an overly rigid, 'statist' and theorized version of the concept. This, in turn, has tended to 'reduce the understanding of social relations to a residual effect of hegemonic projects and/or governmental programmes of rule'.¹³⁶

For these reasons, the specific analytical approach I employ is one influenced by a particular reading of Foucault's study of 'problematizations', as Barnett and Koopman have recently elucidated.¹³⁷ These scholars challenge conventional readings of Foucault's intellectual project as being one of developing grand

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 33–4.

¹³² Li, 'Governmentality', p. 276.

¹³³ Death, 'Governmentality at the Limits', p. 765.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 768 -

¹³⁵ Barnett, 'On Problematization'.

¹³⁶ Barnett, 'Consolations', p. 10.

¹³⁷ Barnett, 'On Problematization'; Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique*, chapters 1 and 6.

theoretical concepts, or of providing a model of critical analysis, to be applied to specific empirical settings in a deductive or ‘top-down’ manner. Rather, they argue that his work is better approached as providing a set of methodological or analytical orientations for a more descriptive, empirical and inductive approach to social inquiry – one designed to open up new avenues of critical reflection on the arrangements and dispositions of the present. We are invited to recognize Foucault’s primary objective as one of analysing or elaborating *problems*. Such an approach, arguably, is more in keeping with Foucault’s conscious methodology of historical nominalism, and his emphasis on the ‘event’ as the situated locus of historical practice and change.¹³⁸ Moreover, employing a resolutely empirical approach to the analysis of government is a critical condition for enabling a Foucauldian conceptual approach to ‘travel’ beyond the confines of Europe and the global North to other parts of the world.¹³⁹

In the sense that I deploy the term, then, ‘problematization’ refers first and foremost to an object of analysis. It is the process by which something becomes a problem, rather than a critical procedure or method of analysis, as in a researcher trying to ‘problematize’ an established way of thinking or acting. Here a ‘problem’ comprises a concrete state of affairs (such as food scarcity) *and* the ways in which governmental actors viewed those affairs and proposed various practical solutions.¹⁴⁰ Problematizations are understood as always emerging in relation to particular uncertain situations in which activities of governing are ‘called into question’.¹⁴¹ Through these situations, problems are defined in new ways that enrol various actors and ‘shape subsequent pathways of action, decision, inquiry and intervention’.¹⁴² Crucially then, rather than entirely new or novel events, problematizations are understood as situations in which the difficulties pertaining to pre-existing domains of action are amplified or intensified. They arise when existing patterns of forming and solving problems are interrupted. As such, in this thesis a key objective is to examine the historical situations through which issues of food scarcity have become problems of governmental thought and intervention through the intensification of ‘always already difficult situations’.¹⁴³

In examining how food scarcity was problematized in colonial Kenya, I will mobilize three analytical concepts. The first is *governmentalization*. This concept signals my interest in the process by which governmental regimes of practices and ideas have emerged. More specifically, I aim to show how food scarcity was *governmentalized* – how it became a domain of government and conduct, something amenable to governing techniques and calculations, and targeted at particular objects. Rather than assuming the existence of a sovereign state as an *a priori* subject, the concept of governmentalization enjoins us to examine how states, civil societies, populations, food producers, trading networks, and so on, have been ‘brought into being, transformed and governmentalized by particular

¹³⁸ Flynn, ‘Mapping of History’, pp. 40–1; Foucault, ‘Questions of Method’.

¹³⁹ Death, ‘Governmentality at the Limits’.

¹⁴⁰ Barnett, ‘On Problematization’.

¹⁴¹ Dean, *Governmentality*, p. 38.

¹⁴² Barnett, ‘On Problematization’; Huxley, ‘Historicizing Planning’.

¹⁴³ Barnett, ‘On Problematization’.

power relations'.¹⁴⁴ My second analytical concept, *responsibilization*, seeks to capture changing ways in which actors and institutions claimed or delegated responsibility to perform certain activities in relation to food scarcity.¹⁴⁵ The value of this notion lies in directing our attention to how responsibilities may be allocated between various kinds of actors and institutions, for different ends. Taken together, these concepts warn against any assumption that certain aspects of food management have always been a state responsibility, or a matter of government. The third concept is *territorialization*. Following Foucault's emphasis on the centrality of spatial realities, notions and practices to any exercise of power, this concept enjoins our attention to how food scarcity manifested in space, and how efforts to respond to food problems unfolded in and through space.¹⁴⁶ It implies attending to the production of 'governable spaces' – the specific combinations of material environments, representations of space, forms of political rule, cultural elements and identities, legal systems, as well as political-economic factors that make governing possible.¹⁴⁷

Having outlined the conceptual and analytical approach used in the thesis, the following sections discuss methodological aspects relating to the study's scope, scale and sources.

1.7 Scope and scale

The final research question, presented above, implies that this historical study can have relevance for understanding contemporary realities. As such, some further methodological clarification is warranted. In particular, some justification of the study's specific focus on *Kenya*, on the *period* leading up to 1952, and on food *scarcity* is necessary. Consider, firstly, the choice of Kenya. The foremost reason is that Kenya is relatively underexamined in the historical literature on African food insecurity and famine. As such, this study helps to fill a major gap in empirical knowledge. The second reason relates to Kenya's wider relevance. Gardner has argued, with respect to fiscal policy and economic status, that colonial Kenya exemplified many of the trends and experiences seen in other African colonies.¹⁴⁸ This is also the case for food. Kenya saw famine relief practices, the establishment of marketing boards and the implementation of soil conservation programmes, just as many other colonies. I have not attempted to frame Kenya as a 'case study' with a particular value for 'building' theory. However, I believe that by providing a careful empirical study of Kenya, one can start to tease out initial ideas and hypotheses about the colonial government of food problems that may be relevant to other African contexts, either through their similarity or their difference. To assist with this wider process of comparison and learning, I have attempted, where possible, to highlight the

¹⁴⁴ Death, 'Governmentality at the limits', p. 785.

¹⁴⁵ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, chapter 4.

¹⁴⁶ Elden, *Mapping the Present*; Huxley, 'Space and Government'.

¹⁴⁷ Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, pp. 31–2; Watts, 'Development and Governmentality', pp. 13–15; 'Sinister Political Life', pp. 106–8.

¹⁴⁸ Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, p. 2.

specificity of Kenyan dynamics when measured against those of other African contexts.

Second, why does the study period terminate with the escalation of the Mau Mau Uprising in 1952? The timing of closure is somewhat arbitrary, for one of my key arguments is that a particular kind of governmental logic to address food scarcity, with an associated regime of institutions and practices, was formed in Kenya by the end of the Second World War, and consolidated in the immediate post-war period. Moreover, we still see the traces of this approach to this day. I have therefore chosen not to analyse state practices and military strategies surrounding food during the State of Emergency. This is a potential topic for future research, but I do not believe it has significant bearing on the argument at hand.

Third, why is food *scarcity* appropriate as the primary focus of data collection and analysis? It could be argued that an analytical focus on scarcity, to the neglect of other aspects of 'food security' such as access and utilization, runs the risk of reproducing the very 'productionist' bias that the thesis ultimately seeks to question. Two main reasons justify this focus. On one hand, scarcity presented colonial officials with their first and foremost problem in relation to food. It was the threat of starvation and price inflation imbued in food shortages that motivated officials to take extraordinary measures, and laid the foundation for subsequent policies and techniques to address food and marketing problems. It was during episodes of scarcity that food issues erupted most forcefully into public view and concern. Such crises therefore provide historians with 'windows' onto the wider 'issues at stake' in food governance.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, I have not ignored problems of accessibility in the ensuing analysis, but have rather attempted to understand how they related to the dynamics of scarcity and its government. On the other hand, the focus on scarcity is justified by the study's design as a history that seeks to critically understand the realities of the present. If contemporary 'food security' policies are marked by the 'naturalization' and 'politicization' of scarcity,¹⁵⁰ then focusing on the historical problem of *food as scarcity* – how this has become the dominant frame and concern of government and state action – allows us to see more clearly the connections and breaks between past and present. If one wants to adequately account for the persistence of production-oriented strategies of food security, one needs to understand how a set of ideas and a regime of practices surrounding *scarcity* have come to structure the field of governmental thought and practice surrounding food.

Having justified aspects of the methodological design, in the following section I reflect on how the sources of evidence consulted enable the study to address the research questions and make the key arguments outlined above.

¹⁴⁹ Guyer, 'Introduction', p. 8.

¹⁵⁰ Mehta, 'Scare, Naturalization'.

1.8 Sources and limitations

Primary and secondary data sources were consulted to address the research questions presented above. Details on the primary sources are provided in an appendix at the end of the thesis. These records, like all official archives, provide an incomplete picture of colonial problems.¹⁵¹ The study is inevitably biased towards the ways in which officials thought about and responded to scarcity, and how they chose to represent those ideas and actions to themselves and their overseers. The perspectives and experiences of the people affected by food shortages and famines, like those of other actors involved in the food trade or relief efforts, receive less emphasis. Moreover, the archival sources consulted, located in the United Kingdom and consisting mostly of correspondence between Nairobi and London, do not illuminate the full range of official dynamics. Cashmore notes that this correspondence was doubly limited. The British government, answerable both to parliament and public opinion for the acts of officials serving in distant colonial territories, mainly worried about political embarrassment. Dispatches from London were therefore 'largely directed to relieving the troubled conscience of England'.¹⁵²

Communications from Kenya, on the other hand, tended to 'give the minimum of local administrative information', perhaps for 'brevity', or perhaps to 'deny Whitehall opportunities to interfere with local action'. As a result, British government records tell us little about the realities of local administration, 'except when one of those "embarrassing" incidents, that aroused the wrath of the humanitarians, produced more information than usual'.¹⁵³ Cashmore's period of study ended with the close of the First World War, but some of his observations are valid for later years. The interest and intensity with which the British government kept records of colonial famines varied. Sometimes this intensity appears to have been linked to an event's potential to 'embarrass'. It could also arise if a local food shortage was perceived as a threat to security, or if the British state sought greater control over international food trade and supply. This was the case during the Second World War. As such, files were kept on colonial food problems inconsistently. Moreover, these records focused on official ideas and practices at the level of *central* colonial government.

An empirical focus on central state dynamics need not be seen as a limitation in relation to the study's objectives. In the chapters that follow, I will argue that that the responsibility to address food scarcity increasingly, if unevenly, became a domain of the central state. Indeed, it was at the central level that the most heated ideological and political debates surrounding food issues took place, and

¹⁵¹ That the colonial archive is inherently limited, plural, open-ended, invested, fantastical, fictitious and, in a sense, violent, is a point made and remade forcefully by postcolonial scholars. See Arondekar, *For the Record*; Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts'; Lalu, *Deaths of Hintsa*; Mbembe, 'Power of the Archive'; Spivak, 'Rani of Sirmur'. Debates over the appropriate ways to conceptualize and approach the colonial archive are well-established and wide ranging. My own approach has been influenced by Stoler's invitation to 'read along the archival grain': to examine colonial archives as sites of knowledge production, and to attend to the conditions of possibility of what could or could not be said therein; *Along the Archival Grain*, p. 20.

¹⁵² Cashmore, 'District Administration', pp. 10–11.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

where the influence of external political pressures was felt most. As such, by looking at the centre one can identify the full variety of practices used to manage scarcities, and can understand their relations to one another. The ‘provincial and district level’ may have been where the ‘meaning and shape of policy in action was decided’, but such a focus would be inappropriate to examining how scarcity emerged as a territory-wide problem involving centralized coordination.¹⁵⁴ In any case, I have attempted to manage the ‘filtered’ and piecemeal nature of the primary evidence base through rigorous crosschecking of the statements of Kenyan officials against other primary and secondary sources.

A few more words on the collection and use of the archival data, within a wider Foucauldian approach to the analysis of government, are warranted. Data gathering was centred on the exhaustive empirical analysis of key food-related events in Kenyan history. From searches of the secondary literature and archival databases, I identified key moments when food became a matter of major public and political concern – scarcities, wartime control, major nutritional surveys – and gathered as many relevant sources as possible. These events were then analysed as in-depth case studies. Once primary data had been assembled and examined, secondary sources were consulted to locate these events in their appropriate historical context, and to help span the wide empirical chasms spanning the official archival record. I then attempted to draw out the links between these event-cases, comparatively etching out the historical consistencies and differences in the ways that officials and other actors thought about and addressed food problems. The analytical process, however, was not linear. It involved continuously circulating between periods and registers: between different historical events themselves, and between individual events and their wider historical settings. The methodological and analytical primacy afforded to the *event* thus concurred with my conceptual and historiographical approach: to write an empirically-oriented, nominalist historical analysis of colonial food governance.

I will return to reflect on the study’s limitations and contributions in the thesis conclusion. Before beginning this journey, the following section sets out the basic structure of the thesis and its arguments.

1.9 Outline

The chapters of the thesis are arranged chronologically. Each chapter explains changes in the dynamics and government of scarcity along several axes. These axes include the causes of scarcity, the emerging ways in which scarcity was conceived as a problem, the role and duty of the state in relation to that problem, as well as the techniques used to address it.

Chapter 2, which follows, uses secondary sources to set the background for the study, describing how food shortages affected East African peoples prior to and during the colonial conquest of the region. The main focus is on the ‘Great

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

Famine' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which saw the first official responses to food shortage. I describe how the causes and drivers of famine events, and the ways in which people coped, started to shift with the presence of colonial state and capital.

Chapter 3 considers how anti-scarcity practices started to shift as colonial rule was consolidated and the capacity of the state to manage food problems grew in step. It focuses on the state's response to a major famine that coincided with the end of the First World War. This response involved bureaucratic and legislative measures coordinated by the central secretariat.

Chapter 4 considers how, during the 1920s, the nature and problem of food scarcity started to shift in accordance with the development of the capitalist economy, the spread of market relations, new state policies targeting settler and African production, as well as the influence of wider colonial discourses like 'trusteeship'. The chapter indicates how state responses to scarcity began to target the culture and behaviour of African subjects, rather than relying on straightforward coercion. It culminates in an analysis of the highly centralized state response (involving stringent market control) to a serious food scarcity that Kenya felt in 1929 and 1930.

Chapter 5 deals with the transformations brought about by the economic depression of the 1930s. It indicates how food problems were increasingly intertwined with efforts to boost African cash crop production, settler demands for greater state support, as well as emerging concerns around overpopulation and soil degradation.

Chapter 6 focuses on the Second World War, when state control over the food marketing system was firmly established. I describe how a calculative and dualistic (productionist and welfarist) mode of seeing and addressing food scarcity, at a territory-wide scale, emerged as a result of specific wartime conditions.

Chapter 7 discusses how this wartime rationale and practice set the agenda for the state's anti-scarcity functions after the war's end. I show how a production-oriented logic persisted in this period, despite appeals for a return to subsistence-based agriculture, and for the development of a food policy based on human nutritional needs.

In the thesis conclusion I reflect on how the preceding analysis has responded to the study's research questions, in light of its inevitable limitations. I consider the value of the research in contributing to our historical understanding of the nexus between food scarcity and colonial government, both in Kenya and more generally in Africa. The study's potential contributions to work on colonial governmentality and biopolitics are briefly discussed. Finally, I reflect on how this history may help us to understand and critique contemporary modes of food security governance in Africa.

2. Famine and Colonial Conquest

This chapter draws on secondary research to describe how the dynamics of scarcity and famine in East Africa began to shift with the increasing colonial presence in the region. I focus on the event that would later be recalled as the 'Great Famine', an event that devastated East Africa in the final years of the nineteenth century, to show how early capitalist development and the growing colonial influence started to shape the production and experience of hunger. I describe how the fledgling colonial state responded to the famine, and indicate the long-term implications of the event for the settlement and development of Kenya.

In the 1880s, prior to the official establishment of Britain's sphere of colonial influence in the region, the inland areas of Kenya consisted of 'a web of subsistence economies' exploiting ecological conditions that were variably suited to pastoral or agricultural production.¹⁵⁵ Symbiotic commodity exchange and population adjustments occurred between these cultivator and pastoral communities, and such patterns intensified when drought and pestilence brought on hard times.¹⁵⁶ East Africa experienced particularly intense periods of scarcity and famine in 1884–85, 1889–90 and 1897–1901. Drought and locusts gave rise to famine, in turn to epidemics of smallpox.¹⁵⁷ Further, a new lethal threat – rinderpest or cattle plague, imported from Russia and India – visited at the start and end of the 1890s, decimating the herds of pastoralists such as the Maasai. With the decline in cattle herds, sleeping sickness spread along the Victoria lakeshore as tsetse-friendly bush grew over formerly well-stocked grazing grounds.¹⁵⁸

While it is difficult to estimate the scale of mortality from these disasters, it is possible that up to four of every ten people died in some Maasai, Kikuyu and Kamba communities.¹⁵⁹ European travellers depicted 'harrowing' scenes of starvation and destitution in their written accounts.¹⁶⁰ Yet scarcity affected groups – and individuals within those groups – differently. More successful agriculturalists, and those with greater access to trading and political networks, could be less vulnerable during times of hunger and dearth.¹⁶¹ Likewise, individuals were more or less vulnerable. 'In hard times', Berman and Lonsdale remind us, death 'visited the weak more than the strong'. With ecological crises and famine, 'a strong man's dependants ceased to be his extra hands; they

¹⁵⁵ Lonsdale and Berman, 'Coping', p. 494.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.; Munro, *Colonial Rule*, pp. 20–3. For a description of the ecological history of famines in Kenya and Uganda, from ancient times to the late twentieth century, see Spinage, *African Ecology*, pp. 132–7. For a critique of the notion that precolonial African food systems were marked by 'ecological complementarity', see Pottier, 'Politics', p. 208.

¹⁵⁷ Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, p. 23.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.; Ochieng', 'Reconstructing', p. 47.

¹⁵⁹ Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, p. 23.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid..

¹⁶¹ For example, Brantley notes that the capacity of the coastal Giriama people – living in proximity to Arab and Swahili traders as well as British representatives – to secure famine relief supplies was greater than that of other groups such as the Kamba and Taita; *Giriama and Colonial Resistance*, p. 53.

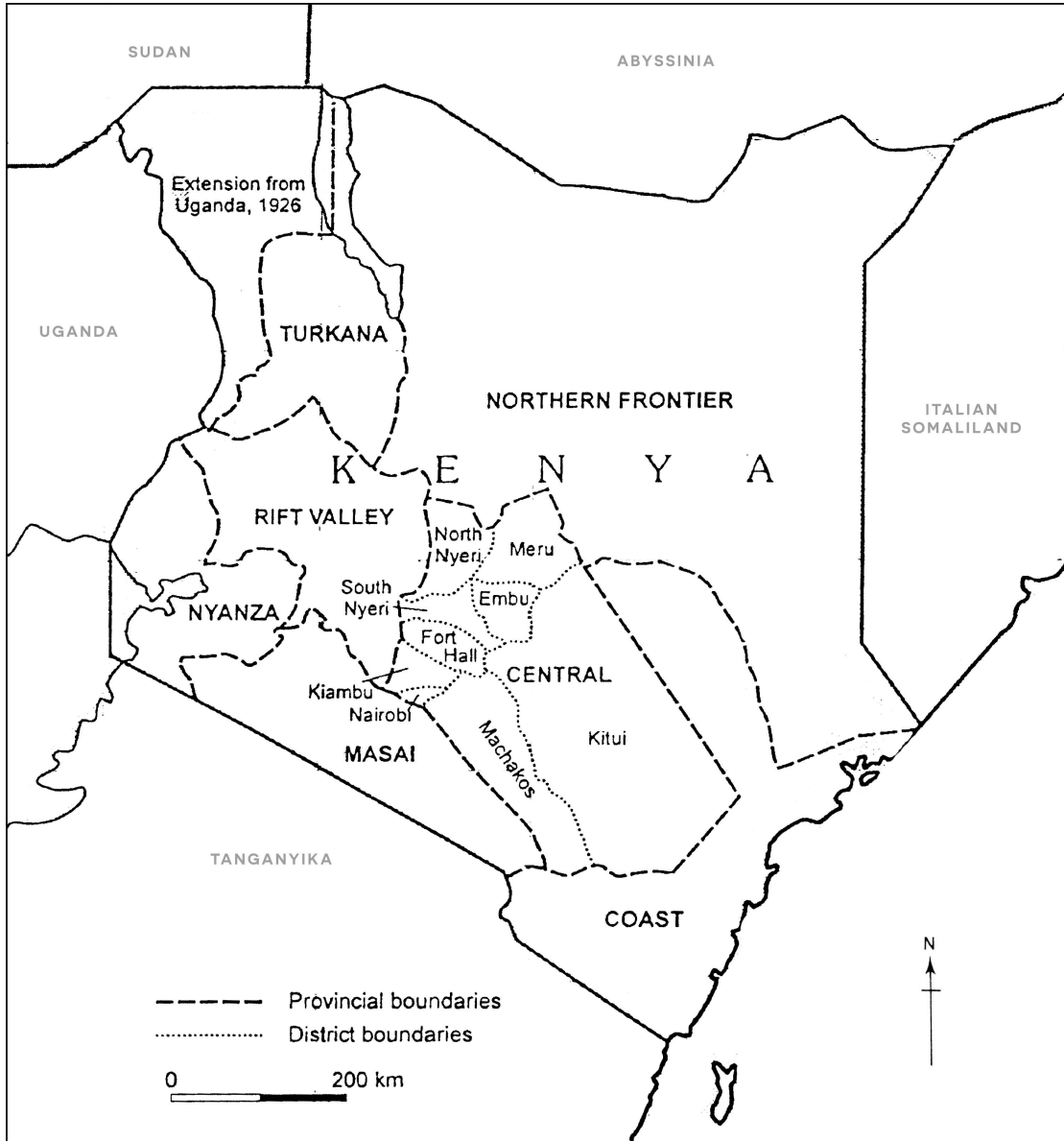


Figure 2.1. Colonial Provincial and District Map of Kenya, c. 1933.
 Source: Adapted from Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, figure 1.1.

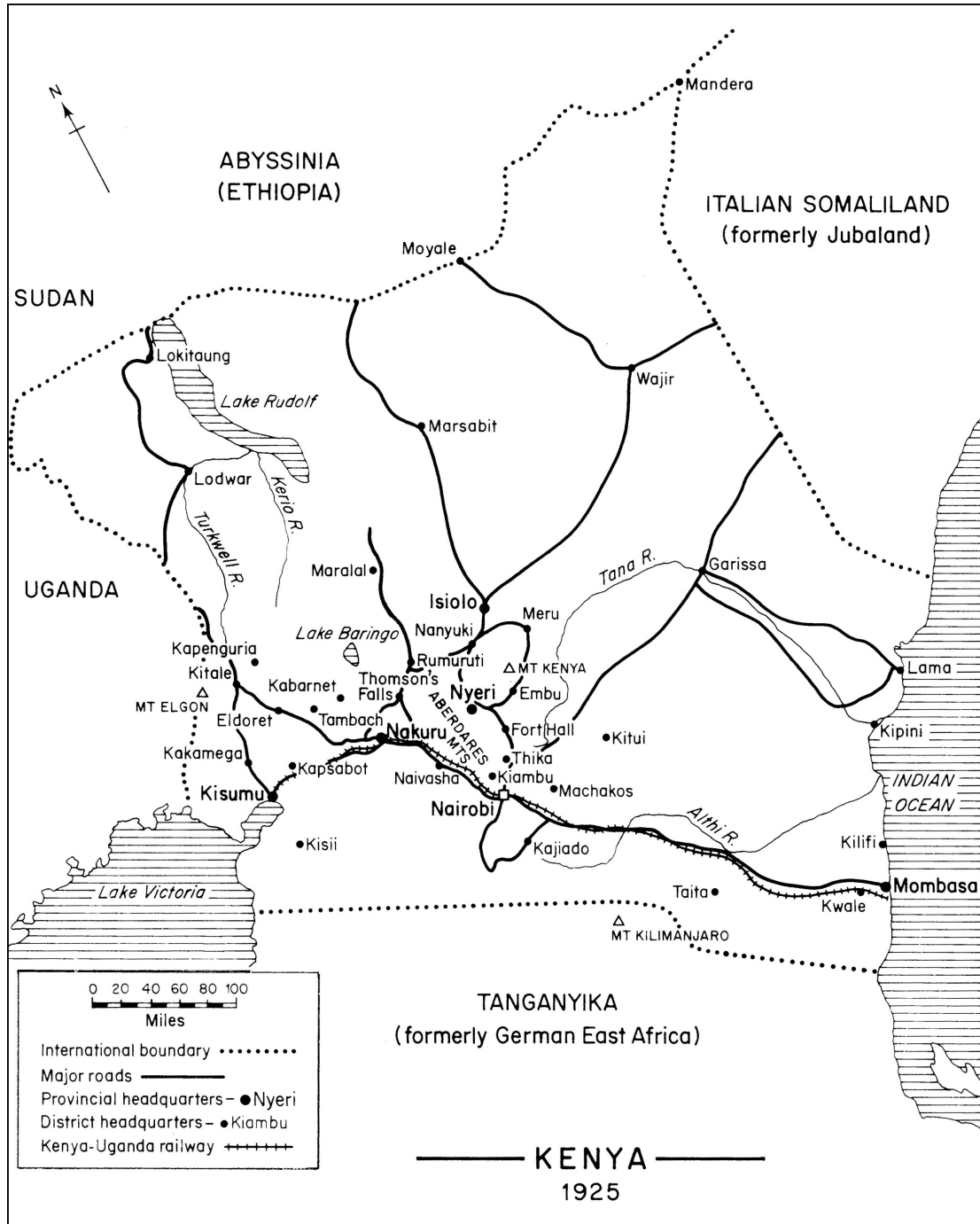


Figure 2.2. Map of Key Transport Routes and Towns in Kenya, c. 1925.
 Source: Adapted from Chenevix Trench, *Men Who Ruled Kenya*, p. 298.

became extra mouths instead'.¹⁶² Normal claims to protection might have to be disavowed.¹⁶³ As a result, the old and young died most easily.¹⁶⁴

The character of scarcities began to change with the increasing colonial influence in the region. A charter was granted to the Imperial British East Africa Company in 1888, handing the Company the responsibility to administer a vast swath of territory connecting the Indian Ocean seaboard with the vibrant inland economies of the Great Lakes region. Soon British trading caravans joined their Swahili predecessors in stimulating increased commercial food production along their routes from the coast to the Lake Victoria area.¹⁶⁵ A series of trading systems emerged, centred on the major food-buying areas along the road (and later railway) to Uganda.¹⁶⁶ The use of currency became more widespread in these areas. Demand for food was high enough that grain prices on the Kikuyu caravan market increased at least thirtyfold over the course of the 1890s.¹⁶⁷

Meanwhile, British territorial authority was consolidating. In 1895, the imperial government terminated the Company's charter and proclaimed an area, roughly coterminous with modern Kenya, as the East Africa Protectorate. A prefectural administration was established,¹⁶⁸ presided over by a governor.¹⁶⁹ Soon afterwards, construction began on the railway leading from Mombasa to the northern shores of Lake Victoria (see figure 2.2). Thousands of indentured labourers were brought from India to work on the railway, joining other Indians who had already immigrated to work as traders or artisans. The demand for food grew in step with the increasing labour force and urban population.

As the foreign presence in the interior of the country grew, violent conflict escalated. The 1890s saw a number of British military actions against African

¹⁶² Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, p. 14.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁶⁵ Lonsdale and Berman, 'Coping', p. 495.

¹⁶⁶ Nicholls, *Red Strangers*, pp. 19–20.

¹⁶⁷ Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, pp. 25–6.

¹⁶⁸ The prefectural system comprised political officers, stationed in all of the territory's various subdivisions, who acted as direct agents of the central state (that is, as representatives of the governor). These officers held wide powers over local activities, notably over taxation and property. As the 'front line' of the administration, they were tasked with encouraging production and trade, as well as maintaining public order; Berman, *Control and Crisis*, pp. 73–4. The basic prefectural chain of command was as follows: The governor held authority over a series of provincial and district commissioners stationed throughout the territory. The commissioners, in turn, oversaw the work of their more junior district officers, as well as the African chiefs who had been appointed as government agents. All correspondence to the governor passed through the chief secretary who, as head of the head of the local colonial secretariat, oversaw the organization of administration over the entire country; Dille, *British Policy*, p. 21; Stamp, 'Local Government', p. 23.

¹⁶⁹ This position was occupied by a commissioner until 1906, when authority for the Protectorate passed from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office. The governor acted as the 'direct local representative of the Crown', holding a 'monopoly of executive authority' over all local matters. However, they were required to defer certain decisions and approvals (such as legislative or budgetary changes) to the secretary of state in the Colonial Office. All correspondence between colony and Colonial Office passed through the governor; Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 2; Cashmore, 'District Administration', p. 10.

groups living inland, intensifying towards the time of the Protectorate's declaration.¹⁷⁰ Meanwhile, relations between Maasai, Kikuyu and Kamba groups were deteriorating, and bands of young raiders became more active in the interior.¹⁷¹ Such violence and the associated 'politics of conquest' had profound effects for food crises, aggravating famine and epidemic disease when they inevitably struck. The decade's upheavals left central Kenya particularly vulnerable to climatic catastrophe.¹⁷² This much was clear when a major drought beset the region before the turn of the century.

2.1 The 'Great Famine'

The 1897–1901 famine of East Africa, often referred to as the Great Famine, illustrates how the nature of dearth had begun to shift with the increasing colonial presence. In Kikuyu it was called *Ng'aragu ya Ruraya* ('the famine of Europe') due to its association with the presence of white traders, missionaries and officials.¹⁷³ The primary cause was serious and widespread drought, reportedly lasting nearly eighteen months, following in the wake of huge locust swarms and rinderpest outbreaks.¹⁷⁴ Market purchases, disease and violence aggravated the problems of pestilence and poor rainfall. Groups living alongside the inland trading routes, including around Machakos and in southern Kikuyuland, were some of the worst affected. Food purchases for railway construction crews, trade caravans and a military expedition sent to relieve a Ugandan mutiny had depleted Kamba and Kikuyu supplies, depriving people of their reserve stocks, and driving up grain prices.¹⁷⁵

Drought and hunger were quickly followed by outbreaks of smallpox, as well as the spread of a new pest – sand fleas or jiggers. These natural threats were accentuated by major socio-political unrest and violence, including raiding by Kikuyu *thabaris*, widespread banditry and theft, as well as attacks on railroad construction camps. Armed police retaliated.¹⁷⁶ The resulting mortality was extreme.¹⁷⁷ Few people and places were unaffected by the famine's reach. In

¹⁷⁰ The conflicts of colonial conquest would continue through the first decade of the next century. For a comprehensive list of these events, see Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, table 2.2.

¹⁷¹ Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Africa and the Africans*, p. 122.

¹⁷² Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, p. 122.

¹⁷³ Wamagatta, *Controversial Chiefs*, p. 16. Ambler notes that this association referred to more than the presence of Europeans and their activities. It included a sense of 'cosmological imbalance', and that 'the growing power of Europeans, however vaguely understood, lay behind these destructive forces'; *Kenyan Communities*, p. 124.

¹⁷⁴ McGregor Ross, *Kenya from Within*, p. 62; Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth*, p. 47.

¹⁷⁵ Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, pp. 125–6; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, p. 346; Chenevix Trench, *Men Who Ruled Kenya*, pp. 13–17; Wamagatta, *Controversial Chiefs*, p. 16.

¹⁷⁶ Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, pp. 145–6; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, pp. 30, 349; Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth*, p. 47; Nicholls, *Red Strangers*, p. 21; Sorrensen, *Origins of European Settlement*, p. 21.

¹⁷⁷ The famine was later found to have killed two-thirds of the people living in a single Kikuyu *mbari*; Iliffe, *Africans*, p. 216. On reports of the high mortality and disruptive socio-political effects of the famine, see Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, pp. 30, 349; Brantley, *Giriama and Colonial Resistance*, p. 51; Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, pp. 201–3; Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth*, p. 47; McGregor Ross, *Kenya from Within*, p. 62; Munro, *Colonial Rule*, p. 47; Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire*, pp. 45–6; Wamagatta, *Controversial Chiefs*, pp. 16–17. The most

Kitui the event was remembered as *Yūa ya Ngomanisye* ('the famine that went everywhere').¹⁷⁸

Ambler argues that the scale and intensity of the crisis led Protectorate officials to shake off their 'antipathy to the free distribution of food' and institute a relief programme – the first coordinated efforts by the fledgling administration to provide emergency food supplies.¹⁷⁹ Relief camps were established at key centres including Ndi, Kibwezi, Machakos, Nairobi and Kikuyu. People were vaccinated against and treated for smallpox at quarantine camps. The administration granted a 'considerable sum of money' for these purposes, but it was by no means sufficient.¹⁸⁰ Local administrators started 'subscriptions' among better-off Africans; European and Indian residents of Mombasa also contributed funds towards relief.¹⁸¹ Many hungry people did not survive the journey to these camps. Others were more fortunate; by late 1899, over five thousand were surviving on relief supplies in central Kenya. For the Akamba, the (as yet incomplete) railway helped to save many lives by allowing missionaries and authorities to transport sacks of rice from the coast for distribution to starving people around Machakos.¹⁸² Mission stations became important places of refuge and conversion.¹⁸³ For famine called upon missionaries to carry out their spiritual duty to relieve suffering, certainly, but also presented opportunities to proselytize to the hungry and newly dependent.¹⁸⁴ Some administrators went to great personal cost to help those suffering around them. In Ukambani, John Ainsworth contributed 1,000 rupees of his own salary

comprehensive description of the famine, including African experiences of the event, is that of Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, chapter 6.

¹⁷⁸ Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, p. 122.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 139; Chenevix Trench, *Men Who Ruled Kenya*, pp. 16–17.

¹⁸⁰ Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth*, pp. 47–8.

¹⁸¹ Munro, *Colonial Rule*, p. 48; Chenevix Trench, *Men Who Ruled Kenya*, pp. 16–17.

¹⁸² Ellis, *Vertical Margins*, p. 90; Ogonda, 'Transport and Communications', p. 138. The distribution of rice explains why the famine is referred to as *Mūvunga* (rice) amongst some Kamba people; Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire*, p. 45. Giriama people referred to the famine as *Ndzala ya Magunia* ('famine of sacks'), and a similar name was used in parts of Ulu. Brantley suggests this was a reference to the imported famine relief; *Giriama and Colonial Resistance*, p. 51. Porter et al. suggest it referred to hessian sacks sold by the Giriama to Arabs; *Development in Practice*, p. 214. Ambler argues that famine names referring to unfamiliar items (such as rice and sacks) reflected a perception that 'external forces' played a role in causing the event, whether through external trade, the presence of outsiders such as Europeans, or other means; *Kenyan Communities*, p. 137. Naming was part of a larger collective process of remembering famines events and developing explanations for their causes and effects; Maddox, 'Mtunya', pp. 188–9.

¹⁸³ Generally, extra-governmental institutions, including missionaries, philanthropists and individual families, bore most responsibility for providing welfare services to the poor in the precolonial or early colonial period; see Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, p. 38; Iliffe, *African Poor*, chapter 11. Sundkler and Steed note that missionary stations often became refuges during African famines of the nineteenth century; *History of the Church*, pp. 132, 143, 546. Missionaries were also involved in distributing famine relief in Southern Rhodesia; *Famine in Zimbabwe*, chapter 3.

¹⁸⁴ For an example of this sense of the Famine as an opportunity to convert Africans, see Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, pp. 148–9. To some extent, one could say that the colonial state inherited this kind of proselytizing logic: famine relief constituted a kind of sacrament and communion, a chance to enact colonial beneficence, and an opportunity to change beliefs and behaviour. At a broad level, official willingness to provide relief should be located against this moral background.

towards relief supplies.¹⁸⁵ Others tried to encourage the circulation of food by facilitating (or coercing) trade – including one officer personally leading a caravan from Kitui to Mount Kenya.¹⁸⁶

The relief actions pursued by administrators, missionaries and other private agencies were highly limited and localized in relation to the overall scale of the famine. So, for the most part, people looked to more established institutions and exchange networks for relief, or tried to fend for themselves. Some found recourse in their regular trading or political relationships.¹⁸⁷ For many, livestock offered a key survival resource, providing milk and blood to eat in addition to a source of payment, but were rarely slaughtered for meat.¹⁸⁸ Others turned to litigation, requesting payments or refunds on bridewealth obligations.¹⁸⁹ However, it was the poor, without recourse to such reserves, who bore the first and most severe brunt of hunger. Many resorted to hunting and foraging.¹⁹⁰ Parties of hungry and impoverished Africans roved about the countryside looking to purchase or work for food. Their searches cast the famine's net over an ever-widening area.¹⁹¹ In this way, the famine led to major population displacements as thousands of refugees moved out of dry areas towards highland regions or market and relief centres, leaving some areas practically uninhabited.¹⁹² For many, survival was a grim battle of subsistence in the face of rapidly eroding moral economies, and the reneging of even the closest of kinship ties.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁵ Cashmore, 'District Administration', p. 25; Munro, *Colonial Rule*, p. 47; Chenevix Trench, *Men Who Ruled Kenya*, pp. 16–17.

¹⁸⁶ Ambler argues that such interventions likely weakened pre-existing networks and means of survival; *Kenyan Communities*, p. 141.

¹⁸⁷ For example, the Giriama living near the Sabaki river provided food to Mijikenda and other nearby groups along the coast; Porter et al., *Development in Practice*, p. 46. Also on the coast, Arabs and Swahilis with access to commercial grain imports were often willing to provide relief for their political and trading allies; Brantley, *Giriama and Colonial Resistance*, p. 12. Many people from Kitui sought refuge through their long-standing trade connections in highland areas; Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, pp. 134–5.

¹⁸⁸ On keeping cattle as an insurance against famine, often in preference to cash reserves, see Spencer, 'Pastoralism', p. 118; Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, pp. 86–7. Cattle were not only a reserve against crop failure, but also 'a way of controlling labour'. Their ownership 'brought labour into the cattle wealthy household', often to the benefit of men; Maddox, 'Gender and Famine', pp. 86–7. Such reluctance to eat livestock, even during times of famine, contributed to the colonial perception of what would later be termed the 'cattle complex'. Ambler depicts this as a rational means to avoid the ruination of entire families through complete asset disposal; *Kenyan Communities*, p. 126. John Ainsworth reported that some Africans did slaughter their stock to supplement the food supply, or ate animals infected with rinderpest; Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth*, p. 47.

¹⁸⁹ Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, p. 126.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 127; Wamagatta, *Controversial Chiefs*, p. 16.

¹⁹¹ Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, pp. 129–30.

¹⁹² For example, many Kamba people travelled to Kikuyu territory, where some remained, but mainly they journeyed towards the coast where 'the Rabai Akamba are mostly such as left Kitui to escape the famine'; Dundas, 'History of Kitui', p. 485. Among other things, widespread population movements across the region led to the growth of African settlements adjacent to market centres such as Nairobi; Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, pp. 134, 139–40.

¹⁹³ Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, pp. 144–5.

Trade took on particular importance as a means to secure food. Makeshift caravans made repeated journeys from dry lowlands to less-affected highlands to trade for food. Initially these followed regular trading routes but later, as conditions worsened, people ventured toward any district where they might rummage for supplies.¹⁹⁴ Most trade was carried out directly between producers and consumers, although some acted as professional traders, bringing supplies into areas of dearth.¹⁹⁵ Yet, as more people came to depend on purchased food, prices rose, and increasingly they were forced to survive by pledging their own labour or that of their dependants.¹⁹⁶ Pawning women became increasingly commonplace, in some places turning into outright coercion and trading in dependent female labour.¹⁹⁷ As noted by Maddox, such famines brought a fall in the relative 'value of labour'.¹⁹⁸

The events of 1897–1901 had significant long-term economic and political consequences. As Ambler has argued, it proved 'a critical element' in the 'rapid advance of imperial authority and the early evolution of colonial society'.¹⁹⁹ On one level, it played a key role in driving complex reformations of the distributions of authority and wealth within African societies, both undermining and enabling the extension of customary authority in new ways.²⁰⁰ This promoted political fragmentation at the same time as consolidating the status of patrons better positioned to recover from adversity.²⁰¹ Many trading 'middlemen' and brokers were able to accumulate wealth and influence during the famine; others did so by forging new links with institutions including missions and the British administration.²⁰² Indeed, the famine enabled European administrative, mission and trading centres – through their access to and distribution of imported supplies – to extend considerably their local political and commercial influence.²⁰³

The Great Famine led to the decline of Arab and Swahili economic dominance along the coast.²⁰⁴ Moreover, high mortality and population dispersion in the interior opened the door for the alienation and allotment of settler farms in fertile lands, adjacent to the new railway, previously cultivated by the Kikuyu, or grazed by weakened pastoral tribes like the Maasai and Akamba.²⁰⁵ The event was thus a critical condition for the policy of 'white settlement' that the Kenyan

¹⁹⁴ For a description of inter-regional trading relationships, and how they were mobilized in Ulu, Kitui, Meru and Kikuyuland during the famine, see Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, pp. 130–1.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 131–2.

¹⁹⁷ Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, pp. 132–3. Dundas reported that Kamba men 'sold' women to Kikuyus in exchange for food, redeemable for a 'ransom' price, although it is unclear whether this represents a European misunderstanding of pawning, or a more coercive act; 'Organization and Laws', p. 290.

¹⁹⁸ Maddox, 'Mtunya', p. 192.

¹⁹⁹ Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, p. 123.

²⁰⁰ Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, p. 349.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30–1, 364.

²⁰² Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, pp. 148–9.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 138–40.

²⁰⁴ Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, p. 203.

²⁰⁵ McGregor Ross, *Kenya from Within*, p. 62; Munro, *Colonial Rule*, pp. 77–80; Sorrensen, *Origins of European Settlement*, p. 28; Spencer, 'Pastoralism', pp. 113–14.

administration pursued in earnest from 1902, which in turn drove a significant elaboration of the state apparatus.²⁰⁶ Ultimately, this set in motion a lasting political problem, and a focus for anticolonial agitation.

The Famine was more severe than any event in living memory.²⁰⁷ Its significance as a historical event is evinced by its use as a dating device, with officials later using it as a historical marker to discuss trends relating to African custom and law.²⁰⁸ In the early 1930s, the Kenyan Land Commission would repeatedly refer to estimated population sizes and patterns of occupation before and after the Famine, particularly in Kikuyu Province, to consider the legitimacy of various historical claims to land.²⁰⁹ Moreover, the worst of the suffering may have passed by 1901, but its memory retained a powerful political force. In future years, officials and politicians would remobilize this memory during times of acute scarcity as a way to legitimate government intervention. Although state-led relief efforts were highly circumscribed, they seemingly established a precedent for the administration's role in future times of dearth.²¹⁰ They laid the foundations of an official 'duty' to relieve hunger and suffering in times of crisis.

2.2 Conclusion

To summarize, in the latter half of the nineteenth century food scarcity visited East Africa in cyclical fashion, primarily affecting areas with marginal environments and irregular climates. During major food crises, mortality was mainly the result of disease, and could be staggering in its scale. Yet these crises were increasingly and integrally linked to the politics of colonial conquest and violence.²¹¹ By the last decade of the century, food purchases for external markets had started to affect these dynamics. This much was clear during Kenya's *fin-de-siècle* Great Famine.

By the start of the twentieth century, the governmentalization of food scarcity comprised basic disaster relief functions performed by a variety of actors, including missionaries, philanthropists and administrators. Often such actions appear to have been motivated by a moral notion of duty. As such, hunger and starvation were a *problem* mainly for the suffering they caused the colonial subjects of the Crown. What we find, then, is a politics of mortality – a moral

²⁰⁶ For example, a state agricultural department was established in the early 1900s to provide assistance to white settler farmers. The functional and technical departments of agriculture, public works, education and medicine were grafted on the basic structural and spatial framework of the prefectural administration. These agencies provided services throughout the territory, for both urban and rural areas. Departmental heads advised, and answered to, the governor; Dilley, *British Policy*, p. 21.

²⁰⁷ Ambler, *Kenyan Communities*, p. 122.

²⁰⁸ Dundas, 'Organization and Laws', p. 265; also pointed out in Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire*, p. 45.

²⁰⁹ Carter et al., *Report of the Kenya Land Commission*, part 1, chapters 1–10.

²¹⁰ Munro argues that these anti-famine efforts heralded 'a colonial government with some interest in the welfare of the people it ruled'; *Colonial Rule*, p. 4.

²¹¹ De Waal notes that colonial violence, particularly that directed against local insurrections, continued to act as a proximate cause of famine well into the twentieth century, being particularly notable during the First World War; *Famine Crimes*, p. 27.

politics concerned with preventing individuals from suffering and perishing from the sudden and temporary scourges of famine and epidemic.²¹² For the most part, this was a politics centred on the paternalistic relation between the sovereign and the individual subject. At the same time, the historical evidence suggests that some missionaries and administrators may have seen the providing of famine relief as a means to extend their local influence and control, and to shepherd the beliefs and behaviours of African peoples. Whatever their underlying motivation, the relief efforts co-staged by the Protectorate administration covered only a few key areas around the coast and railway-serviced hinterland, and largely depended on the initiative of local officials rather than legislative control or bureaucratized operations. This would soon change. The following chapter discusses how the state's response to food scarcity would start to take on a far more bureaucratic and coordinated form, partly as a response to the declaration of war in Europe and Africa.

²¹² Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 243.

3. Scarcity, State Control and the First World War

The Great Famine, discussed in the previous chapter, may have left a lasting mark on Kenya's social, political and economic dynamics, but it appears that the early years of the twentieth century offered some respite to both African communities and officials. The colonial annual reports from this period mention few scarcities. From 1907, however, local officials did report anticipated, potential and actual scarcities in various districts practically every year until 1918.²¹³ The chief causes were drought, with epidemic disease sometimes following suit.²¹⁴ Some local scarcities were intimately connected to market factors and the effects of state economic policies.²¹⁵ African uprisings and state retributions, including those against the coastal Giriama people between 1914 and 1916, also led to localized famines.²¹⁶

Prior to the First World War, the Kenyan state's responses to food shortages took several forms. Probably the most common strategy was to distribute emergency relief supplies, either for immediate repayment or on credit. Broadly speaking, the volume of supplies distributed by the state was limited.²¹⁷ Loans of food supplies could be made to specific communities and, in less severe cases, the collection of taxes might be postponed.²¹⁸ Relief works, like those devised in nineteenth-century India, might also be organized.²¹⁹ Such works were arranged in Nyanza and Lumbwa as early as 1907, roughly coinciding with a considerable expansion in settler estate production, as well as an extensive public works and railway construction programme.²²⁰ Road and rail-building projects were often favoured. These had the benefit of concentrating hungry people in areas where they could be fed more easily.²²¹ They ensured some form of repayment for the supplies distributed, and the resulting infrastructure helped to 'open up' the country. During future scarcities, the argument went, relief supplies could be

²¹³ East Africa Protectorate (EAP), *Annual Reports 1906–18*.

²¹⁴ In 1908–09, for example, scarcities in Kitui and Machakos districts were linked to outbreaks of East Coast Fever; EAP, *Annual Report for 1908–09*, p. 32.

²¹⁵ Maxon notes that a 1910 in Vihiga, for example, was partly the result of an official campaign to increase the planting of sesame as a cash crop. After households had sold large portions of their sorghum supplies at end of 1909, and subsequently planted sesame at the expense of food crops, inadequate rainfall during the course of the following year left people with little to either trade or consume; 'Fantastic Prices', pp. 32–3.

²¹⁶ Brantley, *Giriama and Colonial Resistance*, p. 132; Cooper, 'Kenya After Slavery', p. 27; Porter et al., *Development in Practice*, p. 214; Savage and Munro, 'Carrier Corps', p. 318.

²¹⁷ O'Leary, 'Responses to Drought', p. 320.

²¹⁸ In 1908–09, 16 tons of foodstuffs were loaned to inhabitants of Kibwezi, who had 'suffered severely from famine', and tax collections were postponed in Rabai 'owing to threatened famine'; EAP, *Annual Report for 1908–09*, pp. 27, 32.

²¹⁹ In the late 1870s, Viceroy of India Lord Lytton laid out a famine policy emphasizing free trade and the distribution of relief in return for hard labour. The latter principle was inspired by the writings of Turgot, the eighteenth-century French economist, on famine; Stahl, 'Economics of Starvation'.

²²⁰ EAP, *Annual Reports 1905–07*; Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 61.

²²¹ This logic was evident in famine relief works organized in 1929. A railway extension was motivated as a relief work as a means to 'effect an economy in the famine relief, inasmuch as it will bring both the natives towards the source of supply of famine relief, and also give them work'; (E. M. V. Kenealy) CPK, *Kenya Legislative Council Debates (KLC Deb) 1929*, Vol. 1, 22 February, p. 40.

transported more easily to the area. And, as I will show later, they avoided the possibility of corrupting the (work) 'morale' of African men, which officials and settlers assumed to be the inevitable result of the free distribution of state relief.

Following the outbreak of war in 1914, food scarcities resulted from a variety of factors. In 1916–17, enemy activities along the Tanganyikan border led to a food shortage in Vanga, while the abandonment of homes due to recruitment efforts reportedly led to scarcity along the Tana River.²²² The worst, however, was yet to come. Over the course of the war, thousands of Africans had been conscripted to serve as soldiers or as porters in the infamously ill-fated Carrier Corps, where thousands would ultimately suffer and perish from disease.²²³ African women assumed more responsibility to clear land and grow food; many switched to labour-saving crops such as maize.²²⁴ Similarly, many settlers were absent from their farms on military service. Kenya generally faced a lack of veterinary staff and farm animals, while import restrictions meant fewer agricultural implements were available. By the latter part of 1917, such conditions combined with unfavourable rainfall; outbreaks of stock diseases; government pressure to market all available supplies for military purposes; as well as the spread of insect, plant and fungal menaces.²²⁵ The result was Kenya's first major famine under Colonial Office administration, which by year's end gripped many districts in the territory, spilling southwards over the border into Tanganyika.²²⁶ Food prices spiked, among other things undermining the local pig industry.²²⁷ And diseases such as influenza, tuberculosis and malaria spread rapidly throughout groups already weakened from famine, with horrifying mortal effect.²²⁸

3.1 Central state responses

Aware of the danger of a possible food scarcity due to the failure of the 'short rains' (preceded, in some areas, by exceptionally heavy rainfall), in early December 1917 the Acting Governor C. C. Bowring requested all provincial commissioners to provide assessments of 'the food prospects throughout the Protectorate'.²²⁹ The replies generally indicated that 'a sufficiency of food' was to be expected if decent rains fell in December and January. Such did not materialize. At the end of December, Bowring appointed a Famine Committee chaired by Ainsworth to investigate 'the question of the native food supply and to make recommendations'.²³⁰ It is worth noting that Ainsworth, who had been

²²² EAP, *Annual Report for 1916–17*, p. 21. German recruitment of African men and requisitions of food and cattle also led to people abandoning their homes in Tanganyika, thereby aggravating famine conditions; Maddox, 'Mtunya', pp. 183–4.

²²³ Savage and Munro, 'Carrier Corps'.

²²⁴ Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, p. 132.

²²⁵ EAP, *Annual Report for 1917–18*. On state pressure to increase marketing of supplies for military purposes, thereby contributing to food shortages, see Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', p. 33.

²²⁶ Maddox, 'Gender and Famine', p. 89; Maddox, 'Mtunya'; Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, p. 108.

²²⁷ EAP, *Annual Report for 1917–18*.

²²⁸ EAP, *Annual Reports 1917–19*. The influenza epidemic took more than 1,000 lives in Vihiga district alone; Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', pp. 33–4.

²²⁹ EAP, *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Legislative Council of East Africa (EAPLC Mins) 1918*, First Session, 18 February, p. 5.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6; Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth*.

nominated as military commissioner of labour in March 1917, in charge of recruiting labour for the Carrier Corps, and who would later be the Protectorate's founding chief native commissioner (1918–20), was consistently deprecated by settlers for his apparently 'pro-native tendencies'.²³¹ In January 1918, as the Famine Committee chair, Ainsworth seized the opportunity to pursue some of these 'tendencies', directing administrative officers 'to develop reserves to the maximum' both as a response to the immediate conditions of famine and to provide for 'future policy needs'.²³²

After working to obtain 'all possible information from all parts of the Protectorate', the Famine Committee reported to the governor that serious shortages were expected in the Nyika reserve and areas of Kenya Province (later part of Central Province). Bowring, in turn, reported the threatened famine to the secretary of state in the Colonial Office, and requested assistance in arranging shipments of emergency food supplies from South Africa. Such arrangements were made through the Royal Commission on Wheat Supplies, and a vessel was dispatched from 'the Union' with 3,500 tons of grain, with further requirements to be met by monthly shipments. The Committee also considered how best to receive and distribute supplies through the railway system, including via a depot in Nairobi.²³³

In February 1918, Bowring explained to the Legislative Council (Legco) that the grain was to be distributed along four lines: to employers requiring food for their labour, to African people (via district commissioners), to private traders, and to mission stations.²³⁴ Supplies were to be sold at the cost price of landing the food at the nearest station or point of distribution. For traders, this was conditional on their being 'limited in the amount of profit they shall make in retailing [the] same'.²³⁵ Although the government's intention was to issue grain only on payment, officials recognized that it would be necessary to devise special famine relief works if drought conditions continued. The director of public works drew up a schedule of projects in case, and made arrangements such that labourers would not only be fed, but could also 'draw food in payment of services for the

²³¹ McGregor Ross, *Kenya from Within*; Tarus, 'Direct Taxation', p. 21. In large part this notoriety stemmed from Ainsworth's energetic encouragement of African agriculture and cash cropping during his tenure as commissioner of Nyanza. Settlers saw this as obstructing the flow of labour to the settled highlands; Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth*, pp. 101, 103.

²³² Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, p. 94. However, the strength of Ainsworth's efforts to boost African production was short lived. The onset of economic depression shortly after the end of the war, coupled with vocal political pressure to discourage what was correctly perceived as a competitor and threat to the settler economy, ensured that administrative efforts in the reserves were kept at a skeletal level, largely becoming a matter of the individual initiative of local officers; Berman, *Control and Crisis*, pp. 218–9.

²³³ EAP, *EAPLC Mins 1918*, First Session, 18 February, p. 6.

²³⁴ Kenyan Executive and Legislative councils were established in 1906, with the former acting as the governor's advisory body. Legco enjoyed the power to make ordinances, as well as to constitute and regulate courts and officials. All ordinances proposed by Legco had to be assented by the governor, who also held the original and casting vote. At the time of these discussions, in 1918, unofficial members were still appointed by the governor. However, settlers had long agitated for an elective franchise to secure their representation on the Council. This was granted in 1919; Dilley, *British Policy*, pp. 17–23.

²³⁵ EAP, *EAPLC Mins 1918*, First Session, 18 February, p. 6.

use of themselves or their families'.²³⁶ By the end of February, some district commissioners had already started irrigation relief works.

Officials imported and distributed 17,000 tons of food from South Africa and elsewhere.²³⁷ The supplies were mainly sold, and the principal customers were Africans, government departments and employers requiring food for their workers.²³⁸ The Famine Committee later reported that the Kamba people alone bought over 1,900 tons of rice, 53 tons of maize and 73 tons of other grains.²³⁹ Local settler farmers were also urged to proffer supplies to distribute as relief. Much of the imported food was shipped to the new railhead at Thika (opened in 1913), where thousands of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru people arrived in search of food.²⁴⁰ Many southern Kikuyu and Kamba journeyed to Nairobi for the same reason.²⁴¹ Although this relief helped to prevent many more deaths from starvation and smallpox, mortality was nonetheless severe – 'the roads to all government centres', it was reported, 'were lined with corpses'.²⁴² Few had the option to rely on government relief. Migration and trade took on particular importance as a means to survive. Some families were able to secure surplus food supplies from their less harshly affected friends and neighbours,²⁴³ although officials attempted to prevent major population movements.²⁴⁴ Cattle were bartered for food or exchanged for cash.²⁴⁵ Some earned food by working in settlements, on European farms, on public works or by signing up for military service.²⁴⁶ When desperate, many resorted to strategies of foraging, pawning children or becoming dependents themselves, as well as banditry and violence.²⁴⁷

Officials also pursued other strategies. One was to halt and retain all exports of grain and other foodstuffs to provide for local consumption – a measure lamented by Bowring.²⁴⁸ However, the most significant feature of the state's response was its resort to legislative and coercive measures. In February 1918, Legco passed the Food Preservation Ordinance to prohibit coastal people (who had 'shown themselves improvident') from cutting down mango trees to make

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ McGregor Ross, *Kenya from Within*, p. 152.

²³⁸ Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth*, p. 107.

²³⁹ Simiyu, 'Land and Politics', p. 121.

²⁴⁰ Dawson, 'Health, Nutrition', p. 211; Soja, *Geography of Modernization*, p. 29.

²⁴¹ Dawson, 'Socioeconomic Change', p. 101.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ For example, the Gusii sold grain to worse affected Luos, leading to the economic benefit of the former; Maxon, *Conflict and Accommodation*, p. 72.

²⁴⁴ Dawson, 'Socioeconomic Change', p. 101.

²⁴⁵ Although Maddox notes that, at least in Tanganyika, the cash prices for cattle fell so low that people preferred to barter; Maddox, 'Mtunya', p. 187.

²⁴⁶ Savage and Munro, 'Carrier Corps', pp. 329–30.

²⁴⁷ Maddox describes how people in central region of Tanganyika pursued these strategies, and it is likely that similar conditions would have been seen north of the border with Kenya; 'Mtunya', pp. 186–92.

²⁴⁸ As Bowring stated in Legco: 'The existing shortage of native foodstuffs, notably maize and beans... has for the time being completely obliterated this Protectorate as an exporting proposition. I trust however that in a few months' time the position will have changed and that an excess of local production above local consumption will provide a source of supply to the world's markets'; EAP, *EAPLC Mins 1918*, First Session, 18 February, p. 4.

charcoal.²⁴⁹ But Ainsworth sought further powers. In April, building on his earlier instructions for officials to encourage development in the reserves, he introduced two additional pieces of legislation obliging Africans to work for famine relief and to grow more food.²⁵⁰ The first was the Native Authority Amendment Ordinance. This provided the authority to compel Africans 'to make better use of the lands set aside for their occupation'. 'Better use' involved extending cultivated areas plus greater use of manure and crop rotation techniques, which Ainsworth hoped to promote over the longer-term by 'a system of agricultural education'. As he explained: 'The present shortage of food would undoubtedly have been much less severe had the natives generally been more industrious in this connection'.²⁵¹

The second piece of legislation was the Native Authority (Famine Relief) Ordinance. This sought to compel African people 'who are in danger of starvation' to work on 'relief and other public works'.²⁵² In Legco, Ainsworth justified the legislation in relation to the 'peculiarities of the African' who 'becomes apathetic and indifferent to his fate' when threatened by scarcity:

Under famine conditions an ordered idea or concentration on work in return for food is just what these people will not do unless ordered and compelled. It is for these reasons that powers are sought so that it shall not be left to the native to follow his own inclination which if allowed will result in his deterioration and numerous deaths.²⁵³

As such, 'drastic measures' were necessary for Africans 'to be saved from the results of their own indifference'.²⁵⁴ These measures proved to be highly unpopular among the Kenyan settler public. This was partly driven by a sense of moral outrage that 'idle' Africans could potentially be fed by the state. Many argued that food should only be provided to those working for Europeans.²⁵⁵ But there was also a more economic aspect to this dissent, particularly in relation to the Native Authority Amendment Ordinance. In Legco, P. H. Clarke, the first white merchant in Kisumu, argued that it was 'wrong in principle to encourage compulsion within the reserves, without equally encouraging the production of labour for the more important industries of the country'.²⁵⁶ This reflected a wider current of settler opinion that increasing food production in the reserves would only serve to undermine settler industries.²⁵⁷ Later in the year, the state tabled its financial estimates, including a nominal allocation of under 2,000 pounds for technical assistance of African agriculture. This brazen endorsement of African production was a step too far for many settlers. In response to fiery criticism lodged by unofficial Legco members and the local press, the state

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

²⁵⁰ Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, p. 108.

²⁵¹ EAP, *EAPLC Mins 1918*, First Session, 11 April 1918, p. 40.

²⁵² Ibid., p. 42.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, p. 87; Savage and Munro, 'Carrier Corps', p. 334-5.

²⁵⁶ EAP, *EAPLC Mins 1918*, First Session, 25 April, p. 57; Nicholls, *Red Strangers*, p. 111.

²⁵⁷ Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, p. 87.

withdrew the Ordinance.²⁵⁸ This appears to have been something of a ‘rubicon moment’ in Kenyan political history. Cashmore depicts it as a clear statement of growing settler political influence over the official affairs of the Protectorate.²⁵⁹

Leaving aside this opposition for the time being, what do the foregoing statements and actions reflect about how officials viewed the problem of food scarcity? In Ainsworth’s statements, one finds a combination of two imperatives. First, they evince a liberal or Malthusian tendency to blame hunger on the improvidence and lack of industry (‘idleness’) shown by the hungry, which took on a particularly racialized and gendered form in colonial African settings.²⁶⁰ And second, one sees a paternalistic sense of duty that motivated officials to ‘act for the native’s good in spite of himself’ in averting mass starvation.²⁶¹ Related to this point, officials like Ainsworth did not conceptualize hunger as a pure natural function of climatic variables. Rather, natural realities, as the chief cause of famine, were fundamentally linked to and aggravated by human factors. Specifically, scarcities were linked to a Malthusian notion of improvident and hopeless ‘savage life’ as a danger to society. This notion of African improvidence as *catastrophic* is an important element of the paternalism shown by officials over food crises. In the basic Malthusian view, scarcity can act as a kind of ‘regulatory device’, forcing people to generate a sense of futurity over the more immediate facts of their existence.²⁶² However, for Ainsworth, there is little hope that famines will inculcate any such foresight in the absence of outright state compulsion.

It is worthwhile, too, reflecting further on the ‘native authority’ legislation introduced by Ainsworth. These ordinances illustrate an important dynamic in the economy of colonial state power, particularly in the interwar period. That dynamic relates to the way that officials attempted to graft state practices onto existing African socio-political systems in order to ease the exercise of colonial power. In this case, it worked by drawing state-appointed chiefs – along with

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 94; EAP, *EAPLC Mins 1918*, First Session, 12 April, p. 46.

²⁵⁹ Cashmore, ‘District Administration’, p. 199.

²⁶⁰ On the Malthusian attitudes active in nineteenth-century Britain, prior to the ‘humanitarian discovery of hunger’, see Vernon, *Hunger*, chapters 1 and 2; also Dean, *Constitution of Poverty*, chapter 5. For such attitudes during the Indian famines of the same century, see Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, chapter 1. On the prominent Kenyan settler and official view of the male African as ‘idle’, and as a specific motivation for Kenyan state compulsion and discipline of labour during and following the First World War, see Berman and Lonsdale, ‘Crises’, pp. 63–4; Okia, ‘Forced Labour Crisis’; Savage and Munro, ‘Carrier Corps’, pp. 319–20. Rimmer writes generally of British settler colonialism in Africa: ‘The need for labour by the administrations and European employers was made sharper by a sense of outrage that young African men could be maintained in idleness by their womenfolk’; ‘Economic Imprint’, p. 147. On the underutilization of labour time in colonial Kenya as a rational response to the threats of disease, drought and locusts, see Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, pp. 14–16.

²⁶¹ EAP, *EAPLC Mins 1918*, First Session, 11 April, p. 42. Bryceson writes of Tanganyika: ‘Famine prevention and relief epitomized the paternalism of the colonial government and struck a deep responsive chord in officers. Most officers saw themselves as superior in intellect and culture to the African peasant populace. Their duty to the peasantry was defined by the British Empire’s civilizing mission’; ‘Food Insecurity’, p. 75. On paternalism around famine-related food provisioning in rural and urban South Africa in the early twentieth century, see Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach*, chapters 3 and 4.

²⁶² Tellman, ‘Catastrophic Populations’, pp. 136–7.

their 'traditional' powers and responsibilities – into the governmental system of famine relief. The colonial state sought to utilize the chiefs' customary rights to call-out labour, and to control juniors and women, to order the planting of food crops and to prohibit the brewing of alcohol. The effect was to leave the chiefs with the power and responsibility to mobilize the people and punish wrongdoers, but not to distribute rewards. Instead, the act of providing relief supplies was bureaucratized, controlled by district officers and withheld according to the state's interests.²⁶³

Above all, the major problems facing Kenyan officials in 1918 were increasing food production, inducing all available supplies to be put on the market, as well as importing and distributing emergency supplies to the destitute. There is little evidence to suggest that authorities sought to decrease public food consumption, as with the drives for 'food economy' seen in wartime South Africa.²⁶⁴ In all likelihood, this was unnecessary due to the small size of the non-producing population,²⁶⁵ combined with limited state capacity to effect significant control over distribution and public consumption. In any case, Kenyan officials could limit food demand via more coercive methods: for example, by controlling migration and 'repatriating' Africans to the rural reserves.²⁶⁶

One area where food consumption did become a point of significant state interest, however, related to the nutrition and health of the Carrier Corps. The high proportion of African conscripts who perished from malnutrition and disease, or were rejected from service on medical grounds, highlighted the importance of providing porters with an adequate diet.²⁶⁷ Medical officers, many of whom came from South Africa, introduced their knowledge of human dietary requirements (forged on the mines of the Witwatersrand) to reform military rationing practices.²⁶⁸ Indeed, this interest in the nutrition and productivity of African labour would remain a key problem for officials in future years, as I will show.

²⁶³ An almost identical approach was followed by the Tanganyikan state with its 1921 Native Authority Ordinance; Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity', pp. 96–8; Maddox, 'Gender and Famine', pp. 89–90.

²⁶⁴ As evident, for example, in the pamphlet by Higham and Davis, *Plea for War Time Economy*.

²⁶⁵ The 1911 returned the European population as 3,175 and 'Asiatics' as 11,886. The African population was estimated (from 'hut tax returns and other indications') at around three million. At the same time, the population of Nairobi was reported as just over 16,000, including 995 Europeans and 3,361 Asians; EAP, *Annual Report for 1911–12*, pp. 39, 48.

²⁶⁶ Cashmore notes that during the First World War officials attempted to repatriate Giriama people to their rural reserve following their earlier uprising; 'District Administration', p. 130. On the use of vagrancy legislation and repatriation of juveniles in Kenya, and the limits to such measures, see Ocobock, 'Joy Rides'.

²⁶⁷ Anderson, 'Master and Servant', p. 463.

²⁶⁸ Hodges, 'African Manpower Statistics', p. 111; Hodges, *Kariakor*, p. 15. On early twentieth-century interest in the nutrition of mine labour in South Africa, see Davie, *Poverty Knowledge*, chapter 1.

3.2 Long-term effects

The combination of famine, disease and war between 1917 and 1919 would have a lasting effect on Kenyan political economy. The shock suffered by African agriculture, the 'mainstay of the prewar colonial economy',²⁶⁹ opened the door for settler farmers to assume a dominant position in Kenya's export industry. It further emboldened settlers and some officials to affirm settler-led production as the path to economic prosperity and growth.²⁷⁰ They duly looked to a highlands settlement scheme for ex-soldiers as a basis for Kenya's anticipated post-war revival.²⁷¹ Accordingly, in 1919 the Land Settlement Commission advocated the alienation of certain reserve areas for European settlement: these included portions of the Kamba and Kikuyu reserves located close to the railway.²⁷² Although there were several attempts to direct modest state support to African agriculture in the immediate post-war period, and over the Depression-strapped years of the early 1920s, the amounts of capital allocated were paltry compared to those provided in support of settler industries.²⁷³

So, the 1918–19 famine was integral in sketching the outlines of the state's economic policy for the following decade. Nowhere was this more obvious than labour policy. By the latter part of 1918, the decrease in labour availability for private and government works had become a serious problem.²⁷⁴ Even prior to the war, settlers had pushed for a labour policy more favourable to their interests, and for the administration to play a more active role in securing a cheap supply of workers for their farms and plantations.²⁷⁵ Post-war conditions reinforced the pre-existing obstacles to extracting labour from the reserves.²⁷⁶ For many it was clear that the previous administrative policy of 'encouraging'

²⁶⁹ Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, p. 108. Robertson notes that before and during the First World War, two-thirds of all Kenyan export earnings were from African production; *Trouble Showed the Way*, p. 87.

²⁷⁰ Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, p. 109; Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*, p. 87.

²⁷¹ On the Soldier Settlement Scheme, see Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, pp. 177–8; Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, p. 140–5. As part of the scheme, the Nandi and Lumbwa reserves lost 28,000 and 5,600 acres respectively.

²⁷² Cashmore, 'District Administration', p. 199.

²⁷³ Berman and Lonsdale, 'Crises', p. 77n77; Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, p. 109. Sir Robert Coryndon, the governor from August 1922, initially sought to encourage African production as a mainstay of the economy and a key source of customs revenue. However, once world prices started to recover he lent towards a more pro-settler stance. This pattern of encouraging African agriculture during periods of low prices would be repeated during the 1930s depression. Brett argues that these efforts did lead to large increases in production; *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, pp. 179, 183, 205–6. Van Zwanenberg and King note that Coryndon's policy included an effort to develop African maize for export, lasting from 1922 to 1923, *Economic History*, p. 206.

²⁷⁴ Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, p. 108.

²⁷⁵ Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, p. 187.

²⁷⁶ For example, the general shortage of capital and growing debt burden (necessary for continued estate operation) meant that settlers had to reduce the costs of labour (as variable capital) in order to operate profitably. Further, Kenyan settlers had to compete with African commodity and subsistence production for its labour supply; Berman and Lonsdale, 'Crises', p. 62.

labour would not suffice.²⁷⁷ Settler pressure intensified.²⁷⁸ The state's response was fundamentally conditioned by its wartime experiences and techniques. In October 1919, the government issued a special circular instructing all district officials to 'exercise every possible lawful influence to induce able-bodied male natives to go into the labour field'.²⁷⁹ Moreover, the *kipande* system of labour registration was instituted, and African hut and poll taxes were raised.²⁸⁰ In early 1920, moreover, officials passed a new Native Authority Amendment Ordinance empowering African chiefs and headmen to order compulsory 'communal labour' for public purposes at low wage rates.²⁸¹ Together, these measures constituted a 'new massive and coordinated application of state power' to secure a steady labour supply.²⁸² They offered a salient spectacle of 'the efficacy of "total" pressure and systematic organization' when applied to the 'labour problem'.²⁸³

Yet the state's recourse to coercive methods of labour control would be short lived. By 1920, the issue of forced labour had erupted into a major political controversy, drawing strong attacks from humanitarian and political lobbies both in East Africa and Britain.²⁸⁴ The matter was finally put to rest by a 1921 dispatch from Winston Churchill, the colonial secretary, which forbade colonial officers from recruiting for private employers, while still leaving the door open for the use of 'traditional compulsory labour'.²⁸⁵ Nevertheless, damage had been done. The forced labour crisis upset the fragile politics of collaboration that official coercion and extraction previously rested on.²⁸⁶ Officials, in turn, began to assert for themselves a more paternalistic, supposedly autonomous role as a protector of African rights from what they perceived to be 'unreasonable and overly harsh oppression' by settlers.²⁸⁷ This role would soon be encompassed by the capacious notion of 'trusteeship'. It would depend, among other things, on sustaining African commodity production and accumulation to secure general welfare and content among rural populations, and to provide a material basis for the patronage system of chieftainship.²⁸⁸

²⁷⁷ The policy of 'encouragement' had led to the use of coercion by chiefs and their followers in any case. Berman quotes Normal Leys, describing the system of recruitment prior to the First World War: "'Encouragement" by district officers means compulsion in practice'; *Control and Crisis*, p. 61.

²⁷⁸ Savage and Munro, 'Carrier Corps', p. 319–20.

²⁷⁹ Berman and Lonsdale, 'Crises', p. 68.

²⁸⁰ The *kipande* was a registration certificate issued to all male Africans over 15 years of age, recording their employment history and personal details; Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 147.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*; Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity', p. 90.

²⁸² Berman and Lonsdale, 'Crises', p. 68.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁸⁴ On this opposition, see Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, pp. 188–9.

²⁸⁵ Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, pp. 187–8; Okia, 'Forced Labour Crisis', p. 264. The dispatch indicated that compulsory labour could be used for 'essential' public purposes, which was seen as a justifiable continuation of African practices of 'communal labour'. Indeed, such coercive powers, used for public purposes, would be secured in subsequent food crises in Kenya, as well as other settler colonies (see chapter 6).

²⁸⁶ Lonsdale, 'Depression', pp. 99–100.

²⁸⁷ Berman and Lonsdale, 'Crises', p. 78.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

The 'labour problem' would remain a key political and economic issue in Kenya throughout the 1920s – one that preceded the war, yet was intimately linked to its famine-fuelled aftershocks.²⁸⁹ Aside from these general political-economic dynamics, the events of 1918–19 had specific implications for the state's future anti-famine practices. Like the Great Famine, these events helped to establish a precedent for anti-scarcity practice. As I will show, by the end of the decade officials and settler politicians alike saw preventing starvation as an explicit aspect of the state's 'duty' to its African subjects. At the same time, they continued to face settler political pressure demanding that the 'able-bodied' work as a means to access food. Yet, beyond an ideological sense of duty, we also find the roots of a different official rationale: one seeing the state's anti-famine role as necessary to safeguard the security of the state and the people as a whole. In 1918, this had a military meaning – sustaining the productive industries and armed forces of the territory to help defend British East Africa from the German threat. Subsequently, during peacetime, it would assume a more economic inflection. Scarcity would, in part, be managed to secure vital settler industries. The means would again be legislative and bureaucratic. In fact, memories of the damage wrought by food shortages and price inflation in 1918 and 1919 – etched in the minds of officials and politicians – returned to shape the state's response to a major famine that hit Kenya before the end of the decade and the onset of the Great Depression. This is discussed in chapter 4.

3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how the drivers and dynamics of food scarcity were increasingly shaped by the colonial presence in East Africa. While drought was the chief cause of the major famine of 1918–19, the scale of hunger was integrally linked to wartime conditions including military violence, conscription drives and state exactions. Mortality was extremely high, and largely the result of epidemic disease ravaging a malnourished population.

When set against the Great Famine, the events of 1918–19 reveal some significant changes to the state's anti-famine response. As a corollary of the wartime development of the state's bureaucratic apparatus, the central administration assumed a far more systematic role in organizing anti-scarcity measures. This role rested on legislative and bureaucratic techniques coordinated from Nairobi. It included controlling the movement and export of goods, inducing the marketing of all available supplies, as well as importing and distributing food relief, either at cost or in exchange for labour on public relief works. Here the distribution of emergency supplies prioritized the demand from employers of labour and the estate economy. Moreover, the state's expanded anti-scarcity role now involved securing legal powers to coerce African production and labour.

These kinds of measures suggest several significant points about the governmentalization of food scarcity, and the emergence of a biopolitics of

²⁸⁹ On contemporary thinking around the 'labour problem' in Kenya and East Africa more generally, see Ormsby-Gore et al., *Report of the East Africa Commission*, chapter 3.

colonial government in Kenya. First, as with the Great Famine, one finds a politics of mortality, a moral question of keeping British subjects alive in the face of 'imminent death'.²⁹⁰ But things are changing. The crisis of 1918–19 marked the first concerted entry of a Malthusian thematic of scarcity into the logic of government. This thematic stemmed from the broad conviction that humans and nature, trapped within a confined space, were locked in a fundamental conflict that, if left unchecked, would lead inexorably to the miseries of famine.²⁹¹ In the context of colonial Kenya, it was specifically linked to a notion of 'idle' and 'improvident' African life as *catastrophic*, as a danger to society and 'civilized life'. The government of food shortages, then, was not simply a matter of mitigating the suffering of individuals through relief, as with a paternalistic politics of mortality, but of controlling African people so that their actions (or inaction) would not lead to death and disaster at a grander scale.

Second, we have seen that this Malthusian thematic could be versatile. On one hand, it was used to argue for coercive and disciplinary intervention from the state into individual African lives. This was seen as necessary to compel the 'improvident' African subject to move beyond the immediacy of their temporal horizons. On the other hand, it underwrote an argument against the provision of state relief to those who showed a lack of 'industry'.

Third, within this emerging Malthusian problematic, we find that the state's response to scarcity no longer centred on providing disaster relief at a few key centres, as during the Great Famine (see chapter 2), but also aimed to increase local food production. Accordingly, the temporal horizon of anti-scarcity intervention was moving beyond the immediate, reactive relief of emergency events, to include more anticipatory measures that might alleviate episodes of hunger in the longer term.

Fourth, the findings indicate that conducting and disciplining the attitudes, habits and behaviours of African subjects were becoming a key part of the official understanding of, and rationale of responding to, the problem of scarcity. Yet they were becoming so in an ambiguous way – Africans were to be sympathized with, as subjects of paternalistic charity, as well as to be scorned, as the irresponsible subjects of disciplinary control.

Fifth, we saw that while colonial administrators and settler politicians were starting to assume a greater degree of overarching responsibility to address food scarcity, at the same time they were eager to allocate some of this responsibility to African leaders and communities. This was to be accomplished via the state-sponsored system of 'native administration'.

Sixth, we can see that the African reserves were emerging as a particular kind of 'governable space', one through which scarcity could and should be managed through legal compulsion, the threat of punishment, and supervision from field officers. Such measures, however, imposed by the central administration, placed

²⁹⁰ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 243.

²⁹¹ Dean, 'Malthus Effect', p. 21.

the pre-existing politics of local collaboration in jeopardy, and provoked resistance from Kenyan field officers, laying bare some of the contradictions that riddled the colonial district administration.

Finally, it is worth noting, for this theme will return in later chapters, that the question of the health and productivity of those involved in fighting the war in East Africa led to official interest (within the military, at least) in regulating the diet and nutrition of African troops and porters. As a mode of biopolitics, this was not concerned with preventing suffering and death from starvation, to forgo a Malthusian crisis, so much as the reproduction of labour-power in a context of migrant employment. Certainly rationing interventions aimed to reduce mortality, but more specifically they sought to increase the longevity and power of the worker's body in order to broaden, as much as possible, its total window and intensity of work. Put differently, they attempted to economize on the reproduction and conversion of potential labour-power into actual labour-power.²⁹² To boost this total output of work, at the least possible cost, military authorities sought to shape the molecular and biological constitution of the bodies of African labourers, and did so in a disciplinary sense, by imposing an ideal model of 'diet'.

In this chapter I have argued that the First World War and the famine of 1918–19 provided the conditions for settlers to secure greater control over the state's economic policy. Building on this point, the following chapter discusses how, over the course of the 1920s, the dynamics of food shortages were increasingly shaped by the spread of commercial market relations within the territory. As such, food scarcity assumed even more of an economic and political charge. It served, among other things, to justify comprehensive state control of the grain market – something unprecedented during times of peace. It also led officials to tap into the settler economy as a key source of relief in times of drought and dearth.

²⁹² Mukherjee, *Hunger*.

4. Scarcity and Settler Consolidation

In this chapter, I explain how food scarcity in Kenya began to take on a different character with the spread and intensification of capitalist market relations during the 1920s. I will show that, in accordance with these changes, the colonial state assumed a more interventionist role in times of food shortage, and that the question of preventing and managing scarcity was increasingly drawn into longer-term developmental arguments. The first part of the chapter sets out the broad political-economic context of the 1920s, and highlights key pieces of legislation introduced to deal with scarcity in Kenya. I then discuss a major food shortage that affected the territory in 1929 and 1930, using this event to illustrate key changes to the modes by which such events were conceived and governed.

4.1 Recovery and regulation

Following the economic and political turbulence of the First World War period, the 1920s in Kenya were marked by concerted state efforts in two key areas. First, officials sought to promote settler economic recovery by re-establishing the Kenyan export trade, and by continued efforts to secure a steady and cheap labour supply for the estate sector (see chapter 3).²⁹³ Second, they hoped to restore and maintain political control over the African population – something, in the era of the ‘dual mandate’, thought to depend on the preservation of tribal ethnicity and territory.²⁹⁴ At the same time, Kenyan administrators faced the challenge of responding to newly elaborated principles of colonial policy. One was the imperial assertion of the ‘paramountcy’ of African interests in Kenya, carried in the Devonshire Declaration of 1923. Another was the principle of ‘trusteeship’ – a banner under which the colonial state attempted to secure its position as the prime protector of African interests.²⁹⁵

The so-called ‘Dual Policy’, elaborated in the wake of the 1923 Declaration, was the state’s response. Seeking the development of African production as a complement to settler production, the Policy built on a growing tide of official post-war pressure for the state to support African production for commercial sale and export. Indeed, it had strong precedents in the thought and work of officers like Ainsworth.²⁹⁶ Some contemporary observers only saw contradictions in the Policy – Africans were expected to be self-sustaining in food, to produce for export, as well as to provide a labour supply for settler

²⁹³ The 1922 Bowring Committee recommended efforts to rapidly increase maize production in African and European areas, including a specially low rail rate for maize exports; Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, p. 205.

²⁹⁴ On the limits to the ‘tribal geographies’ of colonial Kenya, see Parsons, ‘Being Kikuyu’.

²⁹⁵ Dille, *British Policy*, pp. 186, 214; Lonsdale, ‘Depression’, p. 101. A full exposition of what ‘trusteeship’ implied in East Africa is given in Ormsby-Gore et al., *Report of the East Africa Commission*, pp. 21–3. Cowen and Shenton note that a theory and conviction of ‘trusteeship’ was built into the idea of development from the nineteenth century; *Doctrines of Development*, pp. 25–8.

²⁹⁶ Goldsmith, *John Ainsworth*, p. 104.

estates.²⁹⁷ Mackenzie notes that these ‘contradictory’ readings ignore the fact that it was mainly women’s labour that produced food crops for subsistence or export. When this reality is factored in, the objectives and modalities of the Dual Policy become clearer: the export of male labour could proceed alongside the intensification of women’s labour power in agriculture.²⁹⁸

Dilley presents the Dual Policy as a means for settlers to avoid ‘the full effects of paramountcy’ following their over-zealous efforts to quash the political interests of the colony’s Indian population.²⁹⁹ As such, in practice the state committed few resources to African production. Assistance from the agricultural department (specifically from a dedicated ‘native’ section of the department established in 1922) took the form of a low-capital policy of instruction and demonstration.³⁰⁰ Seeds for ‘improved’ (that is, more marketable) varieties of crops – especially high-yielding, ‘flat white’ strains of maize like Hickory King – were also issued to African farmers as part of a wider strategy of agricultural ‘betterment’.³⁰¹ Gradually, the emphasis on export production fell away during the early to mid-1920s, so that the Dual Policy came to focus on promoting subsistence and production of food crops for the domestic market.³⁰² Nevertheless, the policy reinforced the tendency for certain Kenyan reserves to act both as the greatest sources of labour and cash crop production.³⁰³ This set up a conflict: settlers had to compete against other activities for African labour, including cash crop and subsistence production.³⁰⁴

Despite increasing pressure from settlers for the state to dedicate its support towards estate production, the 1920s saw Kenyan officials pass several pieces of legislation motivated by the need to manage food shortages in African areas.³⁰⁵ The 1922 Kenyan Native Foodstuffs Ordinance was one. Closely based on legislative precedents from other African colonies,³⁰⁶ the Ordinance can be seen

²⁹⁷ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 201.

²⁹⁸ Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, pp. 127, 131.

²⁹⁹ Dilley, *British Policy*, p. 186.

³⁰⁰ Memon, ‘Marketing’, p. 202. This work was done by distributing printed instructions on how to prepare goods such as ghee, hides and beeswax, as well as by training a ‘nucleus of paid agricultural supervisors, instructors and apprentices’ at two schools established for the purpose in the early 1920s. The latter were responsible for interpreting ‘by practical demonstration the advice offered in the pamphlets and in the Government newspaper *Habari*’. CPK, *Annual Report for 1922*, p. 5.

³⁰¹ Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, pp. 128–9; McCann, *Maize and Grace*, p. 170; Leakey, ‘Comparative Methods’, pp. 311–12.

³⁰² Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, p. 206

³⁰³ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 201.

³⁰⁴ Berman and Lonsdale, ‘Crises’, p. 62.

³⁰⁵ Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, p. 109.

³⁰⁶ The Ordinance was passed soon after the arrival of Sir Robert Coryndon as Kenyan governor. Coryndon had just served a term as governor of Uganda, during which time a similar ordinance had been passed. A Native Foodstuffs Ordinance was passed in Nyasaland in 1912 to prevent settlers and other bulk purchasers of food supplies from cornering the market and inducing ‘improvident’ Africans to sell their food supplies for quick cash returns; Chipeta, ‘Labour’, p. 39; Ng’ong’ola, ‘Agricultural Economy’, pp. 243–5. A Tanganyikan version was passed in 1924; Bryceson, ‘Food Insecurity’, p. 68. The Kenyan Ordinance secured fewer powers than most of these other examples. The 1919 Ugandan Native Foodstuffs Ordinance, for example, also reserved powers to fix the prices of any foodstuffs. Carswell suggests that Ugandan marketing

as a pragmatic response to the problem of how to manage scarcity, food supplies and the expanding commercial food market without devoting significant state resources to the task of boosting production.³⁰⁷ Its basic object was to enable officials to restrict the trade and movement of 'African foodstuffs' within any district or area suffering from food shortage. The idea, broadly speaking, was to prevent Africans from selling their food supplies in order to pay their taxes (or to spend otherwise),³⁰⁸ and to stop traders from buying up and moving scarce food supplies away from centres of demand. Combined with the programme of limited support for expanded African agriculture, the rationale was clear: increase local food production and *keep it local* to promote district food self-sufficiency.³⁰⁹ This strategy was partly motivated by the desire to secure the food supplies of growing towns such as Nairobi.³¹⁰ The 1920s saw a number of proclamations made under the Ordinance, including at least four over the course of 1925 and 1926, targeting districts along the coast and in Nyanza.³¹¹ This strategy of restricting the movement of food within and between administrative areas, thereby designating and limiting the space of the market, would remain a mainstay of the Kenyan state's anti-famine response, as well as its future efforts to control agricultural marketing (discussed in chapter 5).

The 1926 Kenyan Crop Production and Livestock Ordinance was another piece of legislation specifically motivated by concerns around food scarcity. Like the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance, it was not associated with any particular programme of investment or extension of services – it took the form of an 'enabling ordinance', effective only through rules made by the governor. As the name implies, it addressed both crop and stock farming. For the former, it allowed 'cultural methods' to be set out to improve and increase production. Through the Ordinance, officials hoped to facilitate the marketing of African goods by fixing the dates of produce sales, and by limiting crop varieties – both means to promote uniform output. There was also an explicit anti-famine motivation. Reverend John Arthur, a Scottish missionary doctor and the Legco representative for African interests,³¹² echoed Ainsworth's statements of 1918

controls were partly motivated by the desire to protect African farmers from greedy (predominantly Indian) 'middlemen'; *Cultivating Success*, p. 39; Carswell, 'Food Crops', p. 544.

³⁰⁷ CPK, *Official Gazette*, 8 November 1922, p. 679. The legislation coincided with a drive for economy in government expenditure related to the economic depression; CPK, *Annual Report for 1922*.

³⁰⁸ Tarus, 'Direct Taxation', p. 141.

³⁰⁹ Carswell, 'Food Crops', p. 544.

³¹⁰ Robertson argues that by the early 1920s, Nairobi was dependent on Kiambu produce, so that in 1923 'attempts were made to stop local movement of maize in other directions and to stop all hawking'. Agricultural officers were tasked with implementing these rules, among other duties. When Kikuyus continued to sell maize to the Kamba along their older trading routes, this trade was classified as a 'black market'. 'Because of the proximate necessity of feeding Nairobi, Kiambu was closely scrutinized regarding supply conditions and subjected to more bans on the export of maize and beans'; *Trouble Showed the Way*, pp. 88, 90.

³¹¹ CPK, *Official Gazette*, 6 May 1925, p. 362; 3 June 1925, p. 485; 12 August 1925, pp. 772–3; 10 March 1926, p. 333.

³¹² From 1924, African political interests were represented by a missionary appointed to both the Executive and Legislative councils. 1924 also saw the creation of the first 'local native councils' (discussed in later chapters). The first African member would be appointed to Legco in 1944.

(see chapter 3) by drawing an explicit connection between the Ordinance and the threat of famine:

The native does not think ahead in regard to many things, and especially in regard to the question of famine. He does not provide in such a way as to safeguard himself in times of famine, and I do think it is absolutely necessary to formulate laws in such a way as will help the native to look ahead in regard to his agricultural crops.³¹³

For livestock, the problem was overstocking in certain reserves: particularly those occupied by the Kamba people to the east of Nairobi (Machakos and Kitui). This, in turn, linked with issues around meat prices and nutrition. The issue was broadly as follows: too many animals were being kept in the reserves, without being slaughtered for meat. This was typically blamed on the pervasive African 'cattle complex'.³¹⁴ Yet finding a commercial market for these cattle was practically impossible, given the almost continuous imposition of quarantine regulations on districts like Machakos since the beginning of the century.³¹⁵ Above all, settlers and officials were opposed to any possible extension of African pastoral lands.³¹⁶

At the same time, officials wanted more Africans to eat 'the most nutritious food in the shape of meat', which required that it be available at a cheap price.³¹⁷ However, demand for livestock products was increasing, due to rising levels of African prosperity, as well as the inclusion of meat in the rations of workers employed on the railway and farming estates. Supply could not keep pace. Taken together, this meant that Africans in overstocked reserves were likely to become increasingly malnourished, just as the 'man-carrying capacity' of the land was gradually being 'destroyed'.³¹⁸ As such, the primary problem at this stage was not human overpopulation leading to famine *per se*. Rather, it was that people keeping cattle above their subsistence requirements might drive soil erosion and cause African population growth (and hence the labour supply) to stagnate.³¹⁹

³¹³ (G. V. Maxwell) *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³¹⁴ On contemporary thought around the 'cattle complex', see Herskovits, 'Cattle Complex'; Spencer, 'Pastoralism', p. 118.

³¹⁵ On the effects of the demarcation of the reserves and quarantine regulations leading to overstocking in Machakos, see Spencer, 'Pastoralism', pp. 117–18; Tignor, 'Kamba Political Protest', pp. 240–1. The extension of cultivated areas in Machakos to capitalize on the growing market for cash crops like white maize also decreased the area available for grazing, thereby intensifying stock congestion. Also see Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 221; Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, pp. 53–4.

³¹⁶ Spencer, 'Pastoralism', p. 130.

³¹⁷ The official and expert bias towards meat and dairy products as a source of nutrition was borne through the Orr and Gilks study of tribal nutrition in Kenya; Brantley, 'Kikuyu-Maasai Nutrition'.

³¹⁸ (Director of Agriculture) CPK, *KLC Deb 1926*, Vol. 1, 18 March, p. 39.

³¹⁹ For example, the 1925 East Africa Commission report noted: 'There is a real danger in East Africa lest pastoral tribes should stagnate, and lest the actual fertility of the soil should deteriorate by overstocking'. It specifically mentioned the Kamba reserves; Ormsby-Gore et al., *Report of the East Africa Commission*, p. 32. The report was one of the first official documents to raise concerns over soil erosion in East Africa; Anderson, 'Depression', p. 340n71.

The upshot was that the Ordinance secured official powers of compulsion to cull excess stock in the reserves.³²⁰ In principle, this would allow animal products to be distributed, cheaply, to malnourished Africans. It thereby represented a 'systemic' vision of agricultural and economic problems: forcibly reducing stock density in some areas could both safeguard the soil and provide cheap nutrition for those elsewhere. Compulsion, officials argued, was necessary 'in the interests of these improvident owners' who were 'bereft of reasoning power'. The government had to 'act in a manner calculated to enable them to help themselves'.³²¹ The chief native commissioner even cited the need for 'benevolent despotism' on the matter.³²² Under the Ordinance, in 1928 the government attempted to pass rules limiting the ages and quality of cattle to be kept in the Machakos reserve.³²³ This effort coincided with increasing Kamba demands for larger grazing areas. The Colonial Office once again declined to approve the rules, believing that such efforts should proceed more gradually.³²⁴ The matter was laid to rest for the time being. Powers to forcibly cull stock would not be used until the late 1930s.³²⁵

Despite the setback over compulsory destocking, the Crop Production and Livestock Ordinance signals several key shifts in how officials thought about problems related to food scarcity. First, it shows how spatial and territorial issues around land, soil deterioration, and 'carrying capacity' were being linked with food problems, and together were emerging as areas of concerted governmental interest.³²⁶ Second, it reveals that officials were starting to think about scarcity and famine in a different way: The problem called not only for distributing emergency relief, 'encouraging' or coercing people to work, and limiting the circulation of goods in space, but also for longer-term economic measures to control the risk of scarcity. The question was now linked to a wider range of problems around increasing and improving African agricultural production, facilitating marketing, and protecting the land from overgrazing. Averting food shortages was one of several motivations for doing so.

Third, the Ordinance indicates that some officials were starting to look beyond pure compulsion and coercion as the means to control scarcity, and towards governmental techniques such as instruction and education. While the desire to safeguard 'the native against himself' evinced a still-strong paternalistic attitude, 'benevolent despotism' was not the only means of achieving the Ordinance's

³²⁰ While previous proposals to implement forced cattle sales had been vetoed by the Colonial Office, Kenyan officials were emboldened by the recommendations of the 1925 report of the East Africa Commission, which looked on forced destocking in a more favourable light; Ormsby-Gore et al., *Report of the East Africa Commission*, p. 32; Spencer, 'Pastoralism', p. 127.

³²¹ (Director of Agriculture) CPK, *KLC Deb 1926*, Vol. 1, 18 March, p. 39.

³²² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³²³ CPK, *Official Gazette*, 15 May 1928, pp. 598–9;

³²⁴ Spencer, 'Pastoralism', p. 131.

³²⁵ Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire*, p. 105.

³²⁶ On the genealogy and various political uses of the notion of 'carrying capacity' within eco-Malthusian arguments, see Dean, 'Malthus Effect', pp. 30–1. In its original formulation, the concept referred to 'the maximum population a specific area could maintain under given conditions'.

objectives.³²⁷ The chief native commissioner suggested that its application 'should go hand in hand with a policy of instruction'.³²⁸ This was a technical question of *training*. But there was a slightly different question of *education*. Several members pointed out that the legislation would be unsuccessful if its purpose was not properly explained to those affected by its provisions, if African people did not believe it was for their benefit.³²⁹ While it would be mistaken to generalize from these (minority) statements, they do suggest the emergence of a different rationale of government: one that (at least in part) sought to influence the practices, beliefs and desires of people – even if in a disciplinary manner – rather than to simply force, constrain and punish. In this sense, the reference to 'cultural methods' as the object of the Ordinance is significant. In 1918, the only recourse to managing the 'indifference' and 'improvidence' of African people was compulsion. Now, inculcating 'habits of industry' and training in 'proper' land husbandry would produce the desired results.³³⁰ The state could act through the malleable surface of culture.

Fourth, the Ordinance reflects the manner in which Kenyan officials were considering how best to implement the Dual Policy within the general overlay of colonial 'trusteeship'. One unofficial member of Legco specifically supported the Ordinance as a key instrument for the government to discharge its responsibilities of trusteeship.³³¹ It served as further endorsement of the measured state support given to African agriculture from the early 1920s. Accordingly, its passage was soon followed by an invigorated, 'direct' policy of instruction in the reserves, accompanied by more widespread issues of higher-grade crop seeds.³³²

Finally, it is important to note that the Crop Production and Livestock Ordinance fit within a wider, shifting context of scientific research on colonial problems. As the legislation was being debated in Legco, the Rowett Research Institute for Animal Nutrition (based in Aberdeen, Scotland) was undertaking its experimental research into the nutrition of animals and African tribes in Kenya.³³³ Meanwhile, Sir Edward Grigg, the Kenyan governor, was expressing his enthusiasm for anthropological research into 'native life and mind' as a basis for better colonial government.³³⁴ Moreover, Grigg and other officials were showing

³²⁷ (G. V. Maxwell) CPK, *KLC Deb 1926*, Vol. 1, 18 March, p. 44.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³²⁹ (M. A. Desai, J. W. Arthur, J. B. Pandya) *Ibid.*, pp. 40–5.

³³⁰ From a speech delivered by Governor Sir Edward Grigg to the Royal African Society, as reported in *The Spectator*, 19 March 1927, p. 2, accessed 20 July 2017, <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/19th-march-1927/2/sir-edward-grigg-the-governor-of-kenya-speaking-to>.

³³¹ (J. E. Coney) CPK, *KLC Deb 1926*, Vol. 1, 18 March, p. 41.

³³² CPK, *Annual Report for 1927*, p. 26.

³³³ Brantley, 'Kikuyu-Maasai Nutrition'.

³³⁴ CPK, *KLC Deb 1926*, Vol. 2, 12 October, pp. 329–31. Grigg's interest was part of a wider imperial trend. The mid-1920s heard numerous calls for further research into the human aspects of colonial problems. Individuals linked to the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, including Lord Lugard and the anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski, saw the ethnographic study of African social change as a means to put a political system of indirect rule into proper effect; Kuper, 'Social Anthropology', pp. 136–45; Tilley, *Living Laboratory*, pp. 101, 231.

interest in enhancing statistical work on issues related to African population and economy.³³⁵ As such, the 1926 Ordinance fit within, and contributed to, a groundswell of interest in rational, scientific knowledge of African cultural and economic processes as a route to more informed, calculative modes of colonial government.

In summary, I have shown that in the 1920s food scarcity was emerging as a concerted area of governmental interest and regulation. This interest was shaped by multiple influences and motivations. In the following section, I use the example of a particular scarcity event to illustrate more precisely how the dynamics of Kenyan food shortages, alongside the state's view of and response to such problems, were shifting in the interwar period.

4.2 The 1929–30 famine

For Kenya, the middle and later years of the 1920s were a period of recovery and growth in productivity. The settler economy and export trade expanded under statutory supports and barriers. Locally, Africans were prohibited from growing high-value cash crops such as coffee, and recurrent quarantines effectively stifled their cattle market. For external trade, settlers were buoyed by protective import tariffs and the abolishment of export duties.³³⁶ Settler maize growers, specifically, were assisted through special reductions in railway freight charges.³³⁷ Moreover, the Kenya Farmers Association (KFA) provided them with a unified political voice to influence legislation and a single bargaining agent to negotiate forward contracts. This helped to extend settler control over maize marketing, particularly the higher-priced export market. By 1930, the KFA handled nearly all of the colony's maize exports.³³⁸ Meanwhile, export controls (including the introduction of produce grading standards for maize) effectively excluded Africans from this trade.³³⁹

Marketed output of African produce also grew through the decade. This expansion was due more to the individual efforts of local administrators than the transient, limited support offered by the central state.³⁴⁰ But it was also an independent African response to meet new consumption needs and markers of

³³⁵ CPK, *KLC Deb 1926*, Vol. 2, 12 October, pp. 329–31.

³³⁶ Kenya introduced customs tariffs on imported goods in the early 1920s as a way to compensate for revenue shortfalls due to decreasing commodity prices and the refusal of European settlers to pay income tax, at the same time as protecting young industries in the colony from foreign competition. These tariffs included heavy rates on luxury goods such as alcohol and tobacco, as well as protective rates on important temperate-climate foodstuffs that could be produced within the colony such as rice, wheat, wheat flour, tea, sugar, ghee, butter, cheese, ham and beer. See Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, pp. 79–80; also Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, p. 203.

³³⁷ This was effected through a government subsidy to the railway; CPK, *Annual Report for 1922*, p. 9.

³³⁸ Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, p. 204; Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, pp. 205–6.

³³⁹ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 169; Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 103.

³⁴⁰ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, pp. 218–9.

prestige, such as schooling and imported clothing.³⁴¹ Much of this output was used to supply food for the burgeoning labour market of coffee and sisal plantations.³⁴² The presence of large settler estates to the north of Nairobi, for example, stimulated increased production of cash crops in the nearby Kikuyu reserves.³⁴³ African cultivators came to dominate this growing internal trade in maize. Moreover, Africans were able to secure a large part of the urban market for vegetable and meat supplies. Originally, settlers had hoped to capture the domestic market as a step into export production. In practice, the only local trade that white farmers were able to secure was the 'meagre pickings' of the 'quality trade': specialized goods consumed by other settlers and townsfolk.³⁴⁴ In this way, the development of estate and African commodity production in Kenya was both segregated and tied together.³⁴⁵ However, just as they were linked through flows of labour and food production, they were forced to compete – farm wages doubled in real terms during the 1920s due to the competing demands for labour.³⁴⁶

These dynamics of structural division, functional interdependence and competition would be of lasting political and economic consequence, as I will show in the chapters that follow. Critically, the articulation and penetration of capital into the African reserves drove complex processes of local accumulation and class differentiation.³⁴⁷ Mackenzie and Kitching have shown how these processes involved a quantitative expansion and qualitative intensification of women's labour power. Female labour drove the commercialization of African agriculture, and helped to keep wages and commodity prices relatively low.³⁴⁸ Maize, in particular, was a crop suitable to women farmers. It was far less demanding to grow than millet, for example – a fact that helps to explain why maize production underwent such rapid growth during and following the First World War (see chapter 3).³⁴⁹ As men increased their involvement in crop marketing, intra-household contests over access to the proceeds of female agricultural labour intensified.³⁵⁰

Increased marketed production during the 1920s was aided by the steady expansion of transport and communications networks throughout the territory.³⁵¹ The decade saw the construction of several new railway branch

³⁴¹ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 104.

³⁴² Berman and Lonsdale, 'Crises', p. 77; CPK, *Annual Report for 1928*, p. 33. African producers also sold food to the railways, or exported to Uganda and Tanganyika to compensate for seasonal scarcities in those territories; Memon, 'Marketing', p. 202.

³⁴³ Memon, 'Marketing', p. 204.

³⁴⁴ Lonsdale, 'Depression', pp. 103–4.

³⁴⁵ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 218.

³⁴⁶ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 104.

³⁴⁷ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, pp. 39–40, 60–1, 222–6.

³⁴⁸ Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, pp. 14–16, 20, 93; Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, p. 127.

³⁴⁹ Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, pp. 132–3.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, pp. 20–1, 89–91.

³⁵¹ Ogonda notes the significant increase in the coverage of Kenya's total road and rail network in the interwar period. Most of this infrastructure served the white settled areas and industries, although feeder roads were constructed in the reserves; 'Transport and Communications', pp. 130–3.

lines, concentrated in the White Highlands but running adjacent to reserve areas in some places.³⁵² A modernized space-economy developed around the major railway routes in the south-western quadrant of the territory.³⁵³ Meanwhile, the construction of new roads and the upgrading of road surfaces greatly increased the volume of motor vehicle traffic, both in settled areas and the reserves.³⁵⁴ With these developments, more African farmers and stock keepers were physically connected to the market, and able to receive a profitable cash return for their goods. This provided an added stimulus for production.³⁵⁵ Commercial activities in the reserves centred on Indian traders operating at various government-gazetted trading centres. A number of 'traditional' or state-established African markets also developed into important sites of exchange and African entrepreneurship. The areas around these markets were serviced by smaller shops and 'itinerant' African traders who usually purchased goods directly from women farmers before selling them on at local markets or to Indian traders (for export beyond the district).³⁵⁶ These African traders increased in number and economic power through the decade.³⁵⁷ A hierarchical marketing and trading system emerged, clustering around the boundaries of the more populous reserves, as well as the major transport routes of central and western Kenya.³⁵⁸

With African maize production assuming central importance for the domestic food market, and being most advanced in highly populated areas located in proximity to transport facilities and trading centres, Kenyan food scarcities began to take on new dynamics. For, even if drought and harvest failure beset a relatively remote rural area, the effect would be to draw supplies away from the most productive areas within the regular marketing system. As this marketing system was relatively integrated and concentrated around the major centres of production and demand, inflation at one part of the system could simultaneously affect a great number of people and places across the board. As such, drought and harvest failure were no longer simply localized problems affecting particular African groups, who were to be relieved by a paternalistic state despite their 'improvidence'. Rather, scarcities increasingly affected the supply of food to employing industries and acted to drive up prices across the domestic market, thereby boosting the costs of production.

Moreover, the fact that the majority of the domestic food trade was handled by small-scale private traders created a particular kind of threat during times of scarcity. In the view of officials, the maligned 'middlemen', engaged as they were in 'cutthroat competition', aggravated scarcities by hoarding supplies for their

³⁵² Soja, *Geography of Modernization*, p. 29. On the political dominance of settlers in determining the location of branch line extensions in the 1920s, see Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, pp. 200–1.

³⁵³ Soja, *Geography of Modernization*, p. 29.

³⁵⁴ Soja notes that after 1923 there was a rapid increase in the road coverage of the reserves due to official efforts to 'open up the districts for labour supplies and more effective administrative control'; *Geography of Modernization*, p. 31.

³⁵⁵ Memon, 'Marketing', pp. 202–3.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

³⁵⁸ Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, p. 133.

own profit and by moving food away from poorer areas and groups suffering from hunger.³⁵⁹ The fact that such traders were often Indian gave these ideas a racialized force.³⁶⁰ As we shall see, these ideas and dynamics called for new kinds of governmental techniques to manage food shortages. By the end of the decade, comprehensive state control was seen as necessary to control supplies, prices and distribution, both to prevent mass starvation and protect certain economic interests.

The Kenyan famine of 1929–30 represents the culmination of these trends in marketing and official action. Yet central state intervention took some time to materialize. The process went something like this: In the early part of 1928 the Baringo and Turkana districts had been threatened with famine owing ‘to conditions of drought and to the consequent failure of crops’.³⁶¹ When conditions did not improve, administrative officers responded by organizing local ‘relief measures’. However, by the end of the year it was clear that similar conditions might be reported from other reserves. The rains had fallen lighter than expected throughout the year; African households had been unable to build up reserve stocks of grain. Meanwhile, massive swarms of locusts descended and devoured entire crops. Maize and wheat fields – acreages of which had steadily increased through the 1920s – provided the insects with a ready source of favoured foods.³⁶² At the end of January 1929, Alex Holm, the Kenyan director of agriculture, reported to the governor on the ‘havoc’ wreaked by the swarms. He considered the scale of crop destruction so extensive that a serious economic problem loomed: it threatening not only the farming industry, but also trade and commerce more generally, including the finances of the railway and harbour administration.³⁶³ With the outlook ‘ominous’, Holm alerted the government to the need to ‘mobilize financial resources which may be required to meet an unforeseen situation’, and to monitor the ‘food position’, which could change at short notice. Meanwhile, the commissioner of Meru District had reported that 120,000 people were affected by food shortages in his district, with only one month’s food supplies remaining. Later reports, however, put these figures at 90,000 and two months’ supplies.³⁶⁴ Ultimately, the famine saw thousands of deaths from starvation and disease.³⁶⁵

³⁵⁹ In Legco debates surrounding the 1935 Marketing of Native Produce Bill, the phrase ‘cut-throat competition’ was repeatedly used with reference to private traders; CPK, *KLC Deb 1935*, Vol. 1, 2–3 July, pp. 170–93.

³⁶⁰ Similar official antipathy towards Indian traders was found in Tanganyika. See Bryceson, ‘Food Insecurity’, chapter 3.

³⁶¹ The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA): CO 533/384/2, Barth to Amery (letter), 9 March 1929.

³⁶² Shanguhya, *Population, Tradition, and Environmental Control*, p. 76. Apart from maize, locusts also had a taste for sorghum and rice; Bryceson, ‘Food Insecurity’, p. 71.

³⁶³ TNA: CO 533/384/2, Holm to Acting Colonial Secretary of Kenya (letter), 30 January 1929.

³⁶⁴ TNA: CO 533/384/2, Barth to Amery (letter), 9 March 1929.

³⁶⁵ In reporting the famine to the Colonial Office, Kenyan officials estimated that less than 1,000 people died from disease and starvation, and were confident that ‘no able-bodied native’ died from the latter cause. This represented the typical tendency for local officials to downplay the scale and intensities of famines when communicating with London, and is likely to have been a low estimate; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 11 January 1930.

In relation to previous events, the 1929–30 famine reveals several key transformations. Officials saw its chief causes as prolonged drought, leading to a cumulative decrease in African food stores, combined with pestilence. But the evidence suggests that the dynamics of this famine were closely linked to the expansion of the commercial economy, wage employment, as well as the growth of the domestic and export trades in cash crops. As such, it appears to be an example of a ‘transitional’ famine – reflecting both ‘traditional’ and ‘capitalist’ elements and drivers.³⁶⁶

The 1929–30 famine shows the increasing influence of the commercial economy and settlement in at least six ways. First, the colony actually produced enough maize in 1929 to feed its inhabitants, and some was exported during the year. Second, settler farmers provided most of the famine relief supplies through commercial channels. Third, the shortage primarily affected groups who were vulnerable both to drought *and* to disruptions in their systems of trading and social protection. Such included the Meru and Embu districts in Kikuyuland, and Kitui District in Ukambani.³⁶⁷ People living in these areas had been permanently affected by land alienation and white settlement; many would have sought wage labour as a means to subsist. It appears that more populous areas were not necessarily the worst affected. Rather, it could be those that were least accessible. People living in Tharaka – a remote, relatively unfertile area in the eastern lowlands of Meru District – suffered the most in late 1929, and saw numerous deaths from starvation and dysentery.³⁶⁸ These were people who, historically, were poor relative to their neighbours.³⁶⁹ Their regular coping strategies relied on trade with surrounding areas.³⁷⁰ They competed with other groups for wage labour opportunities in Nairobi and on nearby estates, and generally received little assistance from officials.³⁷¹ During times of famine, they were difficult to reach to provide with relief.³⁷²

Fourth, while officials had assumed that the hungry would be able to access food surpluses from neighbouring districts through market exchange, a major reason why many Meru people suffered in late 1929 was the collapse of goat prices. This undermined their power to outbid other groups for available supplies from more

³⁶⁶ Similar kinds of ‘transitional’ famines include the 1927 food crisis in northern Nigeria, and the 1922 famine in Southern Rhodesia. See Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, chapter 7; Watts, *Silent Violence*, pp. 305–12.

³⁶⁷ CPK, *Annual Report for 1929*.

³⁶⁸ TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 7 December 1929.

³⁶⁹ In 1913, Dundas wrote of the Tharaka: ‘In stock [they] are very poor compared to the Akamba; a large number possess no stock at all, and only the richest have any cattle. Their main stock are sheep and goats, but even of these a wealthy man has not more than the average Mkamba’; ‘History of Kitui’, p. 545.

³⁷⁰ As early as 1909 Meru District was reported as having ‘several large markets... established by the natives, where they barter and sell their produce’; EAP, *Annual Report for 1908–09*, p. 32.

³⁷¹ Smucker and Wisner, ‘Household Responses’.

³⁷² The name by which the famine of 1930 was remembered by some in the area, *yuura ria Kikuyu* (drought of the search for maize in Kikuyuland), indicates the extent to which they relied on migration and trade as a survival strategy. Reported and translated by Wisner, ‘Constriction’, p. 355.

fertile districts to the south and west.³⁷³ So, exchange and relative terms of trade were important drivers of hunger. Fifth, as in previous years, the people who suffered most and counted the greatest mortality were the poor and weak, including the elderly, small children, and the sick.³⁷⁴ This was partly due to market forces (such as collapsed stock prices), geography (the weak were unable to travel to places where food was available) and biology (the weak were more vulnerable to killer diseases like dysentery). Moreover, government relief efforts channeled supplies through a system of entitlements favouring wage labour, as in 1918 (see chapter 3).³⁷⁵ Yet the social distribution of hunger was also a function of inequality and poverty. The processes of class differentiation linked to the expansion of African agricultural production in the 1920s (mentioned above) had created a larger class of poor people who were more vulnerable to the effects of famine. The better off, meanwhile, could not only withstand food shortages and prices fluctuations, but might actually stand to benefit from the changing terms of trade fostered by drought and dearth. In a cash market context, these terms tended to lean towards cereal growers over stockowners.³⁷⁶ This, in turn, could aggravate social differentiation and inequality.³⁷⁷

Sixth, and finally, officials saw the scale of the 1929–30 scarcity and famine as presenting a particular kind of economic risk. Harvest failure and profiteering threatened to increase staple food prices across Kenya and generally hurt consumers and employers of labour (including plantations, the railway and government departments). These threats were seen to require extraordinary state control of the market. So, in 1929 there was a sense, not apparent previously during peacetime, of scarcity affecting the colony as collective economic problem. This sense cannot only be put down to the scale of drought and harvest failure. Rather, and as I will show, it should be understood as a function of the general and increasing reliance on the cash crop trade (through a more integrated domestic market) and the existence of a system of food entitlements built up through the industrial and exchange economy.

³⁷³ The collapse of goat prices was reportedly due to the market being flooded by goats owned by Kamba people who, short of food themselves, had crossed the Tana River in large numbers into Kikuyu Province to barter their stock for grain. The Akamba purchased much of the food supplies available from Embu and South Nyeri districts, which officials had thought would supply the Meru; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 7 December 1929.

³⁷⁴ Horne, senior commissioner of Kikuyu Province, reported that among the Meru, 'it is the poorer part of the population, those with little or no stock, who are suffering'; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 11 January 1930.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ The loss of stock value relative to that of grain during times of drought and famine, within the context of a cash economy, has been noted for various African contexts. Prior to the cash market, the exchange of stock was bound up with a range of social relationships and obligations that extended their utility beyond the immediate time of drought and scarcity. In a cash market, cattle are simply underpriced due to oversupply, and their sale implies a permanent loss of utility. See, for example, Anderson and Throup, 'Agrarian Economy', p. 19; Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, pp. 60–1; Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, p. 131; Maddox, 'Mtunya', p. 186–7.

³⁷⁷ For example, wealthier Kikuyu men (rather than women) were able to reap rewards from the depressed stock prices in 1928 and 1929. They could buy up large numbers of stock from their drought-stricken neighbours in the Rift Valley and Ukambani, which could then be used to repay debts or make bridewealth payments. This, in turn, expanded their capacity for agricultural production and accumulation, and aggravated social inequality; Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, p. 131.

4.2.1 Official responses

The government's responses to the famine took various forms: some well known, some novel. Initially, in the earlier stages of the drought, officials employed the familiar method of controlling the movement and trade of food in African areas. In 1927, proclamations under the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance were made for Kitui as well as various districts in Nyanza and along the coast.³⁷⁸ In 1928, these targeted Dagoretti Sub-District (close to Nairobi) and Machakos.³⁷⁹ However, once conditions had deteriorated by the start of 1929, the state intensified its efforts. In early February, the Acting Governor Sir Jacob Barth appointed a committee, chaired by the director of agriculture, to look into the food problem. That this resembled the actions taken by Kenya's acting governor in late 1917 and early 1918 is no coincidence – in 1918, Barth had been the governor's deputy and, from August of that year, acting chief secretary.³⁸⁰ The committee immediately convened a conference 'representative of commercial and producing interests',³⁸¹ before reporting back to the governor.

Some of the committee's recommendations were legislative, others were more practical. A special government gazette was published on 5 February to give effect to the former. The Customs Management Ordinance was used to prevent food exports from the territory, except under licence.³⁸² The Native Foodstuffs Ordinance was invoked to prohibit the movement and export of supplies from districts including Meru, Embu, South Nyeri, Fort Hall and Kiambu.³⁸³ However, these efforts went beyond previous measures. The famine saw officials pursue the first systematic attempts to manage the movement of foodstuffs, which drew in the relatively new 'local native councils' (LNCs).³⁸⁴ Coordinated efforts were made to prevent the movement of supplies southwards from Nyeri, while movements northwards from Fort Hall were 'consistently encouraged'.³⁸⁵ Whereas in 1918 officials had tried to control famine by managing movements of people, a decade later they sought to regulate the circulation of goods within the market.

With respect to relief, Barth's committee advised that since 'some of the native tribes' had access to funds, the relief should be issued on payment 'so long as the

³⁷⁸ CPK, *Official Gazette*, 16 March 1927, p. 306; 23 August 1927, pp. 1011–13.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 24 January 1928, p. 58; 4 September 1928, p. 1319–20; Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*, p. 87.

³⁸⁰ EAP, *Official Gazette*, 14 August 1918, p. 674.

³⁸¹ These 'interests' included the Nairobi and Mombasa chambers of commerce, the Convention of Associations, the Coffee Planters' Union, plus exporting firms and the Kenya Farmers' Association. TNA: CO 533/384/2, Holm to Barth (letter), 13 February 1929.

³⁸² CPK, *Official Gazette*, 5 February 1929.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

³⁸⁴ Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*, p. 87. The first of the LNCs had been formed in more 'advanced' districts (notably the highly populated areas of Central and Nyanza provinces) in 1924 to help assuage African grievances over the unfair allocation of direct taxes towards services. Dominated by the district commissioner, LNCs generally consisted of official chiefs and 'other government employees who could be counted on to be cooperative'; Berman, *Control and Crisis*, pp. 216–18; Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, p. 94. Tarus notes that the Kenyan LNCs were based on 'the South African model'; 'Direct Taxation', p. 176.

³⁸⁵ TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 11 January 1930.

recipients are in possession of funds to meet the cost'.³⁸⁶ LNCs would cover the remaining costs. Seeds were also to be issued to relieve famine conditions and 'secure increased production', also funded by LNCs.³⁸⁷ These efforts marked the start of a major official campaign to encourage Africans to grow 'improved' (that is, higher-yielding and quickly maturing) varieties of maize. Some of these varieties were planted on reclaimed swampland in drought-hit regions of South Nyeri and Embu, prepared using communal labour.³⁸⁸

Government relief supplies were 'primarily intended' for women and children in the famine area.³⁸⁹ The official line was to 'encourage' able-bodied men to seek employment on public and private works.³⁹⁰ This would enable the men to access food supplies, while reducing the burden of hunger in the reserves. Accordingly, officials took precautionary steps to secure food supplies for settler farms, to prevent the forced return to the reserves of labourers discharged by employers unable to feed them.³⁹¹ Relief works were quickly organized, and officials mobilized the Native Authority Ordinance so that people of Meru and Embu districts could be compelled to work in return for relief.³⁹²

Yet the most significant aspect of the state's response lay elsewhere. Recognizing that no comprehensive statutory powers existed allowing the state to control food stocks, fix prices, pay compensation, or requisition transport, Barth's committee recommended the preparation of new, emergency legislation, restricted in operation until the end of 1929. The resulting Food Control Ordinance shared the name and some of the functions of a Nigerian ordinance passed two years previously. The Kenyan edition consolidated the central government's powers to prohibit food exports and control the movement and trade of essential 'native foodstuffs'.³⁹³ The legislation was novel in that it established a Food Control Board with 'comprehensive' powers and duties. 'Among the most important', explained the director of agriculture in Legco, 'are the submission of returns of foodstuffs held and controlled by traders and

³⁸⁶ TNA: CO 533/384/2, Holm to Barth (letter), 13 February 1929.

³⁸⁷ Ultimately, officials arranged for seed worth 6,000 pounds to be purchased and distributed; CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 21 February, p. 21.

³⁸⁸ Anderson and Throup, 'Agrarian Economy', p. 17.

³⁸⁹ TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 27 March 1930.

³⁹⁰ TNA: CO 533/384/2, Colonial Office to Barth (telegram), 25 February 1929; CO 533/384/2, Barth to Amery (telegram), 1 March 1929; CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 11 January 1930; CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 21 February, p. 21.

³⁹¹ TNA: CO 533/384/2, Barth to Amery (telegram), 1 March 1929; CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 21 February, p. 20.

³⁹² CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 21 February, p. 20.

³⁹³ The Nigerian Food Control Ordinance was part of a wider famine relief strategy developed in response to a food crisis in 1927. The strategy was similar to the Kenyan approach in that it relied on 'native authorities' (NAs) to make their 'own arrangements' to confront local shortages; central government only intervened when shortage escalated into famine. But the Nigerian strategy (although never implemented) went much further than the more *ad hoc* Kenyan policy by setting out a precise monthly timetable to structure the import and distribution of relief. The more established Nigerian NA structures held far greater responsibility to keep local food reserves, as well as organize and distribute relief supplies, than Kenya's fledgling and relatively incapacitated LNCs. In Kenya, distribution was handled by the Native Affairs Department. The Nigerian Ordinance also differed from the Kenyan version by empowering a 'food controller' (rather than a board) to prohibit imports and exports; Watts, *Silent Violence*, pp. 312-14, 565n63.

producers'. These data would allow the food availability position to be assessed so that trade licences could be granted safely. The Board was given the power to acquire foodstuffs for famine relief and to arrange for their distribution, for example by requisitioning transport at fixed rates. It could also purchase and import foodstuffs, more specifically the assumed staple of maize, to supplement local supplies. Generally, the Board's role was to procure and distribute supplies to key centres – 'last mile' distribution was left to the Native Affairs Department.³⁹⁴ Finally, the Board was tasked with fixing maximum prices for the purchase and sale of food staples. Legco voted 200,000 pounds to cover its functions.

What was the rationale for this degree of investment and control? First, it was needed to ensure that food supplies could get to remote areas that might be unprofitable for private traders to service. This became particularly important in late 1929, by which time famine conditions had worsened in Kikuyuland, partly because premature and heavy 'short rains' had washed away numerous bridges and rendered many roads impassable, thereby blocking the distribution of relief.³⁹⁵ The Colonial Office suggested, to no avail, that the Kenyan government use aircraft to deliver the supplies instead.³⁹⁶

Second, state control was necessary to set maximum prices. This was done ostensibly 'in the interests of trade': to prevent some producers and retailers, from whom food was not purchased at prices set by the Board, gaining an unfair advantage over others.³⁹⁷ Further, fixing prices would prevent inflation and limit costs to consumers and employers. Such willingness to engage in the 'un-British' practice of price control has to be understood against the backdrop of emerging Kenyan state interest in managing food prices and cost of living during the mid-1920s.³⁹⁸ Moreover, restriction of trade and price regulation took on particular

³⁹⁴ CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 22 February, p. 55.

³⁹⁵ The senior commissioner for Kikuyu Province had been able to collect supplies at railhead but experienced difficulty getting food to the starving population 150 miles away; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 7 December 1929. Food destined for Meru was transported to the railhead at Naro Moru, then by motor transport to Meru, and again by lorry to nine distributing centres in the district; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 11 January 1930.

³⁹⁶ The governor replied and explained that there were 'still only three or four aeroplanes in this Colony, the carrying capacity of which would be approximately one or two bags of maize meal at the most'. Whether these figures were accurate or not, the Colonial Office did not pursue the issue; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 27 March 1930. The Royal Air Force did, however, use aeroplanes to drop food relief during a Kenyan famine in the early 1960s, when once again heavy rain followed drought, rendering roads and rivers impassable; Chenevix Trench, *Men Who Ruled Kenya*, p. 288.

³⁹⁷ CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 21 February, p. 5.

³⁹⁸ A Cost of Living Commission had been appointed in 1924 in response to protestations from Kenya's white 'petty bourgeoisie' who had started to feel their standard of living was being pinched by retail price increases; Swainson, *Corporate Capitalism*, p. 41. Cost of living became part of Kenyan political rhetoric: in the mid-1920s, for example, Indian Legco protested the effects of protective duties on ghee, noting their effect on the community's cost of living; CPK, *KLC Deb 1926*, Vol. 1, 18 March, pp. 27–31. The Commission's 1929 report recommended that some manner of protection should continue for key Kenyan products, but left the door open for price control: 'both wholesale and retail prices for local consumption should be periodically reviewed and, if necessary, controlled'; CPK, *Cost of Living Commission Report of Enquiry*, p. xiv.

importance during times of scarcity as a means to prevent hoarding, speculation and profiteering by 'unscrupulous' middlemen. Indeed, the Food Control Ordinance was explicitly motivated by the need to combat the formation of 'rings'. Here memories of previous scarcities and relief efforts – notably the 1918 famine – played an important part in justifying this regulation.³⁹⁹ Yet liberal market ideology still held some ground – in Legco, officials were at pains to point out that the functions of the Food Control Board would not interfere with the normal trade of the colony. And they yet confidently, albeit incorrectly, predicted that emergency imports would not be required.⁴⁰⁰ Self-sufficiency was the key goal.⁴⁰¹ Imports of food, as Rimmer notes generally of British colonial officials in Africa, were more than costly embarrassments: they were 'an indication of administrative failure', or worse. In the strict Malthusian view, relying on food imports amounted to 'a threat to national security'.⁴⁰²

4.2.2 Political controversy

The Kenyan government's actions of early 1929 immediately created controversy. Upon hearing of the emergency measures, Sir Humphrey Leggett, chair of the East African section of the London Chamber of Commerce, a long-time advocate of 'trusteeship' in East Africa, and a businessperson with interests in Kenyan sisal plantations,⁴⁰³ immediately wrote to Bottomley, the assistant under-secretary of state in the Colonial Office.⁴⁰⁴ Leggett railed against Kenya's settler maize growers who were, he claimed, holding the country 'to ransom' under an 'extreme form' of protectionism.⁴⁰⁵ Settlers had been exporting maize, assisted by low rail rates, long after it was safe for the colony's food supply. However, employers of labour were powerless to import their own supplies due to heavy customs duties and high freight charges for imported grain. Leggett's concern was that expensive maize imports would become necessary, thereby driving up the general cost of living, the operational costs of government departments and, most importantly from his perspective, the costs of labour and

³⁹⁹ In Legco, Lord Francis Scott (elected member for Ukamba) reminded other members that '...in 1918 terrible scandals arose in this country in regard to the distribution of famine relief and I do trust that every effort will be taken this time to see that unscrupulous and other people will not have an opportunity to make vast profits for themselves at the expense of the natives'. CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 22 February, p. 34.

⁴⁰⁰ Maize and other food exports were prohibited by the government, but after its formation the Food Control Board granted special licences for export in early 1929, taking care 'to disturb trade and trade conditions as little as possible'. Licences were granted to fulfill existing overseas contracts and to satisfy regular requirements to neighbouring territories including East African ports; TNA: CO 533/384/2, Barth to Amery (letter), 9 March 1929. When, by yearend, weather conditions had not improved, it became necessary to import significant amounts of maize from South Africa.

⁴⁰¹ (Holm) 'We felt that it would be a credit to the Colony if, during this period of difficulty, the Colony was able to feed itself and maintain its trade connections with neighbouring territories'; CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 17 July, p. 254.

⁴⁰² Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity', p. 5; Rimmer, 'Economic Imprint', p. 151.

⁴⁰³ Leggett was also managing director of the British East Africa Corporation; Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, p. 232.

⁴⁰⁴ TNA: CO 533/384/2, Leggett to Bottomley (letter), 24 February 1929.

⁴⁰⁵ TNA: CO 533/384/2, minute by Bottomley, 4 March 1929; CO 533/384/2, Leggett to Bottomley (letter), 6 March 1929.

production on plantations. He enquired whether the Kenyan government proposed to admit such imports free of duties.⁴⁰⁶ The question was delicately forwarded to Nairobi. The governor simply reiterated that he did not expect imports to be necessary. While little came of Leggett's protestations, the exchange indicates how, by this stage, questions of scarcity and food prices were starting to involve contestations between different producer and consumer interests, which demanded a certain 'balancing act' to be performed by the state.⁴⁰⁷

Meanwhile, officials in London had themselves been alarmed by a news article published in *The Times* reporting that Kenyan officials had made 'arrangements' to 'encourage able-bodied people to seek employment in public and private work'.⁴⁰⁸ This, once again, raised the politically charged issue of compulsory labour in Kenya (see chapter 3). A telegram was promptly prepared and sent to Nairobi requesting further details on the nature of the government's proposals for private works.⁴⁰⁹ Barth replied, explaining that none were in place, and that such would require his approval in any case. But he only proceeded to cause more alarm by suggesting, 'I do not consider recourse to compulsory work for private employers at all *probable*' (emphasis added).⁴¹⁰ Such concern only intensified following the election of a British Labour Party government in June 1929. At the time, Kenya and other East African territories were being subject to considerable international scrutiny over their forced labour practices.⁴¹¹

The Food Control Bill was no less controversial domestically, and here one sees more clearly the strength of the settler political pressure that bore on Kenyan officials around their anti-scarcity practices. The Bill was introduced to the Legislative Council at a special sitting called for 21 February 1929 to deal with this 'emergency legislation'. It lit heated debate. In some ways, these arguments reveal the extent of antagonism between Kenyan officials and settlers, which peaked towards the end of the 1920s.⁴¹² In other ways, they speak to the

⁴⁰⁶ TNA: CO 533/384/2, Leggett to Bottomley (letter), 24 February 1929. When, later in the year, the Food Control Board imported 30,000 bags of maize from South Africa, the Board was forced to pay 9,000 pounds in duties; CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 17 July, p. 254.

⁴⁰⁷ Caught in a difficult position, Bottomley opted to let the situation ease itself out. Eventually, he minuted: 'I see nothing to be done. After all, we cannot interfere in a question of maize growers versus sisal planters, and the latter, with their employers who have to buy rations are well able to make their voice heard'; TNA: CO 533/384/2, minute by Bottomley, 22 March 1929.

⁴⁰⁸ TNA: CO 533/384/2, *The Times*, 25 February 1929.

⁴⁰⁹ TNA: CO 533/384/2, Amery to Barth (telegram), 25 February 1929.

⁴¹⁰ TNA: CO 533/384/2, Barth to Amery (telegram), 1 March 1929.

⁴¹¹ The International Labour Organization's report on forced labour, published in time for the International Labour Conference sessions in June of 1929 and 1930 respectively, focused on the question of forced and 'native labour', and dealt extensively with African settler colonies; International Labour Organization (ILO), *Forced Labour*; Goudal, 'Question of Forced Labour'. A little over two years later, the question of forced labour again became a source of Colonial Office anxiety during a famine in Northern Rhodesia. On this occasion, the concern was whether the colonial government's measures satisfied the terms of the Forced Labour Convention; TNA: CO 795/47/13, minute by Vernon, 13 July 1931; minute by Parkin, 15 July 1931; minute by Green, 16 July 1931; Passfield to Maxwell (letter), 23 July 1931; Maxwell to Thomas (letter), 21 September 1931.

⁴¹² Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 109.

tensions at the heart of food provisioning and colonial 'liberal' government in the interwar period.

The opposition came from (mainly European) elected members.⁴¹³ Their antagonism was not necessarily directed at the *principle* of providing relief or controlling prices. Many supported it, but took issue with certain aspects of the state's proposals. There were differences of opinion, for example, between farming and non-farming representatives. The former constituted the majority of elected members.⁴¹⁴ They worried that the prices offered to farmers would be 'fair'; that is, profitable. Those representing consumers fretted more about the costs of food and labour.

One of the ways in which unofficial members expressed their differences of opinion was through their particular framing of the state's 'duty'. Replying to the second reading of the Bill, Lord Francis Scott, a farmer himself, argued 'that it is the government's duty to see that none of the subjects of this country die of starvation', and that preemptive steps should be taken.⁴¹⁵ T. J. O'Shea, a businessperson and 'autodidact economist' from Eldoret, agreed 'that when there is a scarcity of food it is the bounden duty of Government to provide citizens with food'.⁴¹⁶ Yet there was a further, more economic aspect to this 'duty'. Echoing memories of unfair trading practices seen during past scarcities, Conway Harvey (a coffee planter) considered the government's 'bounden duty' to include stopping 'certain unscrupulous individuals' from attempting to 'corner the available supplies of foodstuffs'.⁴¹⁷ T. A. Wood, a prominent Nairobi merchant, concurred that averting cornering was the 'first duty' of the state. His concern, however, was less with rural African hunger than securing 'relief for the ratepayers of Nairobi', who faced rising labour costs.⁴¹⁸ So, a sense of government 'duty' was expressed in both the moral terms of hunger, and the economic terms of inflation. Representatives of 'consuming interests', like Conway Harvey and Wood, emphasized the latter point, and supported the principle of price control. Here they attempted to frame food scarcity in terms of its collective economic effects on the wellbeing of the population at large. Conway Harvey summarized this attitude:

⁴¹³ Europeans were approved a franchise to elect Legco representatives in 1919, with the first elections held the following year. European men and women over 25 years of age and 'of sound mind' were permitted to vote for a representative of their local constituency. At this stage, several Indian and Arab members were appointed to Legco on the basis of nominations made to the governor. However, by the early 1920s, following considerable campaigning in favour of Indian political interests, provision was made for British subjects drawn from these communities to elect their own representatives. The seats allocated to Indians and Arabs were, however, far outnumbered by those reserved for their settler counterparts. As noted previously, from 1924 African interests were represented on Legco by an appointed missionary. Despite settler protestations to the contrary, official members held a majority in Legco until an elected majority was granted in 1948; Dillely, *British Policy*, p. 24.

⁴¹⁴ Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, p. 57.

⁴¹⁵ CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 21 February, p. 15.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12; Nicholls, *Red Strangers*, p. 157.

⁴¹⁷ CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 21 February, p. 8.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17; Nicholls, *Red Strangers*, p. 64. Wood was also involved in the 1920s Cost of Living Commission; CPK, *Cost of Living Commission Report of Enquiry*.

[I]t is essential that the broadest possible view should be taken of this matter. Particularly we must remember that this colony... is a co-operative concern. We have natives, we have Europeans, we have a score of industries – maize, sisal, coffee, and a dozen others; each one is very largely dependent on the other, and I do think, in the interests of the Colony as a whole... the prices of essential foodstuffs should be stabilized so far as possible in order to avoid serious dislocation of people's budgets, and in order to create a feeling of confidence in all and sundry.⁴¹⁹

Elected members were unanimous in urging officials to issue relief only upon payment, either in cash or in kind. This, Scott argued, was 'a matter of principle' that should not apply to any particular race.⁴²⁰ Most Africans were not destitute; providing free food would be little more than a 'dole'.⁴²¹ The chief native commissioner reassured Legco that 'so far as we can possibly manage it, we do not want to feed any able-bodied man for nothing at all'.⁴²² These points strengthened the argument for relief works to enable the hungry and poor to access food. Accordingly, a motion to construct a proposed railway extension from Naro Moru to Nanyuki (running towards the areas suffering most from scarcity, albeit on the far side of Mount Kenya) was fast-tracked, and introduced to Legco the following day.⁴²³

Later, the acting governor cited the example of the 1928 Ugandan famine as a precedent for the approach taken to distributing relief.⁴²⁴ In places where people neither had cash nor access to relief works, as in some parts of Meru District, special measures were required. There maize and maize meal were supplied for cash or on credit at subsidized prices.⁴²⁵ For credit issues, it was necessary to keep accounts charged against district sub-divisions (rather than individuals).⁴²⁶ Kenyan officials seemed concerned to make this process as 'fair' as possible: One

⁴¹⁹ CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 21 February, p. 8.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴²¹ The term 'dole' was used to denigrate free famine relief by C. G. Durham (elected member for Kikuyu); *Ibid.*, p. 17. Reverend H. Leakey, the nominated member representing African interests, also used the term, albeit in a more sympathetic sense. While disputing the notion that 'Africans are all well-to-do', Leakey endorsed the plan to ensure able-bodied men worked for their relief: 'I deprecate anything in the shape of a dole, such as we had some years ago, and although this may be necessary sometimes it must have the effect of demoralizing the people'. For this reason, he supported the organization of relief works; CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 22 February, p. 43.

⁴²² (J. E. S. Merrick) CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 21 February, p. 21.

⁴²³ CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 22 February, pp. 39–40. The line was completed in October 1930; CPK, *Annual Report for 1930*, p. 9.

⁴²⁴ TNA: CO 533/384/2, Barth to Amery (letter), 9 March 1929.

⁴²⁵ In Legco, J. G. Kirkwood argued that the prices charged for relief (five shillings per load of maize and six shillings for maize meal – the same rates charged to the Meru during the previous famine in the area) amounted to approximately 50 per cent of the total cost of purchase and delivery. The acting chief native commissioner indicated that the loss would be met from the state's general revenue. The full cost of the supplies was charged in coastal areas; CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 18 June, p. 146; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 11 January 1930.

⁴²⁶ The governor explained the approach as follows: '[The food] is issued in kerosene tins and at the end of the day the amount of bags issued is registered against the receiving locations'. The plan was to recover the balance through a series of cesses extending over several years, although it was noted that the Meru still owed the government around 20,000 pounds for relief provided on previous occasions; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 11 January 1930.

of the main principles adopted in Uganda in 1928, and endorsed by their eastern counterparts the following year, was to ensure that 'no person who had not received relief should be obliged to pay for that received by anyone else'.⁴²⁷

So, elected members did not necessarily doubt the need for extraordinary measures to combat famine and profiteering. Rather, some of their harshest criticism focused on the intelligence used to develop the legislation and grant its 'wide-ranging powers'. Lord Francis Scott questioned whether such measures interfering 'with the liberty of the subject and with all the trade of the country' were the only means of addressing the situation.⁴²⁸ He was one of several who rebuked the government for failing to provide 'definite figures' to justify the *necessity* of these measures and the existence of a board with such powers. The lack of 'definite figures' encompassed where exactly famine had occurred, what ratio the shortage held to normal food supplies in the affected districts, the total supplies available in Kenya, the number of people requiring famine relief, and the monthly rate at which supplies were being consumed, among other issues.⁴²⁹ Why bother them with this emergency sitting and proposed legislation – which promised to interfere with 'all the trade of the country' – when sufficient supplies could have been more easily secured through government contracts with the KFA and other large grain traders?⁴³⁰ One of those making this argument was J. G. Kirkwood, a hotel owner from Kitale, who took a particularly dim view of the vision of state control expressed by the Bill.⁴³¹

Holm, the director of agriculture, accepted the lack of justifying statistics and information, defending the Bill's measures as being necessary in the 'judgement' of experienced administrative officers in the various districts.⁴³² A district-by-district review of 'the food position' presented by the acting chief native commissioner, as well as a comprehensive reply from Holm, seems to have appeased most of these concerns in the end.⁴³³ Nevertheless, a degree of ambivalence surrounded the Bill. It was motivated by the need for control and certainty of the 'food position' (through, for example, collecting returns and

⁴²⁷ CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 22 February, p. 57.

⁴²⁸ CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 21 February, p. 16.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 16.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 15–17. The director of agriculture later revealed that this approach had been considered by the food shortage committee, but was rejected by representatives of large stockholding organizations. For, if they were obliged to supply grain at a low price, individual traders would be able to 'reap an advantage out of the situation'. Fixing maximum prices through a central board was therefore the only 'fair' means of managing the situation; *Ibid.*, pp. 25–6.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 14–5; Nicholls, *Red Strangers*, p. 157.

⁴³² The director explained: 'Now I wish I were in a position to supply that information, but under the conditions obtaining in this country it is quite impracticable to obtain information of that sort in the native reserves. It is not possible for anyone to say that there are so many hundred thousand bags of maize and tens of thousands of bags of beans and so forth in the native reserves. One should in that regard reply upon the information obtained by and the advice given by Administrative Officers who are well acquainted with the conditions in the native reserves'. He noted that the measures taken to prevent the movement of food from the reserves (under the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance) had been based on information received from these officers. An attempt was made to secure statistics on available maize stocks in settler areas, but no legislation existed to enforce these returns; CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, Vol. 1, 21 February, pp. 24–5.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 16–20.

statistics on stocks held by farmers and traders), yet at the same time appeals had to be made to local official 'judgement' and 'experience' to justify both its necessity and the process by which it was devised.

The tension between demands for numerical certainty and official trust in local experience was reflected in another aspect of the Legco debate. This related to how maize prices would be set, and how suppliers would be compensated for the restriction of exports. More specifically, how would the proposed Board ensure that maize suppliers received a 'fair price'?⁴³⁴ This was a particular concern for grain producers whose profits had been hurt by the drought conditions of the preceding two years.⁴³⁵ The original proposal was for prices to be determined using the export price ruling in London in early February 1929. Several members complained that this might disadvantage some producers and dealers who could otherwise realise a better profit.⁴³⁶ In light of these criticisms, the governor proposed to adjourn the meeting to allow elected members to consult further with 'those interested in the maize trade' to discuss the problem.⁴³⁷ The following morning a slightly revised version of the Bill was read. The most significant change was the removal of the clause referring to the London export price, so that price setting was now left entirely in the hands of the Board. As the attorney general explained, 'in a matter of this kind you have got to trust the Board to use its powers with due discretion'.⁴³⁸ Statistical and calculative certainty were important, but mainly as part of the rhetorical armature of settler political and economic interests.⁴³⁹

Following its third reading, the Bill was passed and the all-European Board established, consisting of three ex-officio and unofficial members apiece, plus a secretary.⁴⁴⁰ It continued to be a highly unpopular entity among unofficial members. When, in July 1929, the Board requested permission to import 30,000 bags of maize into the colony, several members once again protested the entire arrangement implied by the Food Control Ordinance. Measures taken by the Board, Kirkwood railed, had merely created 'artificial conditions' that accentuated the shortage.⁴⁴¹ It was the Board who had compromised Kenya's self-sufficiency and created the need for importation – that index of

⁴³⁴ Ibid., pp. 9, 27.

⁴³⁵ This concern was specifically raised by Lord Francis Scott in relation to his constituents in Ukamba; Ibid., p. 16.

⁴³⁶ J. G. Kirkwood, for example, described the Bill as 'legalised robbery' that took 'away the initiative from produce dealers to obtain the best advantage for their produce irrespective of all other considerations'; Ibid., p. 15.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., p. 28.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

⁴³⁹ I have elaborated on this point elsewhere; see Duminy, 'Piecemeal Avalanche'.

⁴⁴⁰ The official members were the director of agriculture (chair), treasurer (deputy chair), and chief native commissioner. The Department of Agriculture's statistical officer was appointed as secretary; TNA: CO 533/384/2, Barth to Amery (letter), 9 March 1929. Unofficial members included W. K. Tucker (elected member for Nairobi North), C. R. Maynard and W. Tyson (both professionals or businesspeople based in Nairobi); CPK, *Official Gazette*, 1 March 1929, p. 415.

⁴⁴¹ CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, vol. 1, 17 July, p. 256. Foucault notes that the question of the artificiality of the state and political intervention was a key aspect of the critique of *raison d'Etat* and the 'police system', which distinguished disciplinary mechanisms from those techniques of security founded on the 'naturalness' of the population; *Security Territory Population*, pp. 73, 349.

administrative failure. In any case, officials had once again failed to provide adequate substantiating figures on the current and future status of territorial food supplies, to prove the need for food imports.⁴⁴² Outside of Legco, the state's interference in the free market also attracted considerable criticism from Africans who found their ability to take advantage of high famine prices curtailed. This was particularly so for the traders and emerging commercial grain farmers represented by the Kikuyu Central Association.⁴⁴³ Ultimately, the Board was dissolved at the end of 1929, as originally envisaged. Perhaps its harshest indictment came from a former Board member, W. K. Tucker (representative of Nairobi North). Speaking some years after its disbandment, he expressed his hope that such an institution (controlling maize distribution and pricing) would 'never exist again'.⁴⁴⁴ Tucker was to be disappointed – as I will show in chapter 6, government maize control would exist in little over a decade.

As this section has shown, officials in settler contexts, especially Kenya, often found themselves in a bind when confronted with the threat of famine. They could be caught between a paternalistic duty and desire to prevent suffering and ensure order, aggressive political demands from settlers to 'encourage' job-seeking and recover the costs of relief, as well as the economic interests of urban residents, planters and metropolitan capital. All this unfolded under the worried legal gaze of London. The ways in which the government responded to food scarcities like that of 1929–30 reflected these competing agendas. Kenyan officials trod a fine line between moral duty and political expediency.

4.2.3 Reframing the problem

Despite the notoriety of the Food Control Ordinance, its contents and debates reveal several key features and trends relating to the conceptualization and redress of food scarcity problems. Here I reflect on these features and trends, linking the dynamics of 1929 with the preceding discussion of anti-scarcity policy and legislation.

First, officials no longer saw scarcity as the simple result of local harvest failure. Rather, it was a complex phenomenon driven by natural, economic and cultural factors. Natural factors, including drought, pestilence and heavy rainfall, were the chief causes. These were mostly unpredictable, aside from broad climatological patterns and rudimentary meteorological forecasts. Such natural factors produced economic effects, notably price inflation, which in turn led to social responses including asset disposal, cornering, hoarding and speculation. The result was a form of 'market failure': an inefficient distribution of goods calling for state intervention to promote a moral agenda of equity, and an

⁴⁴² E. M. V. Kenealy (elected member for Kenya Province) stated: 'Also we should have had figures provided showing the shortage that exists today, and the shortage that will exist in a fortnight's time, and in a month's time, and so on, so that we could have a real view of the situation. We are thrown a few figures, as a bone is thrown to a dog, and we are told to get our teeth into them and satisfy ourselves on the small quantity of meat upon them; they are empty – there is nothing in them'; CPK, *KLC Deb 1929*, vol. 1, 17 July, pp. 258–9.

⁴⁴³ Anderson and Throup, 'Agrarian Economy', p.

⁴⁴⁴ CPK, *KLC Deb 1931*, vol. 1, 17 June, p. 190.

economic agenda of price stabilization. Cultural factors, by contrast, related to issues such as the gendered division of labour in African societies, land cultivation methods, tenure arrangements, marketing activity, as well as stock keeping habits. These factors shaped the way that land resources were used, and how food shortages affected people in their social relations. Whereas 'failure of the rains' was a matter of misfortune, economic and cultural behaviour were probable risks that can and should be anticipated and managed.

Second, as a 'hybrid' natural and economic phenomenon, food shortage manifested at two levels: scarcity and famine. With the development of commercial food markets in the territory, food shortages started to take on a cumulative nature. Unfavourable weather conditions amplified regular periods of seasonal hunger; prolonged drought gradually eroded household and community food reserves. Scarcity, on one level, referred to such a general decrease in availability, and had an economic inflection: price increases hurt consumers and employers. It had the nature of a collective economic problem. Famine is what happened when this problem was left unchecked – scarcity could generate a cycle of market reactions as staple prices rose in response to increased demand and stock prices fell as a function of over-supply.⁴⁴⁵ Cornering and hoarding by producers and traders diverted supplies from the market, so prices rose even further. Famine and large-scale starvation occurred when poorer people could no longer afford the elevated prices to support their dependents. This was, of course, more of a problem for those in remote rural areas, because the costs of transporting supplies to these places were inevitably higher. So, in the context of a more developed market system, food shortages started to assume this sort of cumulative and self-aggravating character, manifesting at two levels.

Third, officials saw this problem as calling for certain kinds of responses. For many, the state had a 'duty' to intervene and prevent scarcity from snowballing into the crisis of outright famine. There were urgent responses as well as more long-term factors to be considered. One of the most urgent was ensuring adequate distribution and accessibility, and especially physical access – getting relief to remote areas and preventing supplies from leaving local districts. Moreover, famine was partly a result of economic inaccessibility, which required encouraging the 'able-bodied' poor to seek wage labour or, if necessary, providing relief at subsidized rates, on credit, or in the form of loans. The latter interventions targeted specific areas and groups of people, as with the Meru in 1929. Price control was another economic intervention, but one that was less directly tied to the urgency of preventing famine. Rather, it had a wider, more medium-term logic: in 1929, price fixing was more a safeguard of the revenue of employing industries and government departments than of individual access to food. It sought to *manage* and *regulate* the spatial-economic effects of scarcity, not at the level of individuals or specific groups (that is, in order to save lives), but for the sake of the welfare of key communities and industries.

⁴⁴⁵ Foucault notes that for economists and governments in the late eighteenth century, 'scarcity is a state of food shortage that has the property of engendering a process that renews it and, in the absence of another mechanism halting it, tends to extend it and make it more acute'. Scarcity is therefore 'not exactly famine'; *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 30.

So, the state's response was partly one of limiting and controlling the market: designating who could trade, where and how. The Food Control Ordinance signalled a growing official confidence and capacity to do so. Yet there were also longer-term measures that could be pursued to manage the risk of scarcity. In 1929, for example, improving 'communications' emerged as a central strategy of the state's long-term anti-famine measures. In correspondence between Governor Grigg and the Colonial Office in early 1930, improving the road network was the primary measure discussed in relation to 'precautions against the possibility of a recurrence'.⁴⁴⁶

Agriculture was another domain of anti-scarcity intervention. Issuing seeds of 'flat white' maize as an anti-famine measure in 1929 continued the more general policy of boosting African production that had been pursued after the First World War, as confirmed by the 1926 Crop Production and Livestock Ordinance. If 1929 marked any change to this policy, it was to intensify official efforts towards the 'betterment' of African agriculture: improving methods of land and stock husbandry, and encouraging the cultivation of a greater variety of crops including canna, cassava, sweet potato (all less susceptible to locust depredation) and beans.⁴⁴⁷ Unlike in 1918, these efforts relied less on coercion and more on instruction, demonstration and education. Promoting subsistence and local self-sufficiency was still the main objective: African farmers should only market their surplus crops. These sorts of interventions closely followed the recommendations of the 1929 Agricultural Commission; the 1929–30 famine merely strengthened the case for the colonial discipline of African reserve production.⁴⁴⁸

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter examined how the governmentalization of food scarcity shifted with the political and economic dynamics of the 1920s. It has shown that scarcity and its management were increasingly a function of capitalist market relations, even if the chief cause was still prolonged drought. Aside from fulfilling its (now well-established) 'duty' to provide emergency relief to the weak and helpless, the definition of the state's anti-scarcity role had grown significantly since the events of 1918–19. For many, this role now encompassed regulating the economic effects of food crises by securing comprehensive control of the market. And, just as the state's responsibility to manage scarcity was growing, so was the tendency to 'responsibilize' African subjects in several key respects.

In the 1920s, officials and politicians continued to see African cultural attitudes and behaviour (particularly around pastoral and agricultural activities) as fundamentally linked to the drivers of scarcity. In so doing, they cast food

⁴⁴⁶ TNA: CO 533/392/15, minute by Bottomley, 23 April 1930.

⁴⁴⁷ Anderson and Throup, 'Agrarian Economy', p. 17; CPK, *KLC Deb 1931*, vol. 1, 17 June, p. 193. Iliffe argues that a similar shift in agricultural policy was catalysed by the 1922 famine in Southern Rhodesia; *Famine in Zimbabwe*, chapter 7.

⁴⁴⁸ Hall, *Report of the Agricultural Commission*.

scarcity within a range of different political, economic and social problems, including the emerging problems of land allocation, population, soil degradation and malnutrition. The decade saw the elaboration of a notion of population that was inextricably linked to questions of economic development, land and territory. Specifically, population was enrolled within a problematic of how to manage subsistence communities so as to increase the rate of African population growth (and thus reproduce a cheap source of migrant labour-power for settler industries) while preserving the carrying capacity of the land.⁴⁴⁹ Food scarcity was thus emerging as a component of a wider Malthusian triad of reproduction, resource scarcity and confined space.⁴⁵⁰ Now, however, governmental interventions, at least in part, sought to prevent scarcity by conducting African attitudes and behaviours through training and education, rather than simply coercing, supervising and punishing. Such points illustrate how the nature of the rural reserve, as a particular kind of governable space, was shifting in the interwar period under the objectives and coordinates of indirect rule.

Overall, the chapter has described the emerging outlines of a bifurcated mode of biopolitics centred on food. One mode was closely linked to the governable space of the reserve, tending to employ more 'direct' methods of government intervention and control. It worked to stave off scarcity by specifying and modifying African beliefs and behaviours in order to safeguard the soil and subsistence production, thereby improving health, promoting population growth, and economizing on the reproduction of migrant labour-power for the settler economy. Here the concern was not simply keeping people alive on a basic biological level (that is, preventing their suffering and death), but also producing or encouraging specific kinds of productive life by shaping their nutritional constitution at a bodily, and indeed molecular, level.⁴⁵¹ This was a mode of biopolitics with a relatively long-term temporal and anticipatory purview, and one targeted at the rural African population.

The second biopolitical mode was linked to the governable space of the capitalist market. It aimed to regulate the economic drivers and effects of scarcity events as they manifested at a wider, more territorial scale. This entailed a more calculative approach to conceiving and managing food scarcity, as seen with the efforts of 1929–30 to gather intelligence on rates of food supply versus demand, both in particular districts and in the territory as a whole. Here, too, officials used economic techniques like price controls to alleviate the risk of economic collapse and outright famine. These acts speak to the emergence of a more 'indirect' mode of anti-scarcity practice that acted in the domain of the market, on the interests and incentives of economic subjects. But this particular kind of biopolitics was highly limited in its range, techniques and duration. It served the economic interests of certain interest groups (notably, settler employers and

⁴⁴⁹ For an elaboration of how subsistence agricultural communities may be used for the reproduction of labour-power in a modern wage-labour economy, see Meillassoux, 'Reproduction to Production'.

⁴⁵⁰ Dean, 'Malthus Effect', p. 23.

⁴⁵¹ On the genealogy of forms of 'molecular biopower', or biopolitics targeting the molecular constitution of the body, specifically with reference to pharmacology, see Camargo and Ried, 'Pharmacological Practice'.

government agencies) rather than seeking to foster and secure the life of the general population. What is more, the impulse to enumerate and calculate food crises, described above, was tempered by the trust that colonial administrators placed in the judgement and experience of local officers.⁴⁵² At this point, also, the market was enrolled only within an emergency biopolitics. Market interventions were part of the response to a particular scarcity event, rather than a permanent activity of governing.

October 1929, of course, marked a key point in global economic history. Over the course of the 1930s, once the Great Depression had started to cast its deep shadows over the colonial Kenyan economy, the aims of economic development and anti-scarcity methods would be increasingly aligned and imbricated with pressing issues such as agricultural marketing, rural poverty and environmental conservation. In making these connections, officials and other actors increasingly framed scarcity as a long-term risk, requiring longer-term investments and interventions, particularly in the domain of production and marketing. Scarcity would assume a new kind of political charge as a result – one bound up with settler demands for support and protection. The following chapter examines these changes.

⁴⁵² Duminy, 'Piecemeal Avalanche'.

5. Depression and Scarcity

The previous chapter concluded by examining the Kenyan state's response to the famine of 1929–30, which entailed an unprecedented peacetime effort to centralize the means of providing famine relief and to manage the economic effects of large-scale food scarcity. In this chapter, I will consider changes to the nature of scarcity, as well as to the administration's understanding of and attempts to redress the problem, over the course of the 1930s – a decade of economic depression and muted recovery. The contraction of the settler economy and government revenue sources was fundamental to these transformations.

In the sections that follow, I make three main arguments. First, I argue that the colonial state resorted to a more 'decentralized' administrative and financial structure for the provision of famine relief following the prodigal experiences of the Food Control Board. Second, I argue that conditions of economic depression helped to reframe scarcity as being, at least in part, a problem of economic access, to which the state's response focused on increasing agricultural productivity. Third, I argue that the problem of scarcity was increasingly tied up with pressing economic debates surrounding agricultural marketing, as well as emerging environmental problems including population pressure and soil degradation. As these connections were cast, the threat of scarcity became a key argument deployed by officials and settler interests within the political economy of land and agriculture in Kenya.

5.1 Austerity, unemployment and agricultural expansion

The slump in global commodity prices hit the Kenyan settler economy with force in the early 1930s. Prices for Kenyan exports plummeted, dragging profits and purchasing power behind them. Ultimately, one of every five settler farmers folded and left the land. The state's revenue streams – particularly from duties on wine and spirits – dried up into a trickle. Yet its huge debt obligations, notably for the railway, remained.⁴⁵³ Natural disasters calamitously coincided with economic recession, leading to several successive food scarcities in various parts of the territory.⁴⁵⁴

As with the 1929–30 famine, the effects of these scarcities were often felt in rural areas prone to irregular rainfall, as well as to disruptions of regular food entitlements and social insurance relationships. These were generally districts from which labour was recruited, cash crops grown, and in which population pressure was starting to be felt more acutely. Unlike in 1929 and 1930, it does not appear that the districts suffering the most were remote areas, located far from cash-earning opportunities or potential depots of relief supplies. Rather, it

⁴⁵³ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 104.

⁴⁵⁴ The term 'calamity' was specifically used by the Kenyan colonial secretary and future governor, H. Moore, to describe the coincidence of locust invasion with the collapse of global market prices in the early 1930s. It implies the degree of uncertainty with which officials thought about such risks and disasters; CPK, *KLC Deb 1932*, 19 December, p. 454.

is noticeable that several of the most serious scarcities of the early 1930s occurred in highly populated districts located nearby white settled areas. Here people often suffered as a result of the lack of opportunities for wage employment outside the reserves. There is little evidence to suggest that urban areas experienced any significant food supply problems in this period.⁴⁵⁵ Few of these scarcities appear to have turned into outright famine, involving large-scale mortality, although some deaths certainly resulted from starvation and malnutrition-related factors in more marginal or remote areas.⁴⁵⁶

The immediate causes of these scarcities were, as in 1929–30, prolonged drought and locust depredations. Yet a new dimension to the problem was emerging. This related to depressed prices for agricultural produce, as well as a contraction in labour demand (see figure 5.1). Both factors were intimately related to the collapse of global trade that Kenya began to suffer in earnest in 1930.⁴⁵⁷ Take one example: the 1931 scarcity that affected South Nyanza, particularly the low-lying, Luo-inhabited areas falling between the fertile Kisii highlands (inhabited mainly by the Gusii people) and the Nyanza lakeshore, south of Kisumu. This was a highly populated area (the number of people ultimately affected by food shortages was estimated at 200,000), lying close to settled areas that ordinarily provided a ready source of wage employment.⁴⁵⁸ Already by 1930, and for the first time since British administration had been extended over Gusiiland, officials found that the local supply of labour surpassed demand.⁴⁵⁹ Indeed, it was estimated that the ‘output’ of contracted labourers from Kisii station had fallen from an average monthly rate of between 600 and 700, to less than 20 in May of 1931.⁴⁶⁰ This trend in depressed labour demand would continue over the following years, before eventually picking up in 1934.⁴⁶¹

As with labour, agricultural exports from Gusiiland fell markedly in the early part of the decade. Having exported ‘considerable quantities’ of maize and cattle hides in 1929, the following year saw practically no exports as a result of falling prices.⁴⁶² Further reductions in trade activity resulted from natural forces. Heavy rains at the beginning of 1930 washed away the first plantings; the second then received inadequate rainfall.⁴⁶³ Early the following year, a swarm of locusts (reportedly ‘stretching on a front of three miles to a depth of fifteen miles’) swept across South Nyanza and devoured crops, particularly in Luo areas.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁵⁵ Some concern over the security of Nairobi’s food supply was, however, raised in 1931, when it was feared that locusts might invade Kikuyuland from western and northern districts. It appears that this did not materialize; CPK, *KLC Deb 1931*, vol. 1, 17 June, p. 182.

⁴⁵⁶ For example, famine-related deaths were confirmed for the coastal Kilifi and Digo districts in early 1934; CPK, *KLC Deb 1934*, Vol. 1, 15 February, p. 61.

⁴⁵⁷ Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, p. 93.

⁴⁵⁸ Parsons, ‘Local Responses’. The estimate of the affected population was provided by the acting chief native commissioner in Legco; CPK, *KLC Deb 1931*, Vol. 1, 17 June, p. 178.

⁴⁵⁹ Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, p. 93.

⁴⁶⁰ CPK, *KLC Deb 1931*, Vol. 1, 17 June, p. 179.

⁴⁶¹ Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, p. 93.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 93–4.

⁴⁶³ CPK, *KLC Deb 1931*, Vol. 1, 17 June, p. 179.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

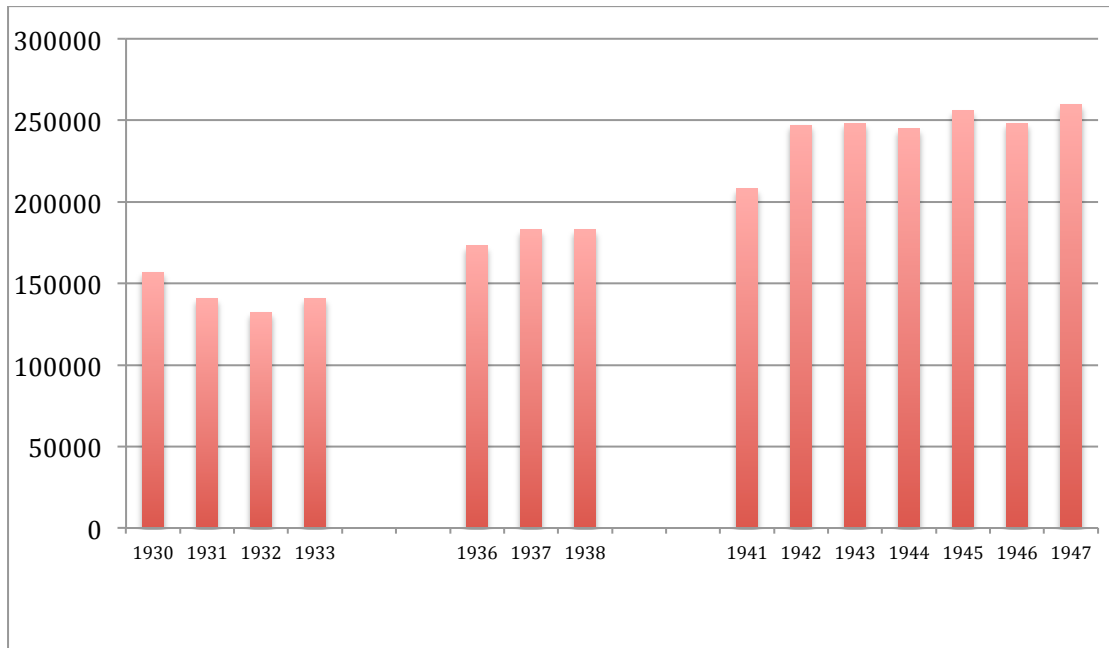


Figure 5.1. Registered Adult Male Africans Reported in Employment, Kenya, 1930–47.

Source: Cooper, *African Waterfront*, table 3.1.



Figure 5.2. Cost Of Living Index, Kenya, 1924–33 (100 = 1924 level).

Source: CPK, *Annual Reports 1924–33*.

Scarcity resulted from this acrid invasion, forcing many Luos to exchange their livestock for food grown by the neighbouring Gusii, who had avoided the worst of the locust damage and saw prices for their maize increase as a result.⁴⁶⁵ However, it was estimated that even in these fertile highland areas up to fifty per cent of the crops had been consumed by pests. With this depletion of their assets, Gusii farmers were less inclined to trade their reserve supplies to their regular Luo trading partners.

Officials were well aware of the interrelated nature of these natural and economic problems, and their effects on food availability and accessibility. Presenting a Legco motion for famine relief in June of 1931, the acting chief native commissioner, summarized the conditions leading to food shortage in South Nyanza: bad harvests, locust destruction, low prices ruling for cattle, and the lack of demand for labour.⁴⁶⁶ In the acting commissioner's motivation one finds clear continuities with the problem of scarcity as it was framed in the late 1920s (discussed in the previous chapter). First, it is seen an aggravation of regular seasonal scarcities.⁴⁶⁷ Second, it is a cumulative and self-aggravating phenomenon that is distinguishable from famine, and state intervention is necessary to halt the progress of the first to the second.⁴⁶⁸ Third, one again finds an emphasis on avoiding the distribution of food without charge (to safeguard the people's 'self-respect' as much as the colony's tight-strapped revenue).⁴⁶⁹ Yet, at the same time, uneven asset distribution within local societies, combined with cultural factors, necessitated government relief.⁴⁷⁰ The approach proposed by the acting commissioner was tried and tested: relief works would be arranged for the able-bodied to earn cash or receive food in kind. The motion was for 20,000 pounds to assist women, children and the elderly.⁴⁷¹

So, the problem of food access was changing as the depressed wage economy contracted in the early 1930s, removing a major source of cash and food entitlements for African people. For, although not mentioned by officials at the

⁴⁶⁵ Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, p. 94.

⁴⁶⁶ (A. de Vins Wade) CPK, *KLC Deb 1931*, Vol. 1, 17 June, p. 178. Low cattle prices were probably a partial reflection of generally depressed prices due to veterinary quarantines imposed on pastoral districts in the 1920s and 1930s; Mosley, *Settler Economies*, p. 107. A more immediate causal factor could have been flooding of the market by Luos in need of food, although the acting chief native commissioner indicated that prices were so low (between 12 and 20 shillings for a bull, and around 20 shillings for a heifer) due to lack of demand, that stockowners were reluctant to sell in any case; CPK, *KLC Deb 1931*, Vol. 1, 17 June, pp. 192–3.

⁴⁶⁷ '[I]t is normal in this part of the world for the people to be short of grain food at this particular time. The rainfall in this low-lying land is spasmodic and unreliable, and the crops are therefore usually precarious, and at this particular time the situation is rather worse than usual'; *Ibid.*, pp. 178–9.

⁴⁶⁸ '[The local people] are not destitute. They have certain resources; they have a large number of stock; and they have certain supplies in the way of potatoes and *muhogo* and a few bananas; but they are already beginning to feel a certain shortage, and that shortage must develop into famine unless the government comes to their assistance'; *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 179–80.

⁴⁷⁰ 'Unfortunately, native communities do not always realise the necessity of feeding the aged and the women and the children before they feed their own able-bodied, and it is chiefly for them that this government assistance is asked'; *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁴⁷¹ 20,000 pounds to assist an estimated 200,000 people in 1931 can be compared with the 200,000 pounds voted to support around 130,000 people in 1929 (see chapter 4).

time, the converse of their usual anti-scarcity strategy of ‘encouraging’ labour now applied: fewer people had access to rations provided by employers (and secured by the state), and there were more mouths to feed within the reserves. These were mouths of the poorer African men who, generally, would be forced to seek wage labour – people without significant land access or resources to tide them over times of scarcity. The problem, then, was not scarcity-linked inflation leading to an increase in the real cost of living, or the fact that wages had dropped sharply, but rather a shortage of work.⁴⁷² In fact, the evidence suggests that the urban cost of living decreased in the early 1930s (see figure 5.2). As such, there was no question of government price control, as in 1929. Besides, the wastage of public funds represented by the Food Control Board was a recent unpleasant memory, invoked by more than one Legco member as a principle of ‘worst practice’.⁴⁷³

These dynamics forced officials to modify aspects of their relief practices. Since ‘encouraging’ men to find work on settler estates was not a viable option, relief works took on increased importance.⁴⁷⁴ In 1931, officials could still use the argument that the people ‘are not destitute’, and that free issues of relief were only necessary for the poor and weak.⁴⁷⁵ But in the context of a severe economic trough, as well as a general drive for administrative economy, even this policy was contested by settler interests. In Legco, Lord Delamere – the political leader of the settler community – suggested that funds motivated for famine relief should rather be put towards loans to support struggling settler industries. This, he argued, would help alleviate scarcity by providing Africans with employment and cash income with which to buy food. Such an ‘indirect method’ of addressing famine would also maintain government revenue over the medium term.⁴⁷⁶ Most Legco members, however, supported the motion as proposed by the chief commissioner, and it was duly carried.

As economic depression wore on, officials would not radically change their anti-famine measures. There would be some minor adjustments in strategy, however. Take a second example, this time from early 1934, when a severe scarcity beset the coastal Digo and Kilifi districts. These areas had suffered from the cumulative effects of four years of drought. By the end of January 1934, in Digo District, the ‘short rains’ had failed, and locusts had reportedly ‘wiped out all the food in the hinterland without exception’.⁴⁷⁷ Of a total district population of around 31,000,

⁴⁷² Mackenzie notes that wages for unskilled labour in Kenya dropped sharply in the early 1930s, with those working on wheat farms and sisal plantations being worst affected; *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, p. 135. However, Cooper argues that despite wage reductions, the real income of Nairobi workers rose during the Depression; *African Waterfront*, p. 59. Iliffe also argues that real wages probably maintained their value during the same period in Southern Rhodesia and Tanganyika; *Famine in Zimbabwe*, p. 84; *Modern History*, pp. 352–3.

⁴⁷³ CPK, *KLC Deb 1931*, Vol. 1, 17 June, pp. 188–90.

⁴⁷⁴ An approach centred on organizing public relief works (for the able-bodied), with free issues made only to ‘old men and women and others unable to support themselves’, was also taken during a 1931 famine in Gwembe, Northern Rhodesia; TNA: CO 795/55/6, Read, ‘Report on Famine Relief: Gwembe, 1931–32’, 1932, pp. 17–25.

⁴⁷⁵ CPK, *KLC Deb 1931*, Vol. 1, 17 June, p. 178.

⁴⁷⁶ Delamere ‘diplomatically’ suggested that such loans could be provided to support the sisal industry; *Ibid.*, p. 183. He would pass away within half a year.

⁴⁷⁷ CPK, *KLC Deb 1934*, Vol. 1, 15 February, p. 61.

nearly half migrated to the coastal strip in the hopes of securing food from the better crops available there, leaving around 17,000 to be provided for.⁴⁷⁸ Although less worse off, a small-scale famine had developed in Kilifi District, with deaths in the Mangea area north of Mombasa.⁴⁷⁹ In early February, an informal committee of local politicians, officials, farmers met and considered the best options for relief. These options included importing supplies and selling them for full payment, distributing them at subsidized rates, providing food on credit, or initiating road-building relief works where the hungry would be paid in kind. The problem with providing food on credit was that 'in a sense the native has no credit'. As such, 'he has not been able to pay his taxes properly in full for many years past'.⁴⁸⁰ The only viable option, then, was to organize relief works. Legco thus voted 3,000 pounds for these purposes, to be supplemented with LNC funds.⁴⁸¹ Although this amount represented almost one-third of Kenya's total estimated surplus for the year, few elected members contested the motion in any way.

1934 was also a terrible year for the Maasai. Over the course of the year, over 100,000 cattle died in the Kajiado area from the drought. Outbreaks of influenza and dysentery caused 'much mortality' among 'people already enfeebled by hunger and an unsuitable diet'.⁴⁸² Over 300 Maasai men reportedly left the district to find refuge among the Kikuyu, using their cattle for bridewealth payments – a reversal of the migratory trends seen during the 1920s. Moreover, the lack of demand and low prices for cattle meant that many Maasai struggled to secure cash to pay their taxes. Communities amassed large debts on taxes and others fees owed to the state.⁴⁸³

In such circumstances, remitting and reducing taxation emerged as one last-resort means to manage scarcity. It was not necessarily a new idea. Delaying tax collection to relieve the burden of drought and famine had been done as early as 1909 (see chapter 3). One letter-writer to the *East African Standard* had already suggested tax remission as potential redress for the damage wrought by locusts in Nyanza during 1931.⁴⁸⁴ The administration, however, was reluctant to cut a key remaining source of its already depleted revenue in this way. Officials did not remit taxes in Gusiiland, which experienced significant financial hardships (through depressed agricultural prices and locust damage) until at least 1935. There, tax rates remained at the same level charged in the late 1920s. The upshot was that collecting taxes became 'harder' and total collections dropped.⁴⁸⁵ Similar dynamics were seen in Fort Hall District. In fact, far from widespread remission, the lengths to which authorities went to collect tax in this period of hardship provoked 'profound discontent' amongst many Africans.⁴⁸⁶ By the end of 1934, however, the administration had started to relent, in special cases. At

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., p. 60.

⁴⁸² Watkins, *Jomo's Jailor*, p. 102.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ TNA: CO 533/392/15, Orchardson, 'Native Taxation', *East African Standard*, 22 August 1931.

⁴⁸⁵ Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, p. 94.

⁴⁸⁶ Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, p. 137.

that time, significant remission and reduction of taxation was deemed necessary for certain coastal areas and the Maasai District.⁴⁸⁷

Worries about over-taxation, coupled with the use of tax reduction as an anti-scarcity measure, formed part of a groundswell of interest and dispute over methods of direct taxation in the early 1930s.⁴⁸⁸ Across British Africa, colonial officials were searching for ways to compensate for decreased customs revenues through adjusted rates of direct tax. In Kenya, some argued strongly for a change from collecting hut and poll taxes to a system of income tax.⁴⁸⁹ Indeed, tax remission and reduction as a famine response reflected a wider emerging trend to see and use taxation to manage the welfare of the population. In other words, tax policy was emerging as one way to regulate the effects of colonial poverty.⁴⁹⁰

The colonial state's specific approach to addressing scarcity during the 1930s has to be set against two significant political trends of the decade. The first was the centralization of the state apparatus from its 'segmentary' forms of the 1920s.⁴⁹¹ As I will show in the following section, surviving the Depression was seen by officials to require an increase in both African and settler production. This, in turn, entailed an attempt to develop a 'corporatist' state apparatus as a means to cast cohesion over Kenya's profound internal social divisions, now laid barer by economic hardship. For officials, centralization of economic interest called for concentration of political interest.⁴⁹² The second trend entailed efforts to develop and 'modernize' local government, involving the strengthening of LNCs and settler district councils.⁴⁹³ During the 1930s, state anti-famine functions were increasingly caught up in the latter trend, as officials actively sought to 'decentralize' their fiscal and administrative responsibility to provide relief following the experiences of 1929–30.

⁴⁸⁷ CPK, *KLC Deb 1934*, Fourth Session, 20 November, p. 741.

⁴⁸⁸ Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, chapter 5; Tarus, 'Direct Taxation', chapter 1.

⁴⁸⁹ Lord Moyne's 1932 report on financial questions in Kenya argued that Africans had been taxed to or beyond their capacity; *Report by the Financial Commissioner on Certain Questions in Kenya*. The adoption of income taxation was an unequivocal recommendation of Sir Alan Pim's 1936 report on the financial position and system of taxation of Kenya; Pim, *Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into and Report on the Financial Position and System of Taxation of Kenya*.

⁴⁹⁰ Lord Moyne, for example, 'called for a lenient policy to exempt the old, the infirm and destitute' from the payment of taxes; Tarus, 'Direct Taxation', p. 7.

⁴⁹¹ Lonsdale describes the 'segmentation' of the Kenyan state in terms of both institutions and political conventions, involving attempts to sequester Kenya's interest groups by race and tribe, and to convert their internal divisions into competing 'claims upon different levels of the state'. The creation of LNCs, for example, was one means of circumscribing African ambitions around claims on local government; 'Depression', pp. 100–1.

⁴⁹² Lonsdale defines corporatism in Kenya as 'the attempt to coopt into state institutions the representatives of organized sectional interests which cut across the gross divisions of race and, if it should ever come to that, of class'. Governor Grigg was a particular enthusiast, and held a vision of Kenya run by practical, competent 'men of capacity' of all races rather than politicians likely to play on racial divisions in the country. In reality, corporatist efforts were hardly extended to Africans, and settler dominance remained clear for all to see; *Ibid.*, pp. 107–8, 115–18.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 129–30. On the rationale and implementation of local government reform at the time, see CPK, *Report of the Local Government Commission*, Vol. 1; also Stamp, 'Local Government'.

One can see how a 'decentralized' system of famine relief worked by considering the example of Baringo District in the early 1930s. Here local officials acted to supplement and control the functions of the commercial system during times of scarcity. Officers imported settler-grown maize as famine relief distributed through relief works or a 'subsidized barter' system. Price controls were enforced, and government retail outlets and reserve stocks were used to limit inflation.⁴⁹⁴ Most of these supplies were sourced from the KFA or directly from European farmers in Nakuru and Ravine districts.⁴⁹⁵ District administrators arranged the imports, occasionally signing contracts with producers to supply grain at fixed prices, and contracted transport companies to move the supplies.⁴⁹⁶ Similar trends were seen elsewhere. During 1935, food to the value of 50,000 pounds was imported into Kitui through the commercial system. This was paid for with African livestock, in turn exported through official channels.⁴⁹⁷ Here the KFA or private producers and traders, acting in concert with local officers, handled the distribution of relief – a function handled by the Native Affairs Department in 1929.

In Baringo, direct aid (in the form of officially-provided famine relief) appears to have been necessary only for relatively remote, under-serviced areas (such as the rugged 'Tugen fringe') that traders were unable or unwilling to supply.⁴⁹⁸ In fact, the commercial grain trade constituted a far greater source of food access than state relief. In the early 1930s, Baringo residents purchased around six times more food through commercial channels than the amount distributed under relief programmes. This commercial-centred system of grain imports was greatly stimulated and facilitated by the construction of roads, themselves often built as part of relief works. By the late 1920s, the travel time from Nakuru to the Baringo District headquarters at Kabarnet had been halved, from ten to five hours. Grain traders were thus able to traverse the district to an unprecedented extent.⁴⁹⁹

It is worth noting – for this will be an important factor in future years – that this kind of system provided a major market for settler-grown grain. Many large-scale settler farmers in Nakuru, who had lost their export market under the Depression, benefitted greatly from the trade in relief supplies to Baringo. As Little has noted, providing food to drought victims was 'good business' for some commercial producers and traders.⁵⁰⁰ Settler maize growers, supported by state subsidies, were able to out-compete African farmers, who in any case suffered restrictions on their produce sales to local Indian traders. These factors combined to disrupt local production and trade in Baringo, and contributed to the development of a food system that was highly dependent on maize imports.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁴ Little, *Elusive Granary*, pp. 43–4.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ O'Leary, 'Responses', p. 321.

⁴⁹⁸ For a similar situation in Southern Rhodesia, see Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, p. 87.

⁴⁹⁹ Little, *Elusive Granary*, p. 45.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 44.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 44–5.

The elaboration of more localized anti-scarcity systems was possible largely due to the decentralization of local revenue collection and expenditure in the form of the LNCs. Indeed, the early 1930s continued and intensified the trend for officials to rely on LNCs to bear some of the costs for relief measures (also see chapter 4). The amounts that individual councils allocated for these purposes varied according to their capacity to raise funds through local rates, which in turn reflected their proximity to marketing and employment opportunities.⁵⁰² In some cases, the amounts were substantial. In South Nyanza, for example, the LNC in the area worst affected by the 1931 scarcity handed over almost its entire surplus budget of 5,000 pounds to the district commissioner to help relieve distress. This, in turn, was supplemented by a vote of 2,350 pounds from the Kisii LNC.⁵⁰³ In 1934, the LNC in Digo set aside one-third of its available funds of 1,500 pounds, and was prepared to contribute more.⁵⁰⁴

Figure 5.3 indicates that, generally speaking, LNC expenditure on famine relief rose rapidly in the early 1930s and in some years compared favourably with spending on other key services. LNC budget votes could also be supplemented by treasury grants if they were considered inadequate.⁵⁰⁵ Generally, until the 1940s, LNC expenditure was capped with the idea that one-quarter of their funds should be kept as a famine reserve.⁵⁰⁶ Administrators, strapped by the 1930s drive for government austerity, thus sought to pass on the unpredictable financial burden of famine relief. At the same time, they looked to LNCs to take over greater responsibility and administrative authority for road construction as an anti-famine precaution.⁵⁰⁷ As I discuss below, they were increasingly prone to consider the state's anti-scarcity role as falling within the improvement and regulation of agricultural production and marketing, as a facet of economic development more generally.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰² Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, p. 174.

⁵⁰³ Officials used these funds to order 1,000 tons of maize: 500 from Kisumu and the remainder from the KFA office at Nakuru; CPK, *KLC Deb 1931*, Vol. 1, 17 June, p. 180.

⁵⁰⁴ CPK, *KLC Deb 1934*, Vol. 1, 15 February, p. 62. In Kitui, the local council's famine relief budget was over 1,700 pounds for famine relief in 1934, and over 20,000 pounds the following year. This money was used to supply food to those working on famine relief works such as roads and seed farms; O'Leary, 'Responses', p. 321.

⁵⁰⁵ For example, when famine threatened in Tharaka in April 1930, the LNC allocated 150 pounds towards relief. Administrative officers advised the governor decided to supplement this amount by a further monthly payment of 250 pounds, until crops were ready to be reaped; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 12 April 1930.

⁵⁰⁶ Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, p. 202n26.

⁵⁰⁷ TNA: CO 533/517/6, Rennie to MacDonald (letter), 15 February 1940.

⁵⁰⁸ This argument was made by Conway Harvey (elected member for Nyanza) as a response to the famine relief funds voted for coastal districts in 1934: 'I consider it is the duty of government to do everything humanly possible to concentrate on the production of foodstuffs and crops suitable to native agriculture in the various districts'; CPK, *KLC Deb 1934*, Vol. 1, 15 February, p. 63. It appears to have been a more general trend of settler political pressure. Later in the year A. C. Hoey blamed the consistent need for famine relief expenditure and tax remissions on the lack of a government policy for the economic development of the reserves, particularly around produce marketing; CPK, *KLC Deb 1934*, Fourth Session, 19 October, p. 615.

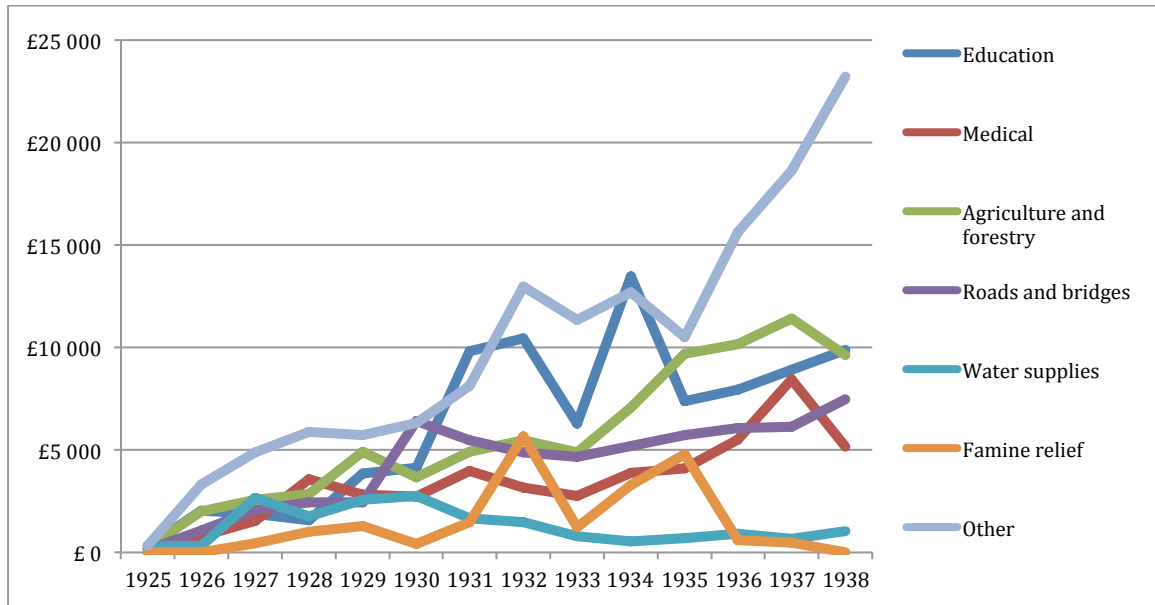


Figure 5.3. LNC Expenditure, Kenya, 1925–38 (1913 prices).

Source: Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, table 7.2.

Arguably, however, such trends represented more than an interest in decentralizing pecuniary functions. In addition to delegating financial responsibility, central officials also increasingly relied upon LNCs to inform and advise the government on the local food situation and the responses required in times of scarcity.⁵⁰⁹ A degree of political responsibility for famine could be decentralized in this way. Indeed, the 1930s also saw officials extend the powers of ‘native authorities’ within the system of famine relief (see chapter 3). This was expressed by the 1937 Native Authority Ordinance, which enabled provincial or district officials to direct local ‘headmen’ to issue orders in conjunction with the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance. These orders could include making people work on relief schemes or moving them to places where they could be fed. ‘Headmen’ could also enforce the cultivation of land and prevent food exports. They faced stiff penalties if they neglected to enforce any orders issued to them by administrative officials.⁵¹⁰

What one finds, then, is that the Depression of the early 1930s saw officials resort to ‘decentralized’ forms of state control over the financing and distribution of famine relief. This entailed relying on local administrators and LNCs to manage and finance relief functions, with the central state only providing support when local capacity was exhausted. It also meant continuing

⁵⁰⁹ For example, describing the steps taken to deal with famine conditions in Kitui District in early 1930, the governor wrote: ‘The possibility of a famine was first foreshadowed at a meeting of the Kitui Local Native Council on 23rd February... On May the 17th, the Local Native Council met again to discuss the situation resulting from the failure of the April rains over a great portion of the district, and on the advice of that body steps were taken in June through the Central Food Board and the Kenya Farmer’s Association to meet the shortage expected in July’; TNA: CO 533/392/15, Grigg to Passfield (letter), 12 April 1930.

⁵¹⁰ People disobeying an order from a ‘headman’ were liable for a fine of 30 shillings, while a disobedient ‘headman’ would face a maximum fine of 600 shillings or six months’ imprisonment; CPK, *Official Gazette*, 22 December 1936, pp. 1509–10.

to rely on, and indeed enhancing, the bureaucratized 'native authority' system of famine response.

While this localized relief system increasingly looked to the commercial market to supply and distribute food supplies, many if not most African people pursued other coping strategies during the years of depression. One strategy was to boost agricultural production to secure greater cash income. Anderson and Throup have characterized the African response to the Depression as 'aggressive', involving rapid expansion of maize acreages in order to compensate for the low profits realizable per unit.⁵¹¹ Women did most of this work.⁵¹² Moreover, the process of expansion was made possible and shaped by ongoing processes of African social differentiation: wealthier households were able to employ additional labour to rapidly expand plough cultivation of maize (often aided by male migrant labour remittances); poorer households could only expand production to a lesser extent, or mainly practised subsistence.⁵¹³ An intensified government programme of agricultural 'betterment' also facilitated this expansion. I will return to this point in the following section.

A different kind of coping strategy available to poorer households – one more survivalist than accumulative, and which largely bypassed official channels – was to rely on older patterns of migration and trade. In 1935, as much as a quarter of the Kamba population of Kitui District was estimated to have migrated to neighbouring districts to secure food. The majority of food supplies were sourced by people working, trading and bartering for food across the Tana River.⁵¹⁴ Kikuyu farmers traded significant amounts of maize with their hungry Kamba neighbours. Many of the former were once again in a position to benefit substantially from the drop in stock prices, and accumulated large animal herds.⁵¹⁵ The precipitous drop in livestock prices meant that vast numbers of animals had to be driven to markets and sold.⁵¹⁶ In the six months from June to December 1932, Kitui residents (officially) sold over 15,000 head of cattle.⁵¹⁷ The balance of these coping strategies would soon shift, however. From about 1935, reduced livestock herds coupled with a recovery of labour demand encouraged more Kamba people to seek urban employment. As a result, wage labour and cash trade would become more central to household subsistence strategies, particularly for those lacking land resources.

Overall, it seems that in Kenya 'famines that killed' became less common and severe towards the latter years of the 1930s. Why should this have been so? Better rainfall and the retreat of the worst of the locust swarms from 1934 onwards played a key role, just as improvements in medical services may have

⁵¹¹ Anderson, 'Depression', p. 325.

⁵¹² Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, pp. 140–2.

⁵¹³ Anderson and Throup, 'Agrarian Economy', pp. 21–2; Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, pp. 90–1.

⁵¹⁴ O'Leary, 'Responses', p. 321.

⁵¹⁵ Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, p. 140.

⁵¹⁶ Simiyu reports that the price of an ox fell from between 60 and 100 shillings to 10 shillings; that of a goat from 10 to two shillings; 'Land and Politics', p. 126.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*

reduced disease-related mortality in times of scarcity.⁵¹⁸ We can also look to biological and ecological factors. Dawson, for example, argues that the 1930s saw the achievement of a new 'ecological balance' between humans and their disease-causing parasites. This homeostatic relation was reached after an initial period of disruption driven by colonial policies and practices, including forest clearing and agricultural expansion.⁵¹⁹ Such natural explanations can be seen alongside the effects of an improved system of rail and road transport, that helped to detect and manage scarcities in a more responsive and effective manner, as we saw in the case of Baringo District, and in which improved means of transportation played a vital enabling role.⁵²⁰

A general reduction in the scale of famine mortality can be seen as a combination of all these factors. Regardless of causality, the evidence suggests that a different pattern of scarcity was emerging in Kenya by the end of the 1930s. Acute, localized famine in remote areas appeared to be ceding to more 'widespread and lingering scarcity' that affected remote regions as well as those areas experiencing more intensive pressure from European settlement.⁵²¹ As Iliffe notes of Southern Rhodesia, the cycles of dearth and abundance characteristic of earlier colonial times were giving way to a more geographically and temporally even distribution of food. However, reliance on cash purchases likely fostered a less equal *social* distribution, as those with fewer cash resources would be left more vulnerable to regular scarcities. Furthermore, it seems probable that scarcity was starting to take the form of endemic malnutrition, primarily affecting the poor and weak, rather than massive mortal famine.⁵²²

In this section, I have shown that the early 1930s – a time when economic depression was more acute in Kenya – saw considerable changes to the way that food shortages manifested. These, in turn, drove important shifts in state provision of relief. The techniques employed were not radically different from those seen previously. The effect of economic depression was rather to consolidate certain official understandings of the problem of scarcity. The dynamics of depression further helped to reframe food scarcity as being, in part, a matter of income and economic access, responses to which included remission and reduction of tax. Moreover, as I will show in the following section, it accelerated thinking around the need to improve and increase African agricultural production, including by extending state control over marketing, as a means to both boost incomes and secure food supplies.

⁵¹⁸ Iliffe argues, speaking of colonial Africa generally, that a reduction in famine mortality was due to factors such as the increased use of motor transport, the spread of anti-famine crops such as cassava, the prevalence of wage employment, as well as the development of colonial medical services (which separated dearth from mortality by controlling famine-related epidemic diseases such as smallpox); *Africans*, p. 247.

⁵¹⁹ For example, the incidence of bubonic plague in the Kikuyu reserves lessened as a new balance was reached among the (plague-carrying) wild rodent population. This corrected the advantage these animals had gained during the initial period of colonial agricultural development; Dawson, 'Health, Nutrition', p. 211.

⁵²⁰ Munro, *Colonial Rule*, pp. 191–2.

⁵²¹ Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, p. 88.

⁵²² Iliffe, *Africans*, p. 247. For a discussion of this trend in Southern Rhodesia during the Depression years, see Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, chapter 8.

5.2 Production and marketing policy

As a result of the adverse economic and environmental conditions described in the previous section, in the 1930s anti-scarcity thought and practice was increasingly tied up with the politics of agriculture and marketing in Kenya. There were two main aspects to this. The first was a continuation and intensification of state efforts towards the 'betterment' of African production (discussed in chapter 4). Officials devoted more attention to altering the practice and substance of African agriculture to help manage the risk of food scarcity. This typically involved encouraging African farmers to plant a greater variety of crops, as well as 'improved' varieties of each.⁵²³ More widespread cultivation of drought-resistant and higher-yielding crops would mean more food being available locally, thereby increasing the chances of household and district self-sufficiency. For these purposes, the early 1930s saw the Kenyan agricultural department initiate a programme to select and breed crop varieties suitable to African conditions.⁵²⁴ In Fort Hall, the efforts of agricultural officers came to rest on issuing large quantities of seed for 'flat white' and quickly-maturing maize varieties to noteworthy individuals or 'progressive farmers'.⁵²⁵ Officials continued to try to 'improve' African agricultural methods through an invigorated programme of rural education and practical instruction.⁵²⁶ The agricultural department also set about attempting to calculate the potential for expanded cash crop cultivation in the reserves, while keeping an eye trained on the need to maintain food sufficiency.⁵²⁷ So, the early 1930s saw the previous decade's policy of agricultural 'betterment' being consolidated and extended, with an explicit anti-scarcity motivation.

However, and secondly, other fundamental changes in economic and agricultural policy were afoot. In the midst of economic depression, many African colonial governments, including that of Kenya, urgently had to rebalance their treasury revenues. By November 1934, for example, the revised estimates of government revenue indicated that Kenya was facing a budget deficit for the sixth straight year. This was due both to a shortfall in revenue resulting from drought and successive harvest failures, as well as to emergency expenditure on famine relief and anti-locust campaigns.⁵²⁸ At the same time, the state faced growing settler demands for support and protection, particularly as export prices for staple commodities such as maize and wheat dropped below their domestic market value. Administrators had to devise mechanisms of support that moved beyond

⁵²³ Other official strategies included: planting drought-resistant crops such as *muhogo* (cassava); planting a greater diversity of crops, (e.g. potatoes, beans, peas and other pulses, legumes, sorghums and roots besides staple cereals); planting quickly-maturing crops or quickly-maturing varieties of staple crops; and planting tree crops; TNA: CO 533/517/6, Rennie to MacDonald (letter), 15 February 1940.

⁵²⁴ Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, p. 62.

⁵²⁵ Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, pp. 137, 140.

⁵²⁶ Again in Fort Hall, the number of African agricultural instructors increased from 12 in 1933 to 36 in 1936, with the LNC covering all the costs of employment by the latter date; *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁵²⁷ Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', p. 330.

⁵²⁸ CPK, *KLC Deb 1934*, Fourth Session, 20 November, p. 742.

protective customs tariffs.⁵²⁹ As discussed above, tax reform was a potential way to boost government revenue while providing relief from poverty. Yet supporting settler farmers, particularly cereal growers, was a different matter.

One means was to directly support farmers via statutory marketing boards. A Maize Control Board had been established in Southern Rhodesia in 1931; another was founded in Northern Rhodesia soon after.⁵³⁰ These had various purposes. Nominally, they sought to stabilize the food supply of towns and mines.⁵³¹ Doing so apparently depended on providing guaranteed minimum prices to producers, using profits from better years to compensate for harder times.⁵³² Farmers so insulated from price fluctuations on the global market would, so the argument went, maintain their levels of cereal production at a consistent and adequate level. This required controlling who could make bulk purchases of maize, to prevent some producers and traders from undercutting the system.⁵³³ Stabilization also required pooling of all marketed maize, so that all producers could take a proportionate share of low export prices as well as higher domestic prices. In reality, however, these boards acted as a means to guarantee a market for settler farmers, and to cross-subsidize their production. In Northern Rhodesia, for example, the Maize Control Board was established in 1936 to allow settler producers to secure a section of the domestic market at a time of low export prices and concerns over possible over-production.⁵³⁴ By enforcing a dual pricing scheme for white and African growers, or imposing levies on locally sold goods, these boards attempted to ensure that the costs of subsidizing settler farmers would be passed on to African producers and consumers, rather than borne by the state.⁵³⁵

Similarly, settler farmers in Kenya pushed for state assistance when the ravages of global economic depression started to be felt. Protecting the Kenyan wheat industry was a relatively simple matter, as wheat was a crop produced by a small number of farmers and consumed mainly by immigrant communities. As such, the 1930 Sale of Wheat Ordinance established a Wheat Advisory Board, with the KFA appointed as sole agent for local produce plus imports.⁵³⁶ Settler maize growers, again through the KFA, also pressed for support. In response, the government, railway and harbours granted a reduction on freight and storage charges for maize exports in 1930. In the same year, the state paid a subsidy of 81,000 pounds to the maize industry.⁵³⁷ More generally, a central Agricultural

⁵²⁹ The heavy import tariffs that Kenyan authorities introduced on imported goods in the early 1920s were an important source of treasury income. Falling revenue from imports in the 1920s and 1930s indicated that the tariffs were indeed curbing imports. This limited the scope for further tariff protection. See Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, pp. 79–80.

⁵³⁰ The Northern Rhodesian Maize Control Board was established in 1936; Makings, 'Agricultural Change', p. 200; Vickery, 'Saving Settlers', p. 228.

⁵³¹ McCann, *Maize and Grace*, p. 147.

⁵³² Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, p. 81.

⁵³³ McCann, *Maize and Grace*, p. 147.

⁵³⁴ Baldwin, *Economic Development*, p. 155; Rimmer, 'Economic Imprint', pp. 150, 152.

⁵³⁵ McCann, *Maize and Grace*, p. 148.

⁵³⁶ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 168; Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, p. 204.

⁵³⁷ CPK, *Annual Report for 1930*, p. 7. Subsidies to a total value of 143,000 pounds were provided in 1931–32; Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 169.

Advances Board was established in 1930 to assist poorer settlers without sufficient access to credit to help repay their mortgages. A Land Bank was also formed to provide long-term credit to settler estates at well below prevailing commercial credit rates.⁵³⁸ It was hoped to use this lending as a basis to pursue a programme of agricultural diversification. Monoculture maize farms (practising what by now was pejoratively termed 'maize-mining', and largely decimated by economic depression) would be reformed in the direction of 'mixed farming'.⁵³⁹ Unfortunately for the farmers, the Bank spent nearly all of its capital on buying out settler mortgage debt; scarcely anything remained to implement the comforting dream of mixed farming.⁵⁴⁰

These forms of support would not suffice as the Depression ground on. The KFA sought longer-term solutions targeting maize growers. In particular, they wanted to ensure higher prices for settler maize, which in turn meant securing control over the better-priced domestic market.⁵⁴¹ They proposed several plans for state maize control, each of which was rebuffed – but not due to official opposition. In 1933, the KFA submitted a scheme, similar to the Southern Rhodesian system, whereby all settler and African maize would be directed to a central pool.⁵⁴² Exporting some of this pool, then sharing out the losses, would sustain high internal prices. Another effort was made in 1936, when a draft Maize Control Bill was introduced to Legco. This Bill was justified by three principles: One, that the only maize exported would be that surplus to the colony's internal requirements. Two, that all growers should share the 'burden' of export. And three, that controls to maintain a high internal maize price were necessary due to unpredictable marketing behaviour of African maize farmers.⁵⁴³ During the 1920s, the KFA had effectively excluded African producers from the relatively lucrative export market. Now that export prices had fallen well below domestic rates, they courted the internal market and wanted Africans to share 'the burden of export'.⁵⁴⁴

However, a central maize control board would not be established in Kenya until 1942 (discussed in chapter 6). In large part this was due to political factors, or, more accurately, to conflicts between different factions of settler capital. 'Consuming interests' such as Kenyan sisal and coffee growers (in addition to urban consumers more generally) still commanded considerable economic and political clout. Planters contributed a greater share of Kenyan trade than did maize farmers, and their costs of labour (which included maize rations) were a key determinant of their profitability.⁵⁴⁵ Essentially, the schemes put forward by the KFA rested on the argument that African maize growers would be unable to satisfy the colony's domestic demand. Settler maize was therefore presented as an 'essential' industry deserving of 'a national effort to assist it and safeguard its

⁵³⁸ However, many settlers were already so embroiled in debt that they were unable to provide sufficient security to secure loans from the Bank; *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁵³⁹ Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, p. 57.

⁵⁴⁰ Lonsdale, 'Depression', pp. 105–6.

⁵⁴¹ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, pp. 169–70.

⁵⁴² Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, p. 211.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁴ Memon, 'Marketing', p. 213; Mosley, *Settler Economies*, p. 47.

⁵⁴⁵ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 106.

interests'.⁵⁴⁶ This was necessary both to prevent famine (as the key African staple) and sustain other important local industries. Consumers, however, feared that a greater export surplus (stimulated by subsidies or the prospect of higher domestic prices) would have to be compensated for by pushing up domestic prices even further. The KFA could not settle the case that a higher supply price was justified, or that consuming interests would be sufficiently compensated through exemptions or concessions, as ultimately had been a necessary condition of maize control in Southern Rhodesia. Plantation lobbies mobilized against any measure that could possibly raise the price of food staples and hence their production costs (see chapter 4). After all, they had also suffered a sharp drop in export earnings after 1929 (see figure 5.4). Officials were unable to bridge the divide, and this opposition seems to have been responsible for the withdrawal of the 1936 Maize Control Bill.⁵⁴⁷ As a result, the KFA was unable to control the internal maize market – a necessary step to securing higher domestic prices.⁵⁴⁸ Maize was thus one crucial failure of the Kenyan state's Depression-era strategy of corporatism.⁵⁴⁹

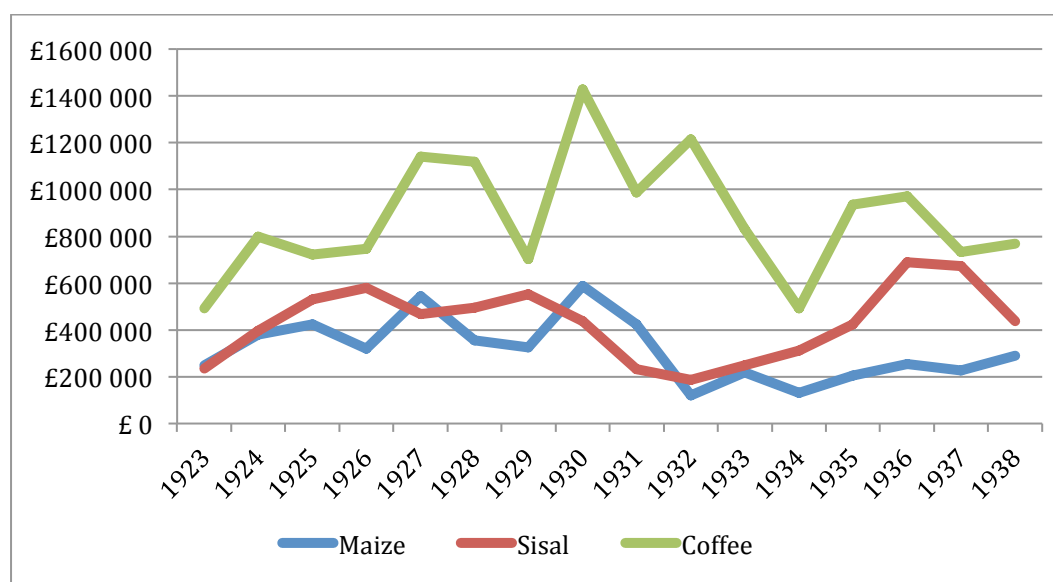


Figure 5.4. Settler Export Earnings for Key Crops, Kenya, 1923–38.

Source: Anderson and Throup, 'Agrarian Economy', appendix 1

The problem for the Kenyan government was broadly as follows. On one hand, officials had to fend off a powerful and increasingly radical bloc of non-creditworthy settler farmers who blamed a prodigal and incompetent government for their woes.⁵⁵⁰ Unlike its more southern counterparts, Kenya

⁵⁴⁶ The quote is from the 1935 interim report of the Agricultural Indebtedness Committee, cited in Willan et al., *Report of the Food Shortage Commission of Enquiry* (hereafter *Report*), p. 9; also see p. 46.

⁵⁴⁷ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 170; Mosley, *Settler Economies*, pp. 47–50; Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, pp. 211–12. Gardner notes the Kenya Coffee Board's opposition to proposals for a minimum maize price. The Colonial Office agreed that sacrificing the coffee trade would be of greater loss to the colony than the maize export industry; *Taxing Colonial Africa*, p. 82.

⁵⁴⁸ Mosley, *Settler Economies*, pp. 47–50.

⁵⁴⁹ Lonsdale, 'Depression', pp. 110–1.

⁵⁵⁰ Nicholls, *Red Strangers*, p. 187.

lacked the mineral industry and wealth that could potentially shoulder the costs of agricultural subsidy and protection. Only the state could carry that burden.⁵⁵¹ But, ridden with debt, it had few (if any) surplus funds to devote to propping up floundering settler farmers. Even if administrators had access to the capital, there was no guarantee that this assistance would be successful or repayable. Nor was the necessary degree of political will assured.⁵⁵² Nevertheless, through credit provided by the Land Bank, the state now had a vested interest in maintaining settler land values through increased production.⁵⁵³ Statutory maize control might have offered a solution to this dilemma, but all proposals seemed doomed in the face of Kenya's political and economic factionalism.

On the other hand, Africans had few employment opportunities to earn cash income. This not only left people vulnerable to scarcities (by removing the food entitlements of wage labour), but also undermined state revenue in a cyclical manner.⁵⁵⁴ It threatened the entire fiscal basis of the colony, as around half of all African tax revenue was used to subsidize settler industries.⁵⁵⁵ Meanwhile, the rapidly decreasing demand for labour on settler estates undermined the strength of arguments against encouraging African commercial production.⁵⁵⁶ In any case, from some officials it was already becoming clear that African producers were weathering the Depression more successfully than settlers, and therefore deserved greater support.⁵⁵⁷

As such, something that both settler maize producers and officials could agree on was a strategy of boosting African production for export. For settler producers, this would open up part of the more lucrative (and politically malleable) domestic market, enabling them to export more economically, sharing any losses with African farmers. For the state, expanded production would offset low export

⁵⁵¹ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 105.

⁵⁵² Ibid., also p. 108. Speaking of the government support that had been given to the maize industry up to the end of 1932, Governor Sir Joseph Byrne stated in Legco: 'The view may also be advanced as to whether it would be right or economically sound to continue to make further grants to the maize industry, having regard to the Colony's depleted financial resources, the absence of any assurance that the money advanced would be repaid within a reasonable time, and the likelihood that such a policy of assistance would not be confined to the present crop'; CPK, *KLC Deb 1932*, 14 December, p. 310. When contrasted with settler demands, Byrne took a somewhat 'laissez-faire' view of the country's agricultural crisis. Indeed, perceptions of his incompetence, his hard-line stance against settler politics, his reluctance to support white farmers, as well as his favour for the imposition of income tax, earned him significant notoriety among Kenya's white population; Nicholls, *Red Strangers*, p. 187; Lonsdale, 'Depression', pp. 106–7.

⁵⁵³ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 112.

⁵⁵⁴ Not only might the unemployed not be able to pay taxes, but their increased vulnerability to scarcity might make tax remissions and reductions, or even relief expenditure, more common and necessary. So there was a 'vicious cycle' of scarcity and revenue reduction.

⁵⁵⁵ Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', p. 329.

⁵⁵⁶ Swainson, *Corporate Capitalism*, p. 35.

⁵⁵⁷ This notion was based 'on the grounds that [Africans'] lower costs of production would allow them to cope better with falling export prices'; Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, pp. 82–3; also Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', p. 329; Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 106.

prices and compensate for their falling customs revenue.⁵⁵⁸ Administrators could either spend this income directly or, indirectly, use it to borrow capital and support settler farmers through the Land Bank.⁵⁵⁹ Unlike in Southern Rhodesia, then, Kenyan officials 'intervened to prevent the destruction of the peasant option' as the basis for economic solvency.⁵⁶⁰ A comprehensive agrarian strategy emerged as a necessity and compromise: both settler and African production would be maximized. Combined production was the only way Kenyan goods could be exported competitively; it was the only means to fill the freight carriages and coffers of the railway. But the problem also required a delicate touch. African production would have to be released onto the export market, but in a restrained way, so that it 'floated settler production rather than swamped it'.⁵⁶¹ The key means to do so was a strategy familiar to many other colonial African contexts: 'organized marketing'.⁵⁶²

Increasing African production for export was the primary objective of the 1935 Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance. Based on similar legislation from Uganda and Tanganyika,⁵⁶³ the Bill was originally gazetted in 1934.⁵⁶⁴ However, it suffered delays as the result of concerted opposition launched by Indian interests, who feared that it expressed a settler motive to squeeze small traders out of the economy, as well as Indians from the country more generally.⁵⁶⁵ In fact, interest in controlling and facilitating the marketing of produce from the African reserves long predated the Bill, stretching back to the early 1920s, but successive efforts by unofficial Legco members to push for a concerted state policy on the matter had proven fruitless.⁵⁶⁶ In some respects, the Ordinance was an elaboration of earlier efforts seeking to facilitate agricultural cooperation, centralize markets, license traders, as well as extend and make compulsory a system of crop inspection and grading.⁵⁶⁷ But it also went further than previous

⁵⁵⁸ For the same reasons, the logic and objective of increasing African production was also adopted in Tanganyika during the early years of the Depression; Fourshey, 'Maize', p. 237; Iliffe, *Modern History*, p. 349.

⁵⁵⁹ Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, p. 60.

⁵⁶⁰ Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', p. 329.

⁵⁶¹ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 110.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 107–8.

⁵⁶³ The Ugandan precedent was the 1932 Native Produce Marketing Ordinance. Jørgensen argues that it was designed to protect established (predominantly Asian) traders from the competition of smaller-scale (mainly African) traders; *Structural Dependence*, p. 165n107. Van Zwanenberg and King, by contrast, argue that in Uganda, as in Kenya, 'part of the scheme was to offer European traders privileged trading positions in order to oust the Asians and Africans from an area where they had the monopoly'; *Economic History*, p. 212.

⁵⁶⁴ CPK, *Official Gazette*, 10 July 1934, pp. 893–99.

⁵⁶⁵ See the opposition presented to the Bill in Legco by Indian elected members Shams-ud-Deen and J. B. Pandya; CPK, *KLC Deb 1935*, Vol. 1, 3 July, pp. 183–215; 8 July 1935, pp. 223–29. The Government of India commissioned a study into the effects of the proposed legislation, and made repeated representations to the India Office to express their concern; see TNA: CO 533/447/3 and CO 852/12/2, both *passim*. The fears of Kenyan Indians were justified to an extent. White elected members did not hide their animosity towards 'unscrupulous' Indian traders. J. G. Kirkwood, for example, claimed that they 'have been exploiting the natives ever since they have traded among them'; CPK, *KLC Deb 1935*, Vol. 1, 8 July, p. 238.

⁵⁶⁶ See the historical summary of African produce marketing as an issue presented to Legco by H. F. Ward (Nairobi North); CPK, *KLC Deb 1932*, 9 May, pp. 101–2, 104.

⁵⁶⁷ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 109; Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*, p. 88.

efforts: it was more comprehensive, in principle covering any sort of African produce, and provided for a wider range of controls and regulations.⁵⁶⁸

What did this Ordinance seek to do? The main argument, presented in Legco by the acting chief native commissioner, was summarized as follows: Improved methods of marketing would boost production, raise rural income levels (and with them tax and customs revenues), facilitate trade, and in turn help to 'promote the general welfare of Kenya'.⁵⁶⁹ Although not explicitly stated, officials also hoped that higher incomes would create an African market for highly-priced foods produced by settlers, such as wheat, butter and cheese.⁵⁷⁰ 'Organization', the acting commissioner stated with the authority of someone reciting a truism, was 'a vital need for every trading and producing interest'. It was a need that had been met in other British colonies and, in Kenya, by settler industries. Yet Africans lacked access to the education, 'time-honoured commercial traditions' and business experience (enjoyed by Europeans) to organize themselves properly. As such, assisting Africans to market their produce was a 'duty which the government can no longer neglect'.⁵⁷¹ Settlers would have to organize and save themselves 'industry by industry'. Africans, by contrast, 'had to be organized by the state for its own salvation'.⁵⁷²

More specifically, the 1935 Ordinance sought to *stabilize* and *centralize* production and trade. Stabilizing producer incomes, firstly, was necessary to ensure a stable output of goods for export. This required something of a balancing act. Producer prices had to be high enough to incentivize the production of more and better quality goods. But prices should not be too high so as to make exporting economically unviable. In short, African farmers should receive a 'fair deal' for their produce. 'Fair' meant being paid in cash, and according to quality (at rates determined relative to the costs of transport and prices ruling in global markets).⁵⁷³ At the same time, produce would have to satisfy certain quality standards to gain the confidence of overseas consumers.⁵⁷⁴ These objectives called for two things. The first was a system of restriction, control and inspection over the buying of produce, in particular to eliminate bartering, predatory trading, 'cheating' practices (such as short weighing), and inadequate packaging. The second was a means to circumvent the 'cut-throat competition' of small-scale dealers, and to put trade exclusively in the hands of large produce dealers with access to capital and 'knowledge' of markets.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁶⁸ CPK, *Official Gazette*, 10 July 1934, p. 893.

⁵⁶⁹ (S. H. La Fontaine) CPK, *KLC Deb 1935*, Vol. 1, 2 July, p. 179

⁵⁷⁰ Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, pp. 60–1.

⁵⁷¹ CPK, *KLC Deb 1935*, Vol. 1, 2 July 1935, p. 174. The Director of Agriculture H. B. Waters later echoed this interpretation of public responsibility: 'Government would be lacking in its duty if it failed to take the necessary steps to ensure that the native gets the highest possible price for the produce he is advised to produce, a result which can be achieved only by organized marketing'; CPK, *KLC Deb 1935*, Vol. 1, 8 July, p. 255.

⁵⁷² Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 108.

⁵⁷³ CPK, *KLC Deb 1935*, Vol. 1, 2 July, p. 170.

⁵⁷⁴ TNA: CO 852/12/2, acting governor's deputy to Cunliffe-Lister (letter), 18 May 1935.

⁵⁷⁵ As H. Harragin, the attorney general, explained: Excessive and aggressive competition between traders increased producer prices to an unwarranted extent, thereby nullifying 'the prospects of making the produce a paying concern, which is the only way that you build up an export market'; CPK, *KLC Deb 1935*, Vol. 1, 2 July, p. 170. The acting chief native commissioner

How should this be done? The Ordinance basically operated through three main logics, each of which entailed spatial elements. First, it *enclosed* trade. Echoing the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance, it granted the governor the power to declare areas (administrative districts or parts thereof) in which the purchase and sale of African produce should be controlled and regulated. Second, it *concentrated* commercial activity. Granting exclusive licences and controlling the establishment and operation of produce markets would serve to reduce both the total number of selling points and the number of traders. These effects were seen as advantageous.⁵⁷⁶ Spatial concentration also facilitated government inspection and lowered handling and transport costs. Third, it *separated* the retail and produce trade in markets and trading centres, thereby isolating African farmers from the financial precarity of ‘the small retail shopkeeper’.⁵⁷⁷ In these ways, the market was recreated as a particular kind of governable space.

What were the Ordinance’s effects? Firstly, setting aside the inevitable financial exclusion and hardships of many small-scale traders, it appears that it did indeed help to stimulate African agriculture via enhanced producer prices.⁵⁷⁸ Prices paid to farmers in Nyanza jumped from less than two shillings per bag in 1935 to between five and seven shillings from 1937 to 1940. There, the volume of maize rose by threefold over the course of the decade.⁵⁷⁹ Land values and trade in agricultural implements rose in conjunction.⁵⁸⁰ More and more African farmers were earning cash incomes from their produce – particularly those located near marketing facilities. Before the end of the decade, it could be said of the Vihiga area of western Kenya that ‘the sale of maize in colonial markets characterized the experience of the majority of households’.⁵⁸¹ So, for more households subsistence was a matter of balancing cash income with expenditure. Secondly, the centralization and concentration of the marketing system opened the door

elaborated: There were too many traders in African produce than that ‘justified by the economic circumstances of the reserves and by the amount of available trade’, so the Bill sought to ‘restrict the number of such licences to an economic level’; *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁵⁷⁶ The vision of trade and wealth expressed by the Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance was that of a zero-sum game: there was a limit to the total wealth obtainable in the territory. Higher numbers of traders would reduce the total profit to be made from a crop. Higher producer prices would have to be compensated for by an increase in the cost of retail goods. There was no sense of small-scale traders as producing wealth. This reflected a widespread observance (by settlers and officials) of a modified physiocratic or Ricardian doctrine ‘that land was the source of all value’. As noted by Lonsdale: ‘They thought that production was best increased by investing the surplus retained by farmers and the state rather than through the redistributed profits of trade’; ‘Depression’, pp. 108–9. However, many if not most did not strictly observe the physiocratic doctrine that ‘freedom of commerce and of the circulation of grain’ should be ‘the fundamental principle of economic government’; Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 33.

⁵⁷⁷ TNA: CO 852/12/2, acting governor’s deputy to Cunliffe-Lister (letter), 18 May 1935; CPK, *KLC Deb 1935*, Vol. 1, 2 July, p. 177. A significant proportion of the trade in African produce was conducted by Indian dealers performing a dual role of retailer and produce merchant. Government officials saw this as encouraging barter and unfair prices paid for produce; Memon, ‘Marketing’, p. 205

⁵⁷⁸ Anderson and Throup, ‘Myth’, p. 329; Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 170; Lonsdale, ‘Depression’, p. 111.

⁵⁷⁹ Lonsdale, ‘Depression’, pp. 111–12.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁵⁸¹ Maxon, ‘Fantastic Prices’, p. 30.

for large, established firms and cooperatives (including the KFA) to buy in the reserves and gain control over a larger proportion of the African maize market.⁵⁸² By 1941, the KFA handled around 60 per cent of the total marketed output of African maize.⁵⁸³ This did not, however, result in a significant increase in the internal maize price for settlers. Settlers were indeed swamped, rather than floated, by African production. Domestic prices and planted acreages of settler maize continued to decrease through the 1930s.⁵⁸⁴

Even if the system of inspection implied by the Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance was never completely realised due to a lack of state resources and widespread evasion by producers and wholesalers through parallel markets,⁵⁸⁵ the extension of marketing control it facilitated would be critical for later efforts to implement statutory maize control. African traders and farmers were able to organize themselves and develop commercial and political links.⁵⁸⁶ The centralization of commercial activity encouraged urban primacy and polarization within the Kenyan space-economy.⁵⁸⁷ The marketing legislation thus helped to consolidate the spatial and institutional nature of the Kenyan food market. Under its provisions, more supplies tended to pass through centralized channels of commerce and government, just as more people were starting to depend on this market for their food access.

How did this marketing legislation specifically relate to the problem of food scarcity? At this point, the link was not necessarily explicit. Averting or alleviating scarcity was not used as a major argument for marketing reforms. There was a relation, however, and this will become clearer during the Second World War (see chapter 6). Essentially, marketing legislation represented the consolidation of a rationale that sought to ensure the production of an

⁵⁸² Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*, p. 88. Whether assisting the KFA to monopolize the domestic market, given its troubles in securing statutory maize control, was part of the official intention behind the Ordinance is unclear. Many studies depict the Ordinance as a deliberate state effort to legalize a KFA monopoly and exclude either Indians or Africans (or both) from commercial trade. For example: Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 170; Ndege, 'Internal Trade', p. 214; Cheru, 'External Dependence', p. 38. Others have seen the Ordinance as part of a wider strategy to rescue settler agriculture, without a direct monopolistic objective. See Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, pp. 60–1; Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 111; Van Zwanenberg and King; *Economic History*, p. 212. However, the actual motivations given for the Ordinance suggest that increasing African production and income was equally a motivation, if not greater, than restricting trade. Restriction of competition and centralization of trade were part of the general official rationale of how wealth was generated and distributed.

⁵⁸³ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 111; In Fort Hall District, the KFA took over operation of the LNC warehouse facilities from a private company in 1936; Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, p. 135.

⁵⁸⁴ Spencer, 'Settler Dominance', p. 505; Willan et al., *Report*, p. 67. Kitching argues that this failure was due to the KFA lacking the capital and capacity to secure enough physical possession of maize stocks in order to lift prices; *Class and Economic Change*, p. 61. Lonsdale sees it as a result of the intense degree of competition between the KFA and Indian traders (meaning smaller white farmers could not compete with Africans) coupled with the rapid growth of African production; 'Depression', p. 112.

⁵⁸⁵ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 170; Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, pp. 60–1; Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*, pp. 88–9.

⁵⁸⁶ Lonsdale, 'Depression', pp. 111–12.

⁵⁸⁷ Memon, 'Marketing', pp. 215–6. The quote is from Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 109.

‘exportable surplus’ of maize as insurance against internal food shortages. In other words, we see a logic whereby, in the event of a local shortage, the KFA or large firms would be able to divert supplies from the export market to the domestic market. This strategy had already been employed in the 1920s, particularly during the 1929–30 famine (see chapter 4). But it became more attractive during the Depression, when domestic prices were considerably higher than international rates. Officials saw state intervention as necessary to guarantee this exportable surplus – one that must not be too large (because, if so, either producers will have to take a greater share of the ‘burden of export’, or domestic prices will rise), but equally it should not be too small (otherwise imports might be necessary). So a balance needed to be performed: total maize production had to fall within a ‘Goldilocks zone’.

With this kind of rationale and system, then, one can note at least three factors. One, the system consolidated the position of maize as the Kenya’s chief staple – the principal measure of the safety of the colony’s food supply. Two, it represented a more calculative approach to food self-sufficiency. Balancing food production and supply between the margins of domestic demand and exportable reserve required statistics and ‘definite figures’ on which to assess the food situation, and a set of techniques to help to meet that assessment with accuracy. Failure to do so could spell human or fiscal catastrophe. And three, it invoked a figure of the African farmer as an *economic subject*. Far from the stubborn incorrigible for whom compulsion was a necessary evil, as seen in chapter 3, one now finds a subject constituted of (and governable through) desires, incentives and motivations. In fact, part of the argument in favour of the Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance was its potential to ‘have a definite psychological effect on the native producers’.⁵⁸⁸ What was this desired effect? Ultimately, it consisted of instigating a capacity for autonomous choice on the market, driven by price and income incentives – a capacity that could be calculated and predicted.⁵⁸⁹ However, as I will show, this vision of the African-as-economic subject would remain circumscribed in all sorts of ways.

5.3 Scarcity, soil and population

The trends discussed previously in this chapter helped to undermine arguments that ‘idle’ Africans bore responsibility for their own hunger and suffering. Complaints about African unwillingness to work in times of famine became less common, not least because the option of work was seldom available even if it was desired.⁵⁹⁰ Instead, these complaints would increasingly be directed towards African agricultural and land management practices. In the 1930s, in the midst of increasingly politicized concerns over soil degradation and population pressure, the threat of scarcity became a rhetorical tool used to justify settler

⁵⁸⁸ (Director of agriculture) CPK, *KLC Deb 1935*, Vol. 1, 8 July, p. 255. Sir Frank Stockdale later praised the Ordinance’s benefits for progressing the ‘economic outlook’ of many Africans; TNA: CAB 58/202, *Report by Frank Stockdale on His Visit to East Africa January–March 1937*, pp. 73–4.

⁵⁸⁹ Jones, ‘Economic Man’, p. 107

⁵⁹⁰ This trend was also notable in Southern Rhodesia during the 1930s; Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, p. 84.

land claims and to extend state control over the African reserves. In this section, I discuss precisely how the problems of food, soil and population intersected – the role scarcity played in highlighting these issues and justifying intervention, and how the problem of food scarcity was transformed as a result.

In the 1920s, as shown in chapter 4, the problem of scarcity was linked to those of soil degradation and population through the specific issue of overstocking, as it manifested in particular reserves. For colonial officials such as W. Ormsby-Gore, chair of the East Africa Commission in the mid-1920s, the problem was that overstocking increased the likelihood and effects of food scarcity, and thereby *limited* population growth. Population growth was an objective of colonial policy – a guarantee for the labour supply of European industries.⁵⁹¹ At the time, officials had started to think about systemic solutions to the problems of underpopulation, labour and welfare: for example, destocking or grazing improvement programmes that would simultaneously raise human and animal nutrition, increase fertility and life expectancy, conserve the soil, and satisfy growing market demand for animal products. So, there was a connection between the problems of overstocking, soil, food and population. This relation represented a modified Malthusianism: scarcity of land, fertile topsoil and food acted as a check on *desirable* population growth. To some extent, this perspective had started to replace an earlier attitude that saw population pressure as not necessarily being negative, in the sense that it might force Africans to progressively adopt better agricultural techniques.⁵⁹²

In the early 1930s, overstocking and soil degradation would emerge as even more concerted political issues. This was partly because the droughts and famines of the late 1920s and early 1930s focused official attention on environmental crises, aggravating concerns that the entire East African region might be becoming progressively and permanently more arid.⁵⁹³ Moreover, the food shortages of the early 1930s laid bare the links between the collapse of the estate economy and food scarcity in former labour-exporting reserves. They introduced a notion of *surplus* human population to the problem of scarcity.

The problems of overstocking, soil degradation and population pressure were brought into direct communication around the central political issue of land. This link was demonstrated in the 1934 report of the Kenya Land Commission.⁵⁹⁴ The Commission both challenged Kenya's settlers to justify their holdings in the territory, and presented them with an opportunity to entrench that position.⁵⁹⁵ Settlers responded by rallying under the flag of soil conservation. They presented African land husbandry practices as exploitative,

⁵⁹¹ On African underpopulation as a major concern of interwar colonial policy, and the later shift towards overpopulation, see Ittmann, 'Where Nature Dominates Man'.

⁵⁹² John Ainsworth and D. Storrs Fox (a district officer at Machakos) were two Kenyan officials who considered that restrictions on grazing areas were justified so that Africans would be 'practically compelled to take to mixed agriculture', abandoning pastoralism and generally making 'the most effective use of the land they already occupied'; Spencer, 'Pastoralism', pp. 114, 133.

⁵⁹³ Anderson, 'Depression', pp. 331-3.

⁵⁹⁴ Dörnemann, 'Seeing Population', p. 204.

⁵⁹⁵ Anderson, 'Depression', p. 323.

driving soil degradation not only in the reserves, but also potentially in settled areas via the large contingent of squatter labour, plus through the movement of Africans onto lands left vacant by Depression-strapped white farmers. They did not fret over the issue of the soil *per se*. Rather, they drove home the point that it would be regressive to increase the size of African areas by reappropriating sections of the White Highlands.⁵⁹⁶

The Land Commission's report recognized two different sets of problems, each corresponding to specific population groups and areas (or, more accurately, specific areas within reserves). On one hand, the old problem of overstocking presented in the more arid, less populated regions of the territory, and was now linked more explicitly to the risks of soil erosion. In certain areas, notably Machakos and other parts of Ukambani, there had been 'a progressive degeneration of cattle and land, threatening a degeneration of the people'. The main cause was familiar: the 'semi-religious attitude towards cattle' that excluded meat from the diet. Once African pastoralists learned to see their cattle as a food supply, 'they will begin to grow in numbers and skill'.⁵⁹⁷ Here was the old problem of soil, scarcity and malnutrition acting as a brake on population growth and a rising standard of living (see chapter 4). The solutions included better education, forced destocking, and the opening of a market for animals so culled. The Commission further recommended that steps be taken to correlate stock numbers with available grazing areas – in other words, to calculate the land's 'carrying capacity' (see chapter 4).⁵⁹⁸

On the other hand, the Land Commission highlighted the relatively new problem of *overpopulation* in more fertile areas, particularly in the Kikuyu reserves. The cause of the problem was neither overstocking nor population congestion due to a lack of land, but rather: the customary system of land tenure, 'maldistribution of population', and a lack of agricultural skill. Here, solutions could target agricultural 'betterment', or specifically an 'increase of skill'. This would allow standards of living (including better nutrition) to rise despite population growth.⁵⁹⁹ So, the danger was twofold, and regionally specific: in some places, overstocking was leading to soil erosion and scarcity, thereby limiting population growth. Elsewhere, inappropriate land tenure and agricultural technique prevented improvements in the material standard of living, so that people were kept in a state of poverty and malnutrition as *population pressure inevitably increased*.⁶⁰⁰ As such, some officials and experts were starting to see these problems – population change, public health, climate, soil, food supply – as *systemic*.⁶⁰¹ They tended to have cyclical, cumulative and mutually reinforcing

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 324.

⁵⁹⁷ Carter et al., *Report of the Kenya Land Commission*, p. 362.

⁵⁹⁸ The commissioners noted that any policy of destocking 'must have as its main consideration the fact that there is a definite relation between the area of the land and the stock which it can support'; Ibid., pp. 500, 508.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 141-2.

⁶⁰⁰ The Land Commission report made several references to a concern with rural poverty, particularly among pastoral people; a state of 'semi-starvation' was considered one aspect of the condition; Ibid., pp. 264, 495.

⁶⁰¹ Sir Daniel Hall, the Kenyan agricultural commissioner of 1929, was a proponent of this kind of systemic perspective: '[T]he improvement of native agriculture is closely bound up with the

effects. Ecologists played a critical role in enabling this kind of perspective – they were quickly providing officials with a way to study colonial problems through the multi-scalar relations between economic, geophysical, climatic and biological systems.⁶⁰²

The systemic threats of soil degradation and food scarcity presented a powerful justification for greater intervention in African agriculture, both to promote social welfare and, at the same time, defend settler land claims as sacrosanct. Indeed, the Commission recommended that the legal status of the settled highland areas be safeguarded through an Order in Council.⁶⁰³ Yet the use of soil deterioration as a justification for state intervention would change further during the remainder of the 1930s. Now, however, the issue was not overstocking, but rather increased maize production by African farmers. And soil *erosion* was no longer the primary concern, but also *exhaustion*, or the loss of soil fertility.

By the mid-1930s, the opinion that the drive for African export production (discussed above) was depleting the fertility of Kenya's soil – her 'chief national asset' – was gaining momentum in expert and official circles.⁶⁰⁴ Some of these concerns fell from the imperial level, from experts like Sir Frank Stockdale, agricultural advisor to the Colonial Office.⁶⁰⁵ Similar points were also being voiced locally, by officers of the Kenyan Agriculture Department, members of the public, as well as soil conservation experts.⁶⁰⁶ For senior administrators who started to rally under the standard of soil conservation, their worries expressed more than just the fate of the earth and land – they were alarmed by the ascendancy of wealthy and influential African men who disrupted their relations of patronage with African societies. Soil degradation was a material manifestation of social and moral decay, of the 'selfish individualism' that increased cash cropping had fostered at the expense of social cohesion.⁶⁰⁷ As such, a soil conservation campaign targeting African areas served all these

general problem of raising the physique, the health and the education of the natives... Better food, better housing, better personal hygiene, are all bound up in one cycle with better agriculture and it is impossible to say that improvement should begin at any one point rather than another'; *Report*, p. 37.

⁶⁰² Anker, *Imperial Ecology*, chapter 4; Duminy, 'Ecologizing Regions'; Tilley, *Living Laboratory*, chapter 3.

⁶⁰³ Carter et al., *Report of the Kenya Land Commission*, p. 533.

⁶⁰⁴ Willan et al., *Report*, p. 46.

⁶⁰⁵ For example, in 1936, Sir Alan Pim, in his report on financial and taxation issues in Kenya, had expressed concern over the effects of increased African export production on soil fertility. Pim warned that similar results might be seen in Tanganyika and Uganda as a result of similar drives for cash crop production. Stockdale concurred with these opinions; TNA: CO 533/471/2, Stockdale to Flood (minute), 19 September 1936; CO 533/471/2, Ormsby-Gore to Byrne (letter), 19 October 1936; CAB 58/202, *Report by Frank Stockdale on His Visit to East Africa January–March 1937*, p. 5.

⁶⁰⁶ Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', pp. 330–1; Maher, *Visit*. At the same time, observers in Tanganyika were making almost identical arguments over the erosion-related effects of a 'plant more crops' campaign initiated in late 1931 as a means to boost state revenue; Iliffe, *Modern History*, p. 349.

⁶⁰⁷ Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, p. 142; Lonsdale, 'Depression', pp. 114–15;

interests. It appeared to provide the means to maintain social and political control.

Lonsdale notes that 'soil conservation split the official mind'. In one corner sat the 'old school', thinking in terms of 'heroic state action', seeing hope only in compulsion, whether in the form of farm planning or forced destocking in the reserves, as the means to 'defend peasant traditionalism'. Many in this group balked at the prospect of aggressive reforms to land tenure.⁶⁰⁸ In the other, a 'new school' was growing in voice and number – a cadre of agricultural and ecological experts, who 'thought in terms of state encouragement for peasant innovation', and within the broader terms of planning and development.⁶⁰⁹ Nearly all of the solutions proposed to the soil and congestion problem agreed that some compulsory reduction of stock numbers would be necessary. Official and scientific support for forced destocking gained momentum and consensus throughout the 1930s.⁶¹⁰ Once again, attention focused on the Kamba reserves.⁶¹¹ The state devised a vigorous destocking programme to be launched in Machakos and later extended to other areas.⁶¹² Rapid assessments of sub-district carrying capacities were carried out before destocking commenced.⁶¹³ Intense local resistance to the programme forced the state to backtrack.⁶¹⁴ Instead, official efforts focused on reconditioning: encouraging enclosure and seeding of grazing lands.⁶¹⁵ Over 400,000 acres of Kamba land had been enclosed before the end of 1939.⁶¹⁶

Worries about the ecological and social effects of cash cropping and African accumulation were pressing enough to drive a definitive policy change before the end of the decade. By 1939, the Agricultural Department's policy towards 'native agriculture' had returned to the emphasis of the 1920s and the Dual Policy. Its first priority would be ensuring food self-sufficiency, followed by maintaining soil fertility, and then providing adequate nutrition 'to ensure a healthy and energetic population'. Only after these imperatives had been met should produce sales be encouraged 'to enable him to make money for his small needs'. The technical approach to be adopted was as follows: 'mixed farming' consisting of a variety of food crops, planted on a rotational basis, combined with stock husbandry (wherever possible). Also, land conservation measures would be implemented, including contour ridging, rotational grazing, and protection of sensitive areas.⁶¹⁷ However, the momentum of this shift would be temporarily interrupted by the outbreak of war – only to return with renewed conviction and vigour following 1945. I discuss these dynamics in the following chapter.

⁶⁰⁸ Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, pp. 119–20; Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 115;

⁶⁰⁹ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 115; also Dörnemann, 'Seeing Population', p. 206.

⁶¹⁰ Anderson, 'Depression', p. 337. Lord Hailey's *African Survey*, for example, endorsed the 'judicious use of culling and other methods' to reduce overstocking; *An African Survey*, p. 812.

⁶¹¹ Osborne credits Colin Maher with focusing official attention on the seriousness of the soil problems in Machakos; *Ethnicity and Empire*, pp. 105–6.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 106–7.

⁶¹³ Tignor, 'Kamba Political Protest', pp. 242–3.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 243–8; Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire*, pp. 108–112.

⁶¹⁵ Tignor, 'Kamba Political Protest', p. 248.

⁶¹⁶ Rocheleau et al., 'Environment', p. 1042.

⁶¹⁷ Willan et al., *Report*, p. 55.

In this section, I have tried to show that one of the main reasons that experts, officials and settlers worried about soil degradation – aside from diminishing the ‘capital value of the land’ and threatening the long-term viability of commercial agriculture – was its link with food scarcity.⁶¹⁸ The ‘greening’ of colonial and Kenyan policy was part of a wider Malthusian perspective seeing socio-economic problems against a backdrop of limited soil and food systems needing to be secured in the longer term.⁶¹⁹ Here the threat of scarcity held a remarkable degree of rhetorical versatility: it inhibited desirable population growth *and* reproduced poverty amid inevitable population growth. It justified marketing control *and* coercive conservation in the reserves. Food scarcity was thus tied up within a system of problems that helped to succour a growing interventionist ethic among officials, and provided the case for the defence of settler interests.

The final point that I would like to make here is that soil and population issues helped to reframe food scarcity as, in part, a spatial and territorial problem. Officials were starting to see the risks and drivers of scarcity as spatially distributed within the territory: concentrated in some areas, less of a problem in others. The distribution of risk and potential depended on cultural and ecological variables. Some of the responses posed to these risks built on the approach suggested by the Land Commission: calculating carrying capacities and population densities on a district-by-district basis, under a normative notion of ‘optimum density’.⁶²⁰ These kinds of practices would be central to future projects of farm planning (see chapter 7). As such, calculative and territorial practices were becoming key to alleviating the long-term and imminent dangers of scarcity.⁶²¹ Moreover, the need to manage that threat was becoming a key part of the rationale and practice of conservation, development and welfare.

5.4 Conclusion

The 1930s and economic depression brought various changes to the dynamics of food scarcity, as well as the state’s understanding of and responses to the problem. Although these were not radical changes, they were significant nonetheless. The decade saw the consolidation of several key trends that predated the Depression, and would continue through to the outbreak of war.

So, how did the dynamics of Kenyan food shortages shift in this period? In the early 1930s, food shortages were still primarily driven by drought, pestilence and harvest failure. Yet many suffered through forms of ‘indirect’ or ‘exchange’ entitlement failure resulting from unemployment or revised terms of trade.⁶²² The decade saw the acceleration of African socio-economic differentiation. As

⁶¹⁸ Anderson and Throup, ‘Myth’, p. 331; Maher, *Visit*, p. 70.

⁶¹⁹ For an example of this view, see Worthington, ‘Food and Nutrition’, p. 150; also Hall, *Improvement of Native Agriculture*. Bashford discusses the specific links between soil and food problems, as they were conceptualized in the interwar period, in *Global Population*, chapter 7.

⁶²⁰ Willan et al., *Report*, pp. 11–12, 142.

⁶²¹ For an elaboration of this argument, see Duminy, ‘Ecologizing Regions’.

⁶²² Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, pp. 3–4.

such, for a growing number of people, food access was mediated through wage labour and the market; those facing hunger and starvation were those lacking the means of subsistence, let alone control over cash income and accumulation.

How has the governmentalization of food scarcity changed? Conditions of economic depression acted to consolidate and extend the view of scarcity as an economic phenomenon entailing problems of both supply and access. As a matter of income and economic access, it could be managed by the state through forms of tax remission and subsidization. But this 'welfarist' impulse, targeted at specific groups, was set against the more fundamental problem of supply. Maize production and marketing was an increasingly salient political issue, located at the centre of conflicts and competition between different factions of settler capital, and between African and settler production. The threat of scarcity was enrolled in this politics. The security and price of maize supplies were key issues at stake in the arguments used to justify or oppose statutory marketing control. At the same time, increasing maize production was a means for officials to boost rural incomes and material standards of living, alongside state revenue. In this sense, productionism – understood, at this point, as the task of securing an exportable maize surplus – emerged as an expedient response to the conditions and policy imperatives of the time.

These points indicate that the state was assuming greater responsibility for the prevention and redress of scarcity, across a greater variety of domains (that is, production and access), and on an increasingly consistent and long-term basis. Put differently, we see an emerging notion that it is not only the state's responsibility to regulate the economic effects of specific scarcity *events* (as discussed in chapter 4), but also to regulate and guarantee sufficient food supply and access *at all times*.

We have also seen that the behaviour of African remained a key part of the problem of scarcity, but in novel ways. Building on the trends seen in the late 1920s (described in chapter 4), the threat of scarcity was increasingly enrolled alongside environmental, population and poverty problems to justify an increased degree of official intervention within the African reserves. This reinforced the status of the rural reserve as a particular kind of governable space: one animated by a Malthusian anxiety around surplus population and resource limitations, and encompassing efforts to preserve the carrying capacity of the land. It was a space characterized by the official use of compulsion, instruction and supervision, at least where and when the conventional politics of district collaboration would not suffice.

But the events and problems of the 1930s also saw important changes to the status of the African reserve as a kind of governable space. For one matter, anti-scarcity techniques were starting to take on more territorial and calculative forms through, for example, official assessments and planning of carrying capacity and 'optimal density'. These were interventions seeking to ensure sufficient space and resources for human subsistence and procreation. For another matter, marketing legislation acted to extend the governmental techniques of the market (those targeting the incentives of African producers)

into the space of the reserve: a measure designed to boost rural incomes and stave off food scarcities. Such practices corresponded to a notion of the African farmer as a kind of economic subject, to be governed through their pursuit of profit and self-interest, their aspiration to better their condition. This view of the African economic subject, in turn, corresponded to a certain definition of the role of the state. 'Improvident' or 'idle' Africans were no longer the central problem of government, to be coerced from their Malthusian fate. For, now, rural poverty was indicative of the state's failure to fulfil its 'duty' to promote and secure the economic development of the reserves, and to raise the standard of living of the rural population through 'better' agricultural production and land management. Previous, colonial actors had attempted to *responsibilize* their African subjects (through a combination of force and threat, education and training) to be capable of foresight and planning. Now they would also provide the conditions for the incentives and lessons of the capitalist market to be felt and learnt.

Such dynamics speak to the emergence and consolidation of a multimodal anti-scarcity biopolitics. This was a biopolitics operating both through the spaces and techniques of the capitalist market, as well as through the techniques of coercion and discipline specifically targeted at rural African communities. Taken together, these modalities constituted a structure and mode of government that, it was hoped, would alleviate the risk of a Malthusian crisis of population, poverty and scarcity. When set against past initiatives, it was an approach to the 'government of life' that was more calculative, more permanent and more anticipatory (that is, less reactive or palliative) in its operation. It was a mode that aimed to secure the life and welfare of a far greater number of people than previously, yet it was still patchy and inconsistent in its reach – it addressed certain people, spaces and problems with far greater intensity than others.

In the following chapter, I will show that the Second World War accentuated these trends. The African threat to soil fertility would become a major justification for allocating unequal state support to settler maize growers – not only by 'putting a lid on African capitalist production in the reserves', but also through direct support for white farmers in the form of high guaranteed prices.⁶²³ A calculative, state-centred marketing system emerged in order to boost levels of supply above those of demand. With it, a territory-wide perspective on food scarcity was institutionalized.

⁶²³ Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, p. 142.

6. Scarcity, State Control and War: Redux

In this chapter, I examine how wartime conditions in Kenya helped to generate and shape food shortages, as well as how the state's understanding of and response to the problem was conditioned by wartime exigencies. The basic argument is this: the demands of war continued the 1930s trend towards the creation of a centralized, corporatist state from its more 'segmentary' forms of the 1920s.⁶²⁴ Bureaucratic institutions were formed on an unprecedented scale to carry out the business of producing and distributing key commodities. Many fell under the control of the white settler community, albeit incompletely and temporarily. Settler farmers effectively used the immediate and long-term threats of scarcity and soil degradation to claim unequal support from the state. In doing so, they helped to establish a governmental rationale of guaranteeing high producer prices as the means to boost market supply and achieve territorial self-sufficiency.

The chapter starts by describing the wartime policy changes surrounding food, indicating how a shift in objective from maintaining self-sufficiency towards rapidly increasing production affected the institutions and practices of government. It then discusses how officials attempted to manage processes of production, distribution and consumption once the seriousness of the food crisis had escalated. Lastly, the ways in which these governmental efforts intersected with rural African coping strategies are briefly reflected upon.

6.1 Food self-sufficiency as security

For Kenya and other African colonies, the imperative of ensuring self-sufficiency in food had been established even before the war. Already in February 1939 East African governments worried about planning for the development and production of 'economic' and food crops in the event of 'emergency'.⁶²⁵ The British government, in turn, emphasized the strategic defence importance of colonial territories being self-sufficient in essential foods.⁶²⁶ For Kenya, increased production should only be targeted at goods that were 'essential' for the war effort, including gold, sisal, flax and pyrethrum.⁶²⁷ Current levels of butter, tea and coffee production should be maintained. Surplus production of cereals for export was discouraged due to the correctly anticipated shortage of freight facilities. Maize, in any case, was more cheaply available from North America or Argentina.⁶²⁸ If any surplus were to result from a local crop, this should be used to satisfy cereal deficits in nearby territories, such as food-importing Northern Rhodesia, with its large mining labour force. It was, however, noted that small amounts of grain might possibly be required in Egypt

⁶²⁴ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 97.

⁶²⁵ TNA: CO 323/1657/101, Richards to under-secretary of state for the colonies (telegram), 21 February 1939.

⁶²⁶ TNA: CO 323/1657/101, *passim*.

⁶²⁷ TNA: CO 323/1657/101, Brooke-Popham to MacDonald (telegram), 2 February 1939.

⁶²⁸ Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', p. 335; Spencer, 'Settler Dominance', p. 499.

and Palestine.⁶²⁹ In turn, representatives from the British East African territories (which in normal times were interdependent in food supplies) agreed that food production efforts should be coordinated along complementary lines through the Governors Conference and the Standing Conference of Directors of Agriculture.⁶³⁰

In fact, the push for East African self-sufficiency was really an extension of prewar policy (also see chapters 4 and 5). Conditions of war would only make being dependent on imported supplies even *more of a weakness* than it was at peacetime.⁶³¹ Colonies were urged to see increased food production for self-sufficiency as a long-term measure and objective – a part of permanent agricultural policy rather than a wartime exigency.⁶³² At the outbreak of war, Kenya's governor saw part of the colony's duty and contribution to the war as *continuing* to be self-sufficient in all essential foodstuffs.⁶³³ This emphasis on self-sufficiency, with its corresponding aversion to surplus production, would reverse during the course of the war, only to return to the imperative of self-sufficiency, which was then crystallized in Kenya's long-term food and maize production policy.

In Kenya, officials reacted to Germany's invasion of Poland by taking immediate and proactive efforts to secure control over the food system. On 1 September 1939, they promulgated defence regulations and established the Kenya Supply Board (KSB). This Board enjoyed extensive powers. It could implement controls on various products via defence orders, and held authority over price control.⁶³⁴ The regulations also secured wide powers of compulsion to increase production. However, by the end of 1940 they had largely gone unused.⁶³⁵ Likewise, price control functions had also been nominal up to that point, as most goods were not in noticeably short supply.⁶³⁶ The major problem for the Kenya Farmers Association (KFA) and Kenyan officials during 1941 was actually how to dispose of a maize surplus overseas.⁶³⁷ As such, the initial wartime food problem was one of distribution rather than production. This was reflected in the Kenyan state's response to food scarcities experienced in the early part of the war, as discussed below.

⁶²⁹ TNA: CO 323/1657/101, minute by Clauson, 6 April 1939.

⁶³⁰ TNA: DO 35/848/6, Lord Moyne, Colonial Office circular (enclosure), 29 September 1941.

⁶³¹ As explained by Lord Moyne, the colonial secretary, in late 1941, dependence on food imports was 'a source of weakness'. 'Apart altogether from war conditions the extent to which a territory can render itself independent of imported food supplies is a measure of its ability to withstand the effects of the low prices for export staples which have been productive of so much hardship and difficulty in the past. It is, therefore, of the greatest importance that the advances which have been achieved as a result of war conditions should not be allowed to recede when peace once more returns'; *Ibid.*

⁶³² *Ibid.*

⁶³³ Zeleza, 'Second World War', p. 145.

⁶³⁴ An example of a control established under defence order was the Potato Control; Willan et al., *Report*, p. 17.

⁶³⁵ TNA: DO 35/848/6, Lord Moyne, Colonial Office circular (enclosure), 29 September 1941.

Quote is from Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', p. 335.

⁶³⁶ TNA: CO 852/500/2, Rennie to Stanley (enclosed report by Grazebrook), 10 July 1943, p. 10.

⁶³⁷ Willan et al., *Report*, pp. 11–12.

6.2 Famine relief

Prolonged drought conditions over the course of 1939 led, by the end of the year, to localized grain scarcities in various parts of Kenya. The affected areas included low-lying regions of Central Province, the immediate vicinity of Nairobi, parts of Meru District, as well as places in Rift Valley Province.⁶³⁸ In response, officials announced a systematic famine relief policy in January 1940. The policy codified the approach that had been developed and employed over the previous half-century. There would be three forms of relief: providing foodstuffs for sale, arranging relief works, and distributing free food for the infirm or destitute.⁶³⁹ Officials in London lauded the Kenyan government's proactive and systematic efforts; one minuted that 'a generation ago the natives would have died like flies in a drought like this'.⁶⁴⁰

The relief policy also clarified the basic principle of distribution: 'that no man, woman or child, must be allowed to die of starvation'. This principle found support in the *East African Standard*, which argued that it should be met 'whatever may be the cost of preservation of human life'.⁶⁴¹ State care, however, should not come without obligations: 'An important part of the official statement is that which lays stress on the individual's responsibility for his own salvation... Stress is laid on the fact that the individual must play his part'. In practice, this meant the state should use 'its propaganda and publicity agencies to impress on the African peoples the lessons of famine and the duty resting on them to use their livestock reserves before they can qualify for relief'.⁶⁴² A codified policy of relief enjoined codified obligations of the individual subject.

The process to be followed when food shortage threatened a 'native area' went like this: First, a notice was published in the government gazette under the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance, regulating food exports. Second, funds were voted by LNCs to pay for immediate relief measures and food imports. Finally, and only if necessary, the local commissioner applied to the state for additional assistance.⁶⁴³ The expense of providing food was more of a problem than its availability. Officials approached the railway authority to request a reduced maximum rate for the internal transport of maize. This was reluctantly granted: rates were halved until 31 August 1940.⁶⁴⁴

In early 1940, the government purchased 8,000 bags of maize from African farmers in North Nyanza, and sold these supplies at cost price in areas of Kiambu District 'owing to the abnormal demand there which the local trading organization was unable to meet'. The costs were reimbursed from sales or, in

⁶³⁸ TNA: CO 533/517/6, Rennie to MacDonald (letter), 15 February 1940.

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ TNA: CO 533/517/6, Colonial Office minute (author unknown), 12 March 1944.

⁶⁴¹ TNA: CO 533/517/6, *East African Standard*, 'Famine Relief', 26 January 1940.

⁶⁴² Ibid.

⁶⁴³ TNA: CO 533/517/6, Rennie to MacDonald (letter), 15 February 1940.

⁶⁴⁴ TNA: CO 533/517/6, 'Minutes of Kenya and Uganda Railway Advisory Council Meeting', 28 February 1940.

the case of free issues to the destitute, from the funds of the Kiambu LNC.⁶⁴⁵ More relief supplies were purchased for Kiambu a few months later, and were distributed along identical lines. At the same time, a small sum was spent on relief for the coastal Lamu District. As the people here were 'exceedingly poor' and without a LNC, the state bore the full price.⁶⁴⁶ Officials also imported seeds so that farmers would be able to sow before the new rains – LNCs again undertook to bear the cost of any shortfall in resale.

As such, although various parts of Kenya suffered from localized food scarcity in the early part of 1940, as far as officials were concerned there was no great alarm. They were confident that their long-range anti-famine precautions of previous years (promoting crop diversification, use of better crop varieties, developing communications and building up LNC funds) would be able to prevent scarcity from turning into widespread famine. Maize supplies appeared to be ample. Prices were still within reason, having not yet reached the maximum controlled price.⁶⁴⁷ Settler farmers, however, were not so easily satisfied, and they would soon bring their political pressure to bear in pushing for a radical change to state policy.

6.3 The path to maize control

Italy's entry into the war in June 1940 raised the threat of British East Africa being invaded from Abyssinia to the north. West African and South African troops were promptly dispatched to Kenya, and the market for local food produce rose in step. In late 1941, demand expanded further with the arrival of Italian prisoners of war and European refugees. Moreover, the African labour force had grown rapidly during the war (see figure 5.1).⁶⁴⁸ Production on settler farms – often managed by women due to the absence of men on military service – increased in response. African farmers located near to Nairobi also extended their cultivation, particularly of vegetables.⁶⁴⁹ Much of this produce supplied the new vegetable drying factories established by the military at Kerugoya and Karatina.⁶⁵⁰ Yet, still, there was no urgent need for officials to take extraordinary measures to increase food availability.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁵ TNA: CO 533/517/6, Rennie to MacDonald (letter), 15 February 1940.

⁶⁴⁶ TNA: CO 533/517/6, Moore to Lloyd (letter), 12 July 1940.

⁶⁴⁷ TNA: CO 533/517/6, Rennie to MacDonald (letter), 15 February 1940.

⁶⁴⁸ From January 1940 to July 1942, the number of registered Africans in employment increased by almost 60,000 or 33 per cent; Willan et al., *Report*, p. 24; also see Cooper, *African Waterfront*, pp. 57–9. By February 1943 East Africa was providing for 62,000 prisoners of war and 11,500 refugees – with a further 7,000 Poles and Greeks still expected to arrive; TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 6 February 1943.

⁶⁴⁹ Farmers in Kiambu doubled their acreages of vegetables between 1940 and 1943, reaching a total area of some 10,000 acres; Willan et al., *Report*, p. 42.

⁶⁵⁰ These factories processed the produce of 11,000 smallholders, with seeds issued and crop rotations planned by the Department of Agriculture. In the main they supplied troops stationed in the Middle East; Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', p. 338; Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 125.

Correspondence regarding the establishment of the factories, including Colonial Office concern over the imports of the machinery required, is available in TNA: CO 852/469/15, *passim*.

⁶⁵¹ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 120; Willan et al., *Report*, p. 11.

The realities of the early ‘phoney war’ proved sorely disappointing to Kenya’s agricultural officials and settler farmers. Initially, in the outbreak of war, they had sensed a decisive opportunity to develop settler agriculture in the colony. In particular, major global hostilities appeared to promise a reversal of the decade-long woes of the white maize farmer.⁶⁵² However, the dream was deferred – shipping was not available for Kenyan exports, and the prices demanded by settlers were too high for foreign buyers.⁶⁵³ Imperial authorities were by no means encouraging of settler ambitions. In early 1940, Major F. W. Cavendish-Bentinck (the new political leader of Kenya’s settlers) and G. C. Griffiths (managing director of the KFA) travelled to London in a bid to secure contracts for surplus Kenyan maize, bacon and butter. They were greeted with little enthusiasm.⁶⁵⁴

With no ready market available, it made little sense for the Kenyan state to increase production by means of a guaranteed maize price, which is precisely what settlers were once again campaigning for (see chapter 5). Nevertheless, by May 1941, Kenyan officials and representatives of key agricultural cooperative associations were meeting to discuss the advisability of introducing some form of ‘maize control’ scheme. But the argument for control had little to do with the potential contribution that Kenyan agriculture could make to the war effort. Nor did it rest on cornering the market in African produce so as to make Kenyan exports more competitive. In fact, settler advocates resorted to the familiar 1930s arguments around soil degradation – as a threat to maize production and the overall food supply – to push for ‘some measure’ to ensure that a quota of internal maize requirements came from settler farmers.⁶⁵⁵ Their appeals were unsuccessful, for the time being.

Overall, far from an opportunity to reassert settler prosperity, 1939 to 1941 was a period of ‘continuing stagnation and economic depression’ in the East African region, one that ‘merely rubbed salt in the half-healed wound of the Depression’.⁶⁵⁶ The first major impetus to boost Kenyan production only arrived in late 1941, with the call to help supply the Middle East. German U-boat wolfpacks had been devastating Allied shipping lines across the Atlantic. Fighting in North Africa had intensified over the course of 1941 with the arrival of German troops. Allied authorities in the Middle East grew increasingly anxious over the fate of their supply lines, and began to look south, to their mainland and coastal connection with East Africa, as a more reliable source. In October 1941, the Kenyan Supply Board entered into a contract to supply the Middle East with 40,000 tons of maize.⁶⁵⁷ The following month, the minister of state in the Middle East assured an East African delegation that their food exports were urgently

⁶⁵² Anderson and Throup, ‘Myth’, pp. 334–5.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

⁶⁵⁴ Spencer, ‘Settler Dominance’, pp. 499–500; Lonsdale, ‘Depression’, p. 120; Willan et al., *Report*, p. 11.

⁶⁵⁵ Willan et al., *Report*, p. 13.

⁶⁵⁶ The first quote is from Anderson and Throup, ‘Myth’, p. 336; the second from Lonsdale, ‘Depression’, p. 120.

⁶⁵⁷ Only around 6,000 tons were actually delivered under this contract; Willan et al., *Report*, pp. 11, 30.

needed to supply the troops and civil populations of the region.⁶⁵⁸ Finally sensing the opportunity they had been hoping for, Kenya's white farmers rallied. They demanded that they be allowed to rapidly expand their production as part of their patriotic call of duty.

Meanwhile, the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the war, just as Japan was making large inroads into key Allied supply areas such as Burma, the Philippines and Java. Demand for Kenyan sisal and pyrethrum rocketed. These dynamics would decisively alter the terms of trade for Kenyan farmers and planters, ushering in an era of high demand and high commodity prices that would last until the 1950s.⁶⁵⁹ Together, these events were enough to lead officials to embark on an increased production campaign. Maize was not a central emphasis at first, but it would come to play a key part in the drama of wartime scarcity.

Following the call to supply the Middle East, in December 1941 the Kenyan government duly announced a guaranteed price for settler maize of 8/50 (all prices are given in shillings and cents) per bag. The aim was to encourage the production of an exportable surplus. For the KFA, this price was revised upwards to 9 shillings per bag for the 1942 planting season. At the same time, the director of agriculture put together a programme for increased food production by African farmers, focused on maize cultivation in Nyanza and Central provinces.⁶⁶⁰ But a guaranteed price was not enough for settler farmers – they wanted the state to bear the risks of increased agricultural investment. Many, after all, were still ridden with debt, and for them patriotic duty could hardly be expected to include financial self-ruin. In January 1942, some farmers threatened to hoard their maize harvest, while others refused to extend cultivation.⁶⁶¹

The state's first major legislative response to this pressure was the Defence (Increased Production of Crops) Regulations, passed on 28 February. Under these regulations, the Agricultural Production and Settlement Board (APSB) was reconstituted from an advisory body into one with executive powers to plan and boost settler production for civil and military requirements.⁶⁶² The APSB was headquartered in Nairobi, with Cavendish-Bentinck as chair. It would sit at the centre of a web of committees controlling agriculture throughout the territory. Lonsdale later called it 'the corporatist planner's heaven'. Cavendish-Bentinck himself described it as 'practical farmers sitting round a table'.⁶⁶³ The regulations gave settlers the security they sought. In April, the governor approved warrants providing grants to farmers for breaking new land, including to plant with maize, and to guarantee minimum returns per acre in the event of harvest failure.⁶⁶⁴ The director of agriculture remained in charge of African production.

⁶⁵⁸ Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', p. 335.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 335; Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 121.

⁶⁶⁰ Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', p. 335; Willan et al., *Report*, p. 12.

⁶⁶¹ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 121.

⁶⁶² Willan et al., *Report*, p. 16.

⁶⁶³ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 123.

⁶⁶⁴ TNA: CO 852/469/3, Moore to Cranbourne (telegram), 15 April 1942; Willan et al., *Report*, p. 23.

These financial commitments from the state, coupled with the imperative of boosting production for the imperial war effort, finally settled the issue of maize control – it would indeed happen.⁶⁶⁵ On one hand, this was a matter of trade logistics. The centralized system of bulk commodity purchasing that had been set up in Britain to secure civil and military supplies required a local apparatus to handle buying and selling in bulk.⁶⁶⁶ On the other hand, it was a matter of protecting the state's investments. The government had to stake out and protect the maize market, as its financial survival was now invested in it. The credit given to settler growers could only be recouped if consumers bought through official channels. Direct purchasing from cheaper African suppliers would undermine the system and thus the investments of the state.⁶⁶⁷ Control was the solution at hand.

As such, in March 1942 a committee (including two directors of the KFA) was appointed to determine the best means of implementing maize control 'working, if possible, through existing trade channels'.⁶⁶⁸ As with the debate over African marketing legislation in the mid-1930s (see chapter 5), Indian representatives protested, citing the possible negative effects for commercial traders. They agreed to discuss the terms, however, on the understanding that control would endure only under war conditions.⁶⁶⁹

The urgency of boosting production intensified as the Japanese advanced across Burma, threatening to cut off an import source of Kenyan rice imports.⁶⁷⁰ By May 1942 this conquest had been decided. On May 1st, the state passed the Defence (Control of Maize) Regulations. This brought the Kenyan Maize Board into existence as an advisory body.⁶⁷¹ On the 4th, officials passed the Increased Production of Crops Ordinance, consolidating the state's powers over planning and enforcing programmes of settler production for various key crops.⁶⁷² The APSB now controlled production through a series of district production and manpower sub-committees (composed of local farmers) located throughout the territory.⁶⁷³ The following day, Griffiths was appointed as maize controller, while

⁶⁶⁵ Later, the Food Shortage Commission would conclude that this decision was made in the interests of increasing production to help supply the Middle East, rather than to offer a guaranteed price to settler farmers, as some had testified to the commissioners; Willan et al., *Report*, pp. 67–8.

⁶⁶⁶ Berman notes that by 1941 a system of 'monopoly state trading' by British central ministries had largely replaced the prewar system of private commercial trading; *Control and Crisis*, p. 258. Likewise, in East Africa the private commercial concerns still involved in marketing by the end of the 1930s were replaced during the war by marketing organizations with statutory authority and powers of monopoly; Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, p. 214.

⁶⁶⁷ Lonsdale, 'Depression', pp. 121–22.

⁶⁶⁸ Willan et al., *Report*, p. 68.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁰ Collingham, *Taste of War*, p. 67.

⁶⁷¹ Willan et al., *Report*, pp. 72, 76.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 51–2.

⁶⁷³ The scheduled produce included wheat, maize, rye, flax, oats, rice, rubber, barley, potatoes, pyrethrum and vegetables; Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, p. 249n121. The procedure for developing production programmes was as follows: settler farmers were required to submit their production plans to their relevant sub-committee, to be forwarded to the district

still holding the position as managing director of the KFA. He immediately set about signing another contract to supply the Middle East with Kenya's entire exportable surplus of maize, up to a ceiling of 100,000 tons.⁶⁷⁴

In July 1942, the Kenyan Maize and Produce Control (MPC) was finally established to take over marketing of the whole territory's supplies. The objective, as implied in the failed 1930s proposals for control, was to ensure that the MPC secured physical possession of all marketed maize (see chapter 5).⁶⁷⁵ African farmers were required to sell their produce to the control at a fixed price (4/90 per bag, versus the 9 shillings offered to settlers) through traders licensed under the Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance. A single 'transport pool' was devised to subsidize the transport costs of producers located far away from the Control's marketing centres.⁶⁷⁶

The differential pricing system offered to settler and African farmers generated immediate controversy, both locally and in Britain. Kenyan officials were forced to retrospectively justify the scheme. Here, one finds more evidence of the ambivalence that colonial officials held towards African economic rationality. The lower price paid to African farmers was justified because, on one hand, higher prices would disincentivize production as a function of the 'backward-bending supply curve'.⁶⁷⁷ High cash earnings might also possibly undermine African character and discipline. At the same time, better prices could result in *too much* production, thereby giving the Control the headache of having to dispose of a surplus, while potentially degrading soil fertility in the reserves even further.⁶⁷⁸ This particular form of colonial doublethink thus saw Africans as being both too responsive to prices *and* not responsive enough. Or, if they were responsive, they were so in a 'perverse' way.⁶⁷⁹ In response to criticism, the new regulations of October had raised the African maize price to 6/20 per bag.⁶⁸⁰

Settler farmers benefitted almost universally from maize control. Once control had been instigated, the KFA acted both as an agent of the state and as the marketing organization for settler farmers. It began to manage state credit finance given to farmers through the Land Bank and private banks. It operated marketing functions at the same time as recommending producer prices to the government. It was thus 'firmly established as a parastatal organization' that

committee, in turn passed on to the central Board with any recommendations. After revising the plans, if necessary, the farmer would be served with a planting order. The Ordinance enabled committee or sub-committee members to enter farms to check that farmers were complying with the orders; Willan et al., *Report*, pp. 51–2.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 80–1.

⁶⁷⁵ Willan et al., *Report*, p. 70.

⁶⁷⁶ Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, p. 109.

⁶⁷⁷ Mosley, *Settler Economies*, p. 256n17.

⁶⁷⁸ To compensate for the increased risk to the soil, some of the difference between the price paid to African producers and the official retail price was designated as a cess, allocated to LNCs, which were to be spent on conservation in the reserves; Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 126; Spencer, 'Settler Dominance', pp. 505–7.

⁶⁷⁹ Jones gives one example of the ostensible perversity of African subjects: 'when prices rise, less is produced, when wages rise, fewer hours are worked'; 'Economic Man', p. 108.

⁶⁸⁰ Willan et al., *Report*, p. 49.

represented both state and producer.⁶⁸¹ The guaranteed prices paid through the state marketing system gave settler farmers an unprecedented degree of economic protection and security. It was the start of a prosperous era for the White Highlands. However, the settler battle was not yet won. These measures were still a wartime exigency, a response to emergency. To become permanent policy, a stronger argument was needed. I return to this point in chapter 7.

By contrast, maize control had various effects on African production. On one hand, guaranteed prices encouraged 'black market' trade in produce from Central Province, where the difference between official and unofficial prices was relatively great. Kikuyu farmers often preferred to sell their maize in centres of 'black-market' demand, including Ukambani.⁶⁸² For officials, it soon became clear that only a small fraction of maize supplies grown in some areas of Central Province were being sold through controlled channels. The proportion fell further as rains continued to fail in the Kamba reserves over the course of 1943, diverting more Kikuyu maize to the hungry, remittance-flush Kamba market.⁶⁸³ On the other hand, guaranteed prices and the single transport pool acted to boost maize production in Nyanza. Most of this produce was traded through official channels.⁶⁸⁴ North Nyanza maize thus assumed particular importance for the supply and stability of the official market.⁶⁸⁵

So, the war was advantageous for some African farmers, whether by producing for the official or 'black market'. Yet the benefits were unevenly spread. Many rural people, particularly the poor, faced greater strain on their resources. Landlessness increased. Social differentiations widened and stabilized. The war thus accelerated the onset of a 'profound agrarian crisis' that would come to a head in the early 1950s.⁶⁸⁶

This section has indicated how officials and settler interests mobilized the threat of scarcity to justify state control over the food market, and to secure unequal state support for white farmers. In the process, the seeds of an anti-scarcity rationale and institutional apparatus – oriented towards increasing food production through state control and financial guarantees – were sown. Yet at the time of maize control's formation, in July 1942, the objective of increased production was still to supply the export market. This objective would soon change, as by the end of the year Kenya and East Africa faced formidable scarcities of their own.

6.4 Scarcity worsens

In Kenya, the 'long rains' of 1942 had been excessively heavy in some areas, while the 'short rains' between October and December were less than expected.

⁶⁸¹ Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, p. 214–15.

⁶⁸² Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', p. 338.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 340–1.

⁶⁸⁴ Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, pp. 108–9.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 134–40.

⁶⁸⁶ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 256.

Nyanza and Central provinces were the worst affected by the erratic rainfall – regions that ordinarily produced two maize crops every year, and where the harvest usually took place before other parts of Kenya.⁶⁸⁷ This decreased the total harvest coming onto the market in January and February 1943, particularly of maize and fresh vegetables.⁶⁸⁸ Nyanza, as described above, was a large producer of maize, and the smaller crop harvested there was of serious consequence for food supplies in the colony more generally.⁶⁸⁹

By this point, rises in the real cost of living were starting to affect Kenya's working poor acutely. Those in the towns bore the most immediate brunt. There, prices of staple foods had risen to the controlled price, and 'black marketeers' happily supplied those willing to take the risk of illegal trading. Shortages of imported goods also acted to drive up prices more generally.⁶⁹⁰ A committee appointed to look into the cost of living reported that, between the end of 1940 and April 1942, the prices of local goods had increased by 31 per cent, while those of imports had shot up by over half.⁶⁹¹ At the same time, housing costs were atypically high due to heightened demand and the slow rate of supply. Overcrowding was common; living conditions were deplorable and diseases spread easily. Wages generally failed to keep pace.⁶⁹²

The introduction of maize control coincided with efforts to reform the system of price fixing. Up to this point, the KSB had been responsible for commodity pricing. Officials, realizing 'the strength of the conflicting interests affected', decided that the price controller should be given 'as independent a position as possible' while remaining under the governor's oversight.⁶⁹³ This independence would ensure that questions of increased production and supply could be balanced against the need to check the rise in cost of living.⁶⁹⁴ A new set of defence regulations introduced a range of comprehensive price control regulations with heavy penalties for those buying or selling illicitly. However, the price controller could do little to prevent a general rise in the cost of living, having authority over the maximum prices of around 150 local items, and no

⁶⁸⁷ Willan et al., *Report*, p. 7.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7, 11.

⁶⁸⁹ Nyanza was expected to produce 165,000 bags of maize between February and April 1943, versus 69,000 from Central Province and other African areas, and 95,000 from settler areas; *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁶⁹⁰ Reduced imports directly raised the costs of key goods for workers, and further acted indirectly to disincentivize food production by making commodities ordinarily bought by food growers unavailable; Cooper, *African Waterfront*, p. 60.

⁶⁹¹ Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, p. 266.

⁶⁹² Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 122; Zeleza, 'Second World War', pp. 154–5.

⁶⁹³ TNA: CO 852/500/2, Rennie to Stanley (letter), 10 July 1943.

⁶⁹⁴ In particular, W. Grazebrook, the price controller, disapproved of the arrangement of having the Supply Board act as the price control authority: 'I had realized for some time that the position was far from satisfactory and that it was fundamentally wrong for a department – which is not dissimilar to an audit department – to be under the control of, and derive its powers from, a body whose members were principally commercial men vitally interested in the extent to which control was exercised'. He therefore took 'every opportunity' to 'advocate the separation of price control from the Supply Board', concurring with the growing opinion in the press and among the public to that effect; TNA: CO 852/500/2, Rennie to Stanley (enclosed report by Grazebrook), 10 July 1943, pp. 10–11.

powers over the landed costs of imports. Staff shortages made the task that much more difficult.⁶⁹⁵

As shortages of food and consumer goods became more acute in the latter part of 1942, the relatively low fixed prices of key goods encouraged 'black marketing'. By October, the *East African Standard* was highlighting the plight of the black market in Nairobi. Local businesspeople claimed that the austerity of the regulations, combined with the lack of price control staff to enforce them, was forcing smaller dealers to enter parallel markets. In response, they called for distribution, price and import control to come under one administrative head, plus the creation of state shops to act as a 'vent' to undermine illicit trade.⁶⁹⁶ The Colonial Office, however, considered that only a comprehensive rationing scheme could ensure the proper distribution of goods under circumstances where prices were being controlled.⁶⁹⁷

In Mombasa, the situation was far more urgent than members of the Nairobi public or press appreciated. A few days after these reports appeared in the *Standard*, the combination of food shortages, decreased real wages and housing grievances triggered rolling strikes, practically closing the port for several days of October. The unrest spread rapidly from railway to other public and private employees, and from Mombasa to Nairobi and Eldoret.⁶⁹⁸ These events forced the state's hand. Commodity distribution boards were quickly established in Nairobi and Mombasa in October 1942 to plan food allocations. Maize was rationed via controlled distribution through selected wholesalers and retailers, and by imposing volume limits on sales to individuals.⁶⁹⁹ Officials also appointed a committee to investigate the workers' claims. Eventually, they responded by factoring food price and rent inflation into revised wage levels, and by providing a special war bonus for railway and government workers.⁷⁰⁰

So, by the end of 1942 Kenyan officials and members of the public faced the combined effects of maize control, the 'black market', population increase and, finally, bad weather. Urban worker unrest drove home the point that further, intensified efforts were needed to guarantee food supplies for productive and essential services. In addition, it was rapidly becoming clear that Kenya was not the only colony severely affected by drought and harvest shortfall – all countries in the region, from South Africa to Uganda, appeared to be facing poor harvests and major maize deficits. In December, the East African Governors Conference formed the East African Production and Supply Council (EAPSC). It was responsible for pooling and allocating essential supplies between the various regional territories, the railway and harbour authorities, and military forces

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 33.

⁶⁹⁶ TNA: CO 852/500/14, 'Black Market Scandal', *East African Standard*, 12 October 1942; 'A Terrible Racket', *East African Standard*, 12 October 1942.

⁶⁹⁷ TNA: CO 852/500/14, minute by Carstairs, 11 December 1942; minute by McClyde, 14 December 1942.

⁶⁹⁸ Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, pp. 266–7; Cooper, *African Waterfront*, pp. 60–5.

⁶⁹⁹ TNA: CO 852/428/4, Moore to Cranbourne (telegram), 16 November 1942.

⁷⁰⁰ TNA: CO 852/428/3, Colonial Office to Greenridge (letter), 8 April 1943; Cooper, *African Waterfront*, pp. 62–3.

stationed locally.⁷⁰¹ The director of produce disposal, R. E. Norton, was responsible for allocating supplies according to demand.⁷⁰² The task was not easy. Accurate and uniform statistics on food production and demand in each territory were seldom, if ever, available.⁷⁰³

Once it had become clear that Kenya might face an internal maize deficit, the export contract to supply the Middle East was hurriedly cancelled.⁷⁰⁴ But officials gradually realized that more drastic measures were needed. One option was to reduce or substitute labour rations. However, as I discuss below, this invariably provoked 'labour difficulties', and became a last resort.⁷⁰⁵ The other option was to request imports via the Colonial Office and Ministry of Food in London. In December 1942, Kenya requested 10,000 tons of maize imports per month from March to May 1943. This was on top of a separate request from the military for 16,000 tons. By early January, a growing degree of panic was evident in the governor's telegrams to London. Unless imports could be arranged, 'widespread starvation and labour unrest will be inevitable'. Officials were considering 'returning labour to native reserves', plus the culling of pigs being raised to supply the army.⁷⁰⁶

Initially, imperial authorities were reluctant to grant any colonial requests for food imports. At the start of February 1943, Stanley, the colonial secretary, informed Moore that shipping allocations, 'dictated by overriding strategic necessities', meant that East African authorities and populations would have to set about handling the shortages locally, without imports transported on British ships from beyond the Indian Ocean.⁷⁰⁷ Moore did not back down so easily, noting in his reply that people were already starving in Tanganyika.⁷⁰⁸ He reminded Stanley that the maize problem was East African in scope – the Kenyan Maize Control was responsible for feeding employed labour in the mainland territories, as well as providing for Zanzibar and the Seychelles. Moore warned that the maize shortage threatened to bring agricultural and industrial production across East Africa to a 'standstill' once large-scale labour retrenchments became unavoidable. In particular, the production of 'priority materials' such as sisal and pyrethrum were at risk. Railway and port functions (vital for military operations) would also have to be curtailed. Apart from this threat to the war effort, there would be serious local ramifications: 'To turn large numbers of employed natives adrift without food would produce consequences,

⁷⁰¹ Willan et al., *Report*, p. 16.

⁷⁰² Norton was also chair of the East African War Supplies Board, formed in late 1940 to control supplies for military forces; *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷⁰³ TNA: CO 533/530/7, Norton to chief secretary of Kenya (letter), 8 February 1944. The lack of accurate statistics was also a problem faced by the Kenyan Maize Control; Willan et al., *Report*, p. 73.

⁷⁰⁴ TNA: CO 852/428/8, Moore to Cranbourne (telegram), 30 October 1942; Willan et al., *Report*, p. 81.

⁷⁰⁵ TNA: CO 852/428/4, Moore to Cranbourne (telegram), 16 November 1942.

⁷⁰⁶ TNA: CO 852/428/4, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 23 December 1942; governor's deputy to Stanley (telegram), 9 January 1943.

⁷⁰⁷ TNA: CO 852/428/5, Stanley to Moore (telegram), 1 February 1943.

⁷⁰⁸ Tanganyikan officials estimated that 1,000 starved during this famine. Around 100,000 people received famine relief; Maddox, 'Gender and Famine', p. 96.

both economic and political, of the gravest kind'. The whole of East Africa could run out of food for employed labour as soon as April 1943.⁷⁰⁹ Moreover, knowledge that their families at home were facing food shortages was undermining 'the morale of the troops'. 'Nothing would do more to restore confidence', he wrote, 'than a statement that imported food had actually arrived'.⁷¹⁰

For imperial and colonial authorities, the problem boiled down to a balance between economy in consumption (thus saving British shipping space), on one hand, or maintaining essential East African industry through food imports, on the other. At first, as indicated above, the Colonial Office and Ministry of Food were initially reluctant to follow the latter path for East Africa. The military perspective was different. After the end of the Abyssinian campaign, and especially following the fall of Singapore to Japan in February 1942, Kenya had become an important strategic base of Allied operations, as well as a key source of sisal fibre and pyrethrum. The latter was needed to manufacture pesticides – a critical requirement for troops to fight in Asia and the Pacific. The War Office therefore intervened on behalf of East African food security. The Ministry of Food was warned that the 'military repercussions' of the food shortage in East Africa needed 'no iteration'. 'Exceptional measures' were justified to guarantee the region's cereal supplies.⁷¹¹ On top of this pressure, authorities in the United States were growing nervous about their sisal and pyrethrum supplies being threatened by food shortages and possible cutbacks in labour and production.⁷¹² The British Ministry of Supply was equally worried.⁷¹³ So, by the beginning of April 1943, the Ministry of Food faced pressure from several angles to arrange imports and shipping space for East Africa. At the same time, Kenyan officials faced pressure to prioritize food allocations to the sisal and pyrethrum industries.

These events set in motion a flurry of organizational activity in London, with the Ministry of Food, Ministry of War Transport and Colonial Office attempting to balance allotments of different foodstuffs between territories and scarce shipping space.⁷¹⁴ Meanwhile, local officials desperately made calculations of minimum possible food requirements, based on possible reductions in rationing and labour retrenchments (discussed below). The arrangements eventually made by authorities reveal the difficulties they faced: A Swedish ship, the SS Colombia, originally chartered to carry maize from Argentina to Northern

⁷⁰⁹ TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 6 February 1943.

⁷¹⁰ TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 11 February 1943.

⁷¹¹ TNA: CO 852/428/5, Longden to Gent (letter), 17 March 1943; CO 852/428/6, Franklin to Hobley (letter), 1 April 1943.

⁷¹² The Americans had relayed their concern to the British Food Mission in Washington, D.C., which in turn passed the message on to the Ministry of Food and Colonial Office.

⁷¹³ TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 24 February 1943; CO 852/428/5, Hobley to Deuber (letter), 5 March 1943.

⁷¹⁴ For correspondence on import arrangements relating to Kenya and East Africa, see TNA: CO 852/428/4; CO 852/428/5; CO 852/428/6; CO 852/428/7, all *passim*.

Rhodesia, was diverted to Mombasa.⁷¹⁵ Two shipments of wheat from Australia were redirected to East Africa from their supply route to India.⁷¹⁶ The military was able to secure some maize from Eritrea and Ethiopia, as well as tapioca, beans and cassava from Madagascar.⁷¹⁷ By May 1943, over 46,000 tons of foodstuffs had landed at Mombasa or were on order for the East African pool.⁷¹⁸

By September 1943, C. R. Lockhart, chair of the EAPSC, was anxious about the long-term food situation. He, along with officials in London, were already anticipating a worldwide cereal shortage, and he doubted the region could 'face the risk of carrying on for several years on the present close balance between food production and consumption'. Food demand was not expected to abate until demobilization. Increasing food production would require compromising other forms of industry, but was ultimately a fate that had to be accepted. The planning of a cereal reserve of at least 50,000 tons was also 'imperative'.⁷¹⁹ Prospects for 1944 were not favourable either, and he anticipated that the East African region could be 'in a mess' before the end of that year.⁷²⁰ As the minutes of an EAPSC meeting put it: the 'continuing responsibility for feeding employed labour... presented the chief problem'.⁷²¹ By November, Kenyan authorities had placed a firm order with London for 100,000 tons of imports to cover all requirements until September 1944 – double the estimated requirements that had been submitted three weeks earlier. The request later went up to 130,000 tons.⁷²²

These dynamics reveal how the governmental response to food scarcity was starting to take a highly calculative form – officials were thinking about the 'food situation' as a function of expected supplies, available stocks and effective demand. The urgency of these calculations and the sense of crisis they helped to create provided the context and rationale for emergency efforts to boost the local availability of food. These are briefly discussed in the following section.

6.4.1 Production and marketing

Apart from lodging emergency import requests with imperial authorities, Kenyan authorities also took steps to increase local food availability. These measures are already well documented in the existing historical literature, and will not be described in great detail here.⁷²³ One key response was to raise the controlled producer prices for maize (keeping, of course, the differential between white and African prices) to encourage planting and the marketing of all

⁷¹⁵ It carried 3,000 tons of maize and the same quantity of wheat. This was only possible because maize harvested in the Belgian Congo had become available earlier than expected, which was then used to satisfy Northern Rhodesian demand.

⁷¹⁶ One was forced to call at Mauritius to offload some of its stocks and help resolve a crisis that had appeared there.

⁷¹⁷ TNA: CO 852/428/5, Ministry of Food to British Food Mission (telegram), 6 March 1943; CO 852/428/6, Colonial Office to Winterton (letter), 20 April 1943.

⁷¹⁸ TNA: CO 852/428/6, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 15 May 1943.

⁷¹⁹ TNA: CO 852/428/7, Lockhart to Creasy (letter), 2 September 1943.

⁷²⁰ TNA: CO 852/428/7, Lockhart to Creasy (letter), 7 October 1943.

⁷²¹ TNA: CO 852/428/7, 'Minutes of East African Supply Council Meeting', 25 November 1943.

⁷²² TNA: CO 852/428/7, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 18 November 1943.

⁷²³ See Anderson and Throup, 'Myth'; Lonsdale, 'Depression'; Spencer, 'Settler Dominance'.

available supplies.⁷²⁴ This was done in January 1943. Grants payable for breaking and clearing land, as well as guaranteed minimum returns per acre, were also increased.⁷²⁵ Meanwhile, Africans were exhorted to plant and eat alternative foodstuffs in order to release maize supplies to feed labour.⁷²⁶ Officials organized a drive to extract all available maize from African areas.⁷²⁷ White maize growers were similarly ordered to surrender their surplus maize stocks.⁷²⁸ It seems that the combination of official pressure and raised producer prices were effective enough to entice many farmers to sell their maize, even as drought and scarcity seemed increasingly likely.⁷²⁹

A resort to forced labour was another response. Defence regulations passed in 1940 were used to secure labour for private employers in 'essential' industries like sisal, sugar, pyrethrum, rubber and flax.⁷³⁰ Settlers soon agitated for conscription for agricultural purposes. This was granted, and white farmers came to rely heavily on conscript labour.⁷³¹ Northern and Southern Rhodesia followed suit.⁷³² In all cases, it is probable that agricultural conscription exacerbated food shortages by diverting labour away from food production towards other 'essential' commodities.⁷³³ Moreover, in Kenya, communal labour was used for soil conservation work, further diverting scarce labour time from the tasks of subsistence.⁷³⁴

Unlike previous events, the immediate official reaction to food scarcity in late 1942 was not to make a series of proclamations under the Native Foodstuffs Ordinance to limit the movements and prohibit local exports of food supplies. In fact, it seems that a proclamation under the Ordinance – covering the whole of Kenya aside from the Northern Frontier and Turkana districts – was only gazetted on 25 March 1943, well after authorities had started to take other emergency measures to boost production and limit consumption.⁷³⁵ Authorities in Nyanza had only tried to stop the movement of foodstuffs from February onwards.⁷³⁶ Why this late reaction? The key variable here is the existence of maize control. The Native Foodstuffs Ordinance had previously been a means to

⁷²⁴ MPC officials raised the African maize price from 6/20 to 8/96 per bag in January 1943; Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', p. 339. In the same month, the settler rate was increased to 12 shillings per bag, later lifted to 13 shillings; TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 28 January 1943; also Githuku, *Mau Mau Crucible*, p. 104; Spencer, 'Settler Dominance', p. 507; Willan et al., *Report*, p. 49.

⁷²⁵ Willan et al., *Report*, p. 23.

⁷²⁶ Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', pp. 37–9.

⁷²⁷ Githuku, *Mau Mau Crucible*, p. 105.

⁷²⁸ TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 6 February 1943.

⁷²⁹ Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', pp. 44–5.

⁷³⁰ Zeleza, 'Second World War', p. 147.

⁷³¹ Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, pp. 235–47; Zeleza, 'Second World War', pp. 148–9.

⁷³² On the wartime use of compulsory labour in Northern Rhodesia, and Colonial Office discomfort on the issue, seeing it as an opportunistic effort by settler farmers to develop their capacity to produce maize and other cereals, see Datta, 'Farm Labour'; Johnson, 'Settler Farmers'; Palmer, 'Land Alienation'; Tembo, 'Coerced African Labour'; Vickery, 'Second World War'.

⁷³³ Byfield, 'Producing for the War', p. 38; Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, p. 243.

⁷³⁴ Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', pp. 39–40.

⁷³⁵ Willan et al., *Report*, p. 30.

⁷³⁶ Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', p. 40.

promote district self-sufficiency. Now, it was a way to stop the torrent of produce passing through unofficial channels, and to ensure that the maximum amount of maize flowed into the official market. A new version of the Ordinance was enacted in 1944 to reflect this newfound role.⁷³⁷ Likewise, Ugandan officials tightened their control of marketing and food circulation under defence regulations passed in 1943.⁷³⁸

As in the First World War, a shortage of agricultural equipment presented an obstacle to food production. Farmers did benefit, however, from the availability of agricultural equipment through Lend-Lease schemes, following their inception in March 1941.⁷³⁹ Some machinery also became available as part of war booty secured from Ethiopia and Somaliland. This would prove critical in driving the mechanization of Kenyan agriculture. Meanwhile, the use of artificial fertilizers increased through government subsidies. Storage facilities were developed with state assistance and, as mentioned, the state provided credit finance to farmers through the KFA. Buoyed with this unprecedented degree of support, many settlers moved into mixed farming.⁷⁴⁰

Evidence suggests that the exceptional measures taken by the state to boost wartime food production and marketing acted to aggravate the effects of scarcity, particularly for rural households.⁷⁴¹ Yet even these efforts were insufficient to meet local demand. Officials grew increasingly desperate over the course of 1943. Caught up in the wartime enthusiasm for industrial development and technological solutions for civil and military problems, they even started investigating the prospects of growing food yeast on an industrial scale to make up for the food deficit.⁷⁴² Some of the state's most concerted efforts, however, would involve attempting to control food access and consumption. This, in turn, required a delicate political balancing act between appeasing labour and conserving supplies. The following section discusses these dynamics.

6.4.2 Rationing, distribution and pricing

Once it became clear toward the end of 1942 that several African colonies were facing major food deficits, and that imports would be difficult to arrange, local officials set about reducing demand by economizing on consumption. Reducing or substituting labour rations was one option. In principle, this would allow

⁷³⁷ The 1944 Ordinance was amended in 1950 to, among other things, strengthen the penalties for contravention of official controls; CPK, *Official Gazette*, 2 May 1950, p. 334.

⁷³⁸ However, rigorous policing was required to prevent the leakage of food supplies southwards into famine-hit Ruanda; Carswell, *Cultivating Success*, p. 40.

⁷³⁹ Cowen and Westcott, 'Imperial Economic Policy', p. 22; Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 124.

⁷⁴⁰ Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, p. 44; Spencer, 'Settler Dominance', p. 504; Zeleza, 'Second World War', p. 149.

⁷⁴¹ Maddox, 'Gender and Famine', p. 96; Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', pp. 38–9.

⁷⁴² On plans for food yeast production, see TNA: CO 852/522/7, Storey to Carstairs, 24 August 1943; CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1945*, p. 85. The war definitively shifted colonial industrial policy: industrial development in Kenya was now to be encouraged to produce locally and save shipping space. New factories were soon established to produce goods such as margarine, beer and biscuits to supply the East African market. See Cowen, 'Early Years', p. 65; Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, pp. 125–6; Zeleza, 'Second World War', pp. 152–3.

existing stocks to last longer, thereby limiting import requirements. A cut of 25 per cent in the maize ration, to be substituted by cassava from the Belgian Congo, was proposed in Northern Rhodesia as early as November 1942.⁷⁴³ However, officials worried about the repercussions of these reductions for labour unrest. After all, the role that disgruntlement over food rations played in the 1935 Copperbelt strikes was a recent memory.⁷⁴⁴

Similar measures and concerns applied to Kenya, although here rationing schemes were more comprehensive than in Northern Rhodesia. Initially, rationing in Kenya was undertaken for individual commodities. As mentioned previously, maize meal was rationed to Africans in Nairobi and Mombasa from October 1942. European and Indian populations, with their ostensibly different dietary habits, were another matter. Authorities introduced individual rationing for rice supplies at the beginning of December 1942, for butter later in the month, and for ghee from the start of the new year. The rationed quotas of rice and ghee were both subsequently reduced. Initially, Africans were not entitled to rice rations, even if it was a staple in their diet.⁷⁴⁵ Wheat flour rationing throughout East Africa would begin in March 1943.⁷⁴⁶ Meanwhile, reports of the poor supply position led the Maize Board to prepare for maize rationing from early December 1942.

Prior to the establishment of the EAPSC in December 1942, East African officials had already decided that controls over pricing and distribution of essential goods should be coordinated so as to prevent runaway inflation and inequitable allocations of scarce goods.⁷⁴⁷ In addition, there was now the prospect of handling the reception and distribution of hoped-for maize imports. So, on 16 January 1943 the Kenya Commodity Distribution Board (KCDB) was established to advise the governor on the establishment of local boards, and to coordinate the activities of these boards as required by the EAPSC. This included collecting statistics on consumption for the EAPSC's director of produce disposal.⁷⁴⁸ W. Grazebrook, the Kenyan price controller, was invited to be chair of the KCDB. Initially he was resistant due to the anticipated work demands of fulfilling two important official roles. Ultimately, he accepted the position, mainly as a form of official protest – to prevent the manipulation of prices by 'certain commercial interests'.⁷⁴⁹ This, however, did not solve the problems of price control (discussed above), and Grazebrook's powers remained limited. Part of the difficulty was that fixing prices in one context could have major repercussions for the other East African territories. Eventually, in mid-1943, officials decided to establish a committee (headed by the EAPSC chair) to fix prices of plant and animal produce on a regional basis.⁷⁵⁰

⁷⁴³ TNA: CO 852/428/8, Waddington to Cranbourne (telegram), 2 November 1942.

⁷⁴⁴ Dandule, *Women and Mineworkers*, p. 56.

⁷⁴⁵ This policy was changed once the Food Shortage Commission submitted an interim recommendation to this effect in mid-1943; Willan et al. *Report*, pp. 109–11.

⁷⁴⁶ TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 11 February 1943.

⁷⁴⁷ TNA: CO 852/500/14, 'Minutes of the 10th Meeting of the East African Civil Supplies Board', 2 and 5 October 1942.

⁷⁴⁸ Willan et al. *Report*, pp. 17, 19.

⁷⁴⁹ TNA: CO 852/500/2, Rennie to Stanley (enclosed report by Grazebrook), 10 July 1943, p. 34.

⁷⁵⁰ TNA: CO 852/500/2, Rennie to Stanley (letter), 10 July 1943.

The establishment of the KCDB coincided with the period when the effects of food shortages had started to grow more acute. This left the Board in a 'quagmire'. Rationing and distribution on a coordinated, countrywide basis could not be attempted until decentralized bodies were formed capable of implementing these functions and collecting statistics. Further, a census of the non-African population was required – something for which 'no figures of any value existed'. The KCDB was forced to devise a 'hastily conceived' rationing scheme for starch foods, as existing and potential supplies appeared to be dangerously below the estimated rate of consumption, 'which was in any case a nebulous reckoning'.⁷⁵¹

Prior to the KCDB's creation, the maize controller had already started collecting data on consumers in early January 1943. There was a poor public response to the returns, and the process took longer than expected. Moreover, while these data were being collected the maize supply position deteriorated rapidly. 'Drastic steps' were now necessary, involving far more detailed registration work. Authorities decided to implement a complete rationing scheme for Europeans and Indians covering wheat, flour, rice, butter and ghee.⁷⁵² Local distribution boards were quickly appointed throughout the territory at the end of January 1943, and started to register individual consumers and collect census data. Towards the end of the year, regional distribution boards, operating under direct control of a central board, replaced the local versions.

From the start of February, normal Kenyan labour rations were cut by one quarter in mass, to 1.5 pounds of maize meal per working male.⁷⁵³ Workers were assured that the measure was temporary. Officials issued a circular to employers listing suitable foodstuffs that could be substituted for maize meal.⁷⁵⁴ In addition, mixed meal was made by blending maize with other foodstuffs such as finger millet, sorghum and cassava. This was distributed as labour rations, with the approval of medical authorities who noted the improved nutritional value of the admixture over that of straight maize meal.⁷⁵⁵

The crisis escalated further before the end of February. The MPC now held no reserve of wheat, and was forced to distribute incoming maize supplies on a day-to-day basis.⁷⁵⁶ They had to prioritize. The policy they adopted was to provide, as far as possible, supplies essential for employed labour and employed Africans residing in urban areas. All food allocations to traders without registered labour-

⁷⁵¹ TNA: CO 852/500/2, Rennie to Stanley (enclosed report by Grazebrook), 10 July 1943, p. 34.

⁷⁵² TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 6 February 1943.

⁷⁵³ TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 28 January 1943. Defence regulations enacted on 5 February 1943 made it an offence for employers to issue maize meal rations exceeding 1.5 pounds per day to any employee. Further, only the employee, and not their family members, were entitled to such issues; Willan et al. *Report*, pp. 61, 83.

⁷⁵⁴ Githuku, *Mau Mau Crucible*, p. 104.

⁷⁵⁵ TNA: CO 852/428/7, Lockhart, 'EAPSC Memorandum on Maize Ration for Employed Labour and Townships', 30 August 1943. Prior to this, authorities had also attempted to economize on wheat consumption by 'adulterating' flour with maize meal; TNA: CO 852/428/4, Moore to Cranbourne (telegram), 11 June 1942; Willan et al. *Report*, p. 112.

⁷⁵⁶ TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 24 February 1943.

employing customers were stopped, and no supplies were available to help relieve the African reserves. Distribution instead prioritized essential sisal-producing functions (excluding planting and development work). Labour for other farming activities (including tea, coffee and pyrethrum) would continue to receive food supplies, but on a 'severely' reduced basis, to allow for current levels of production to be maintained only. Ration issues were ceased or heavily curtailed for construction industries, gold mines, beer halls and domestic workers.⁷⁵⁷ Despite these steps, many employers retrenched parts of their labour force, while some workers 'voluntarily' returned to the reserves.⁷⁵⁸ Officials also introduced a revised ration scale, based on medical nutritional standards, initially for railway and government employees. This scale included further reductions in cereals, but more meat.⁷⁵⁹ The military had already reduced their rations.⁷⁶⁰ Efforts were taken to reduce maize allocations for stock feed, and to gradually reduce the pig population by half.⁷⁶¹

Forced migration was another drastic option. The government made plans to 'repatriate' urban Africans and discharged labour to rural reserves, and these efforts commenced in February. On the surface, officials thought that people would have a greater chance of obtaining food in the reserves. But repatriation also appeared to provide the opportunity to finally rid Kenyan towns of large numbers of 'idlers and stiffs'.⁷⁶² The approach followed, initially, was to entice people to leave the towns by appealing to 'consciousness of the shortage'. The approach changed in March, once a coupon-based system of rationing had been introduced for Africans in Nairobi. The Nairobi Commodity Distribution Board registered some 30,000 employed males in two weeks, using the *kipande* system (see chapter 3). Only those holding a *kipande* and ration coupon were entitled to receive food from a registered supplier. Women and children were excluded.⁷⁶³ This made the work of repatriation far easier. Officials could simply 'pick and choose' whom they would ration. Those left over would be forced to 'return' to the reserves.

⁷⁵⁷ Willan et al. *Report*, pp. 60–1.

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.*; Sisal planters asked the state for assistance with labour repatriation, but it is unclear whether they did resort to retrenchment; Githuku, *Mau Mau Crucible*, p. 106.

⁷⁵⁹ TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 24 February 1943.

⁷⁶⁰ TNA: CO 852/428/11, Dundas to Stanley (enclosed conference report), 11 March 1943.

⁷⁶¹ TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 28 January 1943; 'Food Shortage in East Africa', *East African Standard*, 29 January 1943; Moore to Stanley (telegram), 24 February 1943. Kenyan officials had considered the question of whether to cull pigs as early as January; TNA: CO 852/428/4, governor's deputy to Stanley (telegram), 9 January 1943.

⁷⁶² More rigorous registration and repatriation 'of the unemployable and unregistered' was recommended by the Willan Commission, which reported on labour conditions and the causes of the Mombasa strike of 1939. This endorsed growing public pressure on the state to take a more active approach in managing African urban populations and improving living conditions. Willan would later chair the Kenyan Food Shortage Commission of 1943 (see chapter 7). Unsurprisingly, the latter's report approved of the state's wartime resort to repatriation; Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, pp. 224, 229n58; Willan et al. *Report*, pp. 61–2. The state continued to repatriate 'unemployed and idle workers' over the course of 1944 through defence regulations; Cooper, *African Waterfront*, p. 76.

⁷⁶³ Willan et al. *Report*, pp. 20–1, 62; Zeleza, 'Second World War', p. 153.

In all, about 10,000 people (including the families of workers) were sent from Nairobi to rural areas. Free railway tickets were issued to those travelling to Nyanza, but Kikuyu people had to bear their own travel costs.⁷⁶⁴ The Mombasa Distribution Board considered registration impracticable, and central officials agreed – Mombasa was a ‘native town’ where registration could not possibly work.⁷⁶⁵ There the Board preferred to sell maize rations through twenty controlled wholesalers and retailers. Each customer was allowed to purchase 1.5 lbs of maize meal per day. But, without registering individual consumers, the system was more than inconvenient (with long queues forming daily outside controlled shops) and easily abused. Casual workers only received rations on the days they worked, and their families were not entitled to any issues.⁷⁶⁶

The East African territories managed to scrape through 1943 with their limited supplies and emergency imports. But the drought extended through the ‘long rains’ of that year. As such, reduced rations – originally announced as temporary – remained in force in Kenya. By late September 1943, Governor Moore and other officials were showing ‘serious concern’ over the ‘labour outlook in Kenya’ as a result of the rationing problem.⁷⁶⁷ Continuing with reduced rations indefinitely, they worried, would amount to a ‘breach of faith’ and lead to further strike action. Moore decided to start issuing full rations (of mixed meal) in October, keeping open the option of restoring a cut in the new year, if the ‘short rains’ proved unfavourable. At that stage, a decision could be taken over whether the risk of imports was justified by the need to maintain production.⁷⁶⁸ That risk was indeed justified – as noted above, Kenyan authorities ordered 130,000 tons of imported foodstuffs to tide them over 1944.⁷⁶⁹

So, the wartime scarcity and the functions of food distribution were closely tied up with an emerging politics of urban labour in Kenya. On one hand, officials preferred to request expensive imports than cut or substitute labour rations, for fear of the unrest and underproduction these acts might entail. On the other, labour mobilization made claims on the state that effectively secured entitlements in the form of priority distribution and wage subsidization. These wartime concessions meant that food emerged as an important component of a political contract formed between the Kenyan state and urban labour. As part of this politics, officials used quantitative nutritional knowledge as the basis to manage worker demands and entitlements. As I will discuss in the following

⁷⁶⁴ Willan et al. *Report*, pp. 61–2.

⁷⁶⁵ Cooper notes the repeated use of the phrase ‘native town’ to justify the lack of any attempt to implement registration in Mombasa in the 1930s and 1940s. Registration of casual workers was eventually started in August 1944, largely as a means to facilitate expulsions of Mombasa’s famously large population of ‘idlers and stiffs’; *African Waterfront*, p. 71.

⁷⁶⁶ TNA: CO 852/428/4, Moore to Cranbourne (telegram), 16 November 1942; Willan et al. *Report*, pp. 17, 20–1. Eventually, registration was introduced in Mombasa in 1944; Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour*, pp. 268–9.

⁷⁶⁷ Zeleza notes that ration reductions had indeed triggered strikes in Kenyan towns; ‘Second World War’, p. 154.

⁷⁶⁸ TNA: CO 852/428/7, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 23 September 1943; Lockhart, ‘EAPSC Memorandum on Maize Ration for Employed Labour and Townships’, 30 August 1943.

⁷⁶⁹ TNA: CO 852/428/7, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 18 November 1943.

chapter, the state's nutritional interventions after the war effectively concentrated on the problem of 'stabilizing' an emerging urban working class.

Conditions of war enabled the problems of distribution and pricing to be considered in concert, and at an inter-territorial scale. Officials became overtly concerned with ensuring *fair* and *equitable* distribution. This was part of the motivation for introducing individual rationing. But it applied equally to how food supplies were collected, pooled, allocated and priced on a wider scale, between districts, race groups, provinces and territories. The latter depended on the availability of accurate statistics.⁷⁷⁰ This marks a profound change from the localized problems of food scarcity and famine relief that occupied officials in previous years. Even the Food Control Board of 1929 was primarily concerned with allocating famine relief to drought-stricken rural districts, rather than coordinating the entire system of production and distribution according to human need (see chapter 4).

Given the repeated official references to 'fairness' and 'equity', it is possible that the war provided the seeds of a rationale whereby the state, through its centralized marketing system, sought to limit and regulate the operations of the market so as to fulfill an economic and moral agenda of equity and fairness between different groups and spaces.⁷⁷¹ However, I have shown that the nominal emphasis on equitable distribution was limited in practice – as in previous famines, wage labour was prioritized for government food relief. Even then, some industries, workforces and districts were 'more equal' than others, according to their ranking within local and imperial priorities. Rural relief was low on the list. As such, people had to cope in a range of ways, most of them extra-governmental. Some of these strategies are briefly discussed in the following section.

6.4.3 Further relief and coping strategies

With the worsening food situation in early 1943, the Kenyan state was forced to ramp up its famine relief efforts. Officials established a Reserve Foodstuffs Committee in early January 1943. This had the power to purchase food supplies, either locally or abroad, and distribute them to the hungry.⁷⁷² The Committee was also able to secure some supplies of cassava, dried bananas and finger millet. These were allocated to district commissioners in the areas most affected by

⁷⁷⁰ Willan et al. *Report*, pp. 18, 93; TNA: CO 852/428/5, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 6 February 1943; CO 852/428/11, Dundas to Stanley (enclosed conference report), 11 March 1943.

⁷⁷¹ Bryceson makes the point that the Tanzanian government's maize pricing policy pursued between 1973 and 1986 was primarily concerned with achieving such 'spatial egalitarianism', affording 'spatially equitable prices to producers and affordable prices to consumers'. She notes that the history of statutory food marketing was closely related to urban development and experiences of urban food shortages and inflation similar to those of the Second World War; 'Urban Bias Revisited', pp. 88, 99.

⁷⁷² Zeleza, 'Second World War', p. 150.

food shortage, on the advice of the chief native commissioner.⁷⁷³ Moreover, large amounts were spent on famine relief in Machakos and other districts in 1943 and 1944.⁷⁷⁴ Support from central government was not targeted equally at all areas, however. In some cases, like Vihiga, north of Kisumu, local officials had to make their own arrangements to secure and transport relief.⁷⁷⁵

Even though the government spent considerable sums on distributing famine relief during the war, African people handed over far larger amounts on cash purchases. For the most part, there was considerable money in the reserves, whether from agricultural sales or military and labour remittances. Some Kikuyu farmers, located close to centres of demand, were making tidy profits through the official or urban 'black market'. Others were able to sell their maize to their remittance-rich Kamba neighbours.⁷⁷⁶ Some of this maize was smuggled by motor vehicles at night, to avoid controls. Some was transported along the old trading routes that linked tribal groups in past times.⁷⁷⁷ Moreover, as in previous scarcities, Kamba people migrated north and west to fetch supplies in Kikuyuland. In Vihiga too, Maxon describes how control regulations coupled with heightened demand quickly led to the formation of non-official trading networks importing food from other parts of North Nyanza, for sale at highly inflated prices. Officials invariably saw this trade as harmful and exploitative. They attempted to shut down local exports, as well as to undercut the 'black market' with imports, often with little success.⁷⁷⁸

So, although people pursued a range of strategies to cope with the food shortage,⁷⁷⁹ evidence suggests that the market was becoming more important as

⁷⁷³ Willan et al. *Report*, p. 4. 30,000 bags of cassava and banana products were imported from Uganda. These were sold at the cost of importation, at the same points wherefrom mixed meal was being distributed; TNA: CO 533/532/9, Moore to Stanley (telegram no. 213), 1 June 1944.

⁷⁷⁴ The amounts spent on famine relief reflected price inflation. During 1943, the state spent 110,300 pounds on relief for parts of Machakos alone. The aim was to recover as much of these costs as possible but, once again, free issues were necessary for the destitute, and sales were subsidized in areas where famine conditions had been protracted; TNA: CO 533/532/9, Moore to Stanley (telegram no. 213), 1 June 1944. For the first nine months of 1944, the state spent over 230,000 pounds on purchasing relief supplies for Machakos, Kitui, as well as marginal northern and coastal districts. The same policy of distribution applied; TNA: CO 533/532/9, Moore to Stanley (telegram no. 214), 1 June 1944.

⁷⁷⁵ The district officer in Vihiga managed to procure some cassava to distribute as famine relief in May 1943. The provincial commissioner also used LNC funds to purchase maize from African farmers, directly, and from settlers, via official channels. These were then sold below 'black market' rates. Up to 5,000 people arrived daily at local marketplaces to obtain relief in the second week of May. This figure soon dropped to around 2,000. Not everyone was able to secure supplies – Maxon indicates that perhaps less than one-third of those seeking food actually received any, depending on how the urgency of their needs were judged by those distributing the supplies; 'Fantastic Prices', pp. 48–50.

⁷⁷⁶ Anderson and Throup note that maize sold by Kikuyu farmers to Kamba people on the 'black market' could fetch seven times the controlled price for African produce, and over four times that paid to settlers, 'Myth', pp. 339–41.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

⁷⁷⁸ Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, p. 109.

⁷⁷⁹ In Vihiga, for example, some farmers shifted cropping strategies and planted more root crops when drought threatened towards the end of 1942. Others planted maize early, tried to hide their supplies from the official market, or ate cobs while still green. Migration to find short-term employment in neighbouring reserves appears to have been a less common strategy, arguably

a mode of access and survival. Prices may have been high, but many people preferred to use cash to purchase food. The increased availability and circulation of money led to further inflation.⁷⁸⁰ As a result, poor households, especially in marginal areas, without access to subsistence resources, suffered the most.⁷⁸¹

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the local and international events of the Second World War consolidated and advanced some of the dynamics of food scarcity and government seen in the 1920s and 1930s. The marked trend was towards centralization of governmental responsibility around food issues, while still relying on local institutions to provide basic relief functions. But the war also introduced novel developments to the nature of food scarcity and its government. I reflect on these below.

How did war conditions alter the nature of food scarcity? The food shortages of 1942 and thereafter were primarily caused by drought, but were fundamentally linked to war conditions, including increased food demand, and the effects of the state marketing system. All consumers were hurt by inflation on both official and unofficial markets. Yet urban residents also suffered from erratic supply through the official market. In both rural and urban areas, the poor felt the effects of scarcity most acutely. While people mainly suffered from hunger in the form of malnutrition, some rural deaths from starvation also occurred, but not at the scale seen in previous events. Famine was now a minority phenomenon, while scarcity was more 'widespread and lingering'.⁷⁸²

How did the understanding of the problem of food scarcity change? For officials, scarcity was now less a natural calamity, to be confronted and 'muddled through' as it appeared, and more a risk calling for extensive state intervention in social and economic life, and in the operations of the market. This intervention sought to moderate the longer-term risks and effects of dearth, and to reduce social vulnerability, rather than simply treat the symptoms of scarcity by distributing relief. Moreover, scarcity was becoming less a problem of localized rural famine, and more a matter of the balance between levels of supply and demand at multiple scales, from the district, to the territorial, to the regional.

Official efforts to manage the wartime scarcity encompassed processes of both access and supply. War conditions, including urban labour mobilization, called for and enabled an unprecedented degree of state control over how people accessed food. These conditions further highlighted the importance of seeing food pricing, distribution and consumption as part of an integrated system. Here the key governmental problem – thrust to the forefront by urban strike action – was managing economic access and the risks of indirect entitlement failure. To

because the labour supply was already depleted, with many working-age men having been recruited outside the reserves; Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', pp. 37–8, 45–6.

⁷⁸⁰ Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', p. 341.

⁷⁸¹ Maxon, 'Fantastic Prices', pp. 41, 43, 51; Nangulu, *Food Security*, p. 215.

⁷⁸² Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, p. 88.

do so, the state acted to guarantee access through targeted subsidization and price control. Moreover, officials invoked a nominal policy of 'equitable' distribution to determine how food should be allocated between different groups and places. In practice, however, the notion of 'equity' was defined in relation to key industries and groups, rather than the territorial population as a whole. Urban labour mobilization secured key entitlements from the state, and 'essential' rural industries were also prioritized for distribution. At the same time, officials sought (within limits imposed by the politics of labour) to control food access and demand, not only by restraining consumption via rationing, but also by regulating how and what workers ate through the specification of dietary scales.

Alongside promoting food access, the supply problem – the urgent need to boost food production – was an equal if not greater area of state interest and intervention. Originally designed to increase export production to assist the wider war effort, statutory control ultimately focused on supplying the domestic and regional labour markets, as well as urban and other non-producing populations. In one move, Kenya's settlers were able to create and 'capture' the corporatist state apparatus of production committees and boards surrounding maize and other key products.⁷⁸³ In the process, the rationale of state-guaranteed prices as a means to secure adequate territorial food supplies was institutionalized.

Taken together, these efforts and developments constituted a state apparatus and mode of government of life that worked along two closely interrelated seams. The first was addressed to the balance between food supply and demand manifesting at multiple scales, and broadly aimed to 'secure' the food supplies of certain sections of the population against the risk of food scarcity. What techniques were applied to manage this risk and balance? Anti-scarcity practices were now, far more so than previously, calculative. They enrolled statistics and quantitative nutritional knowledge to plan production and distribution. They also encompassed spatial techniques and calculations, with the development of local production plans being one key example. Within the limits imposed by the woeful lack of accurate statistics on production and demand, scarcity now had a technical fix. Anti-scarcity practices were also increasingly economic, functioning through the governable space of the market. Subsidies and guaranteed prices, for example, were techniques that worked through incentives, and by acting on the income-cost calculations of consumers and producers. As such, this mode of anti-scarcity practice governed through the 'free', economic subject of interest.⁷⁸⁴ The target 'population' for such a market-based approach was, however, highly circumscribed, practically limited to labour and a few key non-producing groups. The vast majority of rural Kenyans were expected to feed themselves.

It was largely to this majority of poor, rural African smallholder producers that the second, Malthusian rationale and mode of governing could be addressed. This mode, as previously, was closely associated with the governable space of the

⁷⁸³ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 123; Zeleza, 'Second World War', pp. 146–7.

⁷⁸⁴ Dean, Malthus Effect, p. 23.

reserve, and with a resort to coercive methods to implement tasks like soil conservation. However, the wartime 'state of exception' also justified the extension of coercive and disciplinary techniques to other people and places, beyond the confines of the rural reserve.⁷⁸⁵ Africans were conscripted to work on settler farms, maize stocks were forcibly extracted from the White Highlands, urban residents were repatriated to rural areas, and rationing was instituted all over the territory. It was as if the war had turned the entire territory into a kind of reserve; the suspension of liberal techniques and ordinary legal rights became a general juridico-political state, even if Africans continued to suffer disproportionately. Moreover, wartime conditions meant the urgency of increasing food production overtook, in policy and practice, the related eco-Malthusian concerns around population, land scarcity and soil degradation. The latter problems would, however, return to the political stage with renewed rhetorical force before the war had come to a close, as I will show in the following chapter.

Yet, apart from a keener recourse to state coercion in certain circumstances, the chapter has also revealed some subtle wartime changes to the Malthusian anti-scarcity problematic. The statements of Kenyan officials reveal that they increasingly expected to govern through the responsible, provident subject. This was notable within the wartime discourse that emphasized the responsibilities of the individual African in relation to food shortages. Rural Africans no longer simply constituted a hopeless and catastrophic mass of 'savage life' to be wrested from the immediacy of its existence through any necessary force or instruction. Rather, colonial officials were increasingly keen to direct their energies at a governable subject who could take responsibility for themselves and their family, and who would not expect public charity to do so.⁷⁸⁶

Overall, the Second World War helped to foster the emergence of a market-based, state-centred and supply-oriented approach to managing the threat and risk of scarcity. This approach ultimately persisted beyond the end of hostilities. However, maize control – with its system of corporatist boards and high guaranteed prices – was specifically motivated as an emergency wartime measure. In 1943, in the context of intense public criticism of its handling of the food shortage, there was no certainty that state control would continue once peace returned. Moreover, there were competing visions of how a Kenyan food policy should be designed: some were using the 'new science of nutrition' to argue for an approach to agricultural planning centred on human nutritional needs. Others were calling for a return to African communalism and rural subsistence as the key objectives of 'colonial development and welfare'. As such, the following chapter describes how, despite these alternative visions, a production-oriented anti-scarcity strategy was able to persist in Kenya beyond 1945.

⁷⁸⁵ Agamben, *State of Exception*.

⁷⁸⁶ Dean, *Malthus Effect*, p. 23.

7. Setting the Agenda

Historians have noted the critical role that the Second World War and its aftermath played in African political and economic history. The tensions created by wartime policies helped forge ‘the social base of political nationalism’ that came to dominate post-war politics in numerous African contexts.⁷⁸⁷ In Kenya, specifically, the war promoted the development of African and settler interests competing for control of the economy, and sharpened the effects of differentiation within African societies. In doing so, it accelerated the trends in political economy and state already seen during the Depression (see chapter 5).⁷⁸⁸ The early 1940s thus brought into focus the dynamics that would fire nationalist struggle and culminate in the Mau Mau conflicts of the following decade.⁷⁸⁹

In this chapter, I focus on the implications of the war and the immediate post-war period for anti-scarcity thought and practice in Kenya. The object is to show how a production-oriented rationale and system was able to persist and stabilize after 1945. As it did during the war, this system continued to function under the rationale that high producer prices were necessary to secure an adequate supply of maize to the official market at a territory-wide scale. I will argue that this rationale remained the keystone of government anti-scarcity efforts, despite (ultimately failed) calls to implement demand-oriented policies to promote rural subsistence and nutrition. Some of these calls emanated from a commission of inquiry appointed to investigate the causes Kenya’s wartime food shortage. I begin by discussing the recommendations of that commission.

7.1 The 1943 Food Shortage Commission

In the previous chapter, I noted that the war enabled settlers to win a temporary and incomplete ‘capture’ of state corporate institutions. They seized that opportunity to claim unequal support from the state. Moreover, as Lonsdale argues, they were able to develop a reputation for ‘productive efficiency’, becoming officially ‘respectable’ in a way that they had not been previously.⁷⁹⁰ They were also developing a united political voice after the factionalism that trumped plans for maize control during the mid-1930s (see chapter 5). Now planters had little to complain about (by way of high internal maize prices) when they faced the prospect of paying vastly more for imports or, when these were not available, retrenching workers.⁷⁹¹ Although conflict remained between the system of settler boards and Kenyan elective institutions, there was enough unity and influence that settler maize farmers could finally make their point and be heard: they were an ‘essential’ industry. Even if they had not completely

⁷⁸⁷ Byfield, ‘Producing for the War’, pp. 41–2.

⁷⁸⁸ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 256.

⁷⁸⁹ This basic point is made by Anderson and Throup, ‘Myth’; Lonsdale, ‘Depression’; Throup, *Origins of Mau Mau*; Zeleza, ‘Second World War’.

⁷⁹⁰ Lonsdale, ‘Depression’, p. 123.

⁷⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 123–4.

commandeered the state executive, they were in a position to decisively shift policy in their favour.

The food shortages of 1942 and 1943 led to 'severe' criticism of the government and maize control from 'unofficial quarters'. This pressure forced the governor to accede to a Legco motion to appoint a commission of inquiry into the causes of the scarcity.⁷⁹² The all-white Food Shortage Commission (FSC) – chaired by H. C. Willan, a former attorney-general of Kenya – considered a wide variety of causes leading to the scarcity, but ultimately agreed with the settler view: maize prices had been too low to maintain adequate levels of supply.⁷⁹³ Settler maize was essential to war requirements. It would still be essential once peace returned, ostensibly because 'optimum production' had been reached in the African reserves. Those making such arguments were careful to hedge their bets: declining African yields would either result from poor farming methods and soil degradation or, alternatively, the uptake of 'better' mixed farming methods.⁷⁹⁴ In any case, relying on African-grown maize to satisfy domestic demand would constitute a 'grave risk' due to the inherent unpredictability of African marketing behaviour.⁷⁹⁵

The FSC report, published in 1943, duly recommended that maize control continue after the war. Moreover, it argued, the government should undertake to buy 400,000 bags of settler maize from the KFA annually, at special high prices so as to incentivize greater production.⁷⁹⁶ Both settler and African producer prices should be fixed before the start of each planting.⁷⁹⁷ Production for export should not be encouraged; territorial self-sufficiency would now be the objective of maize policy.⁷⁹⁸ To help achieve this object, centrally-coordinated storage

⁷⁹² TNA: CO 533/530/7, Moore to Stanley (telegram), 19 April 1943.

⁷⁹³ Feeling that the interests and food needs of their community had been largely ignored by the European-controlled production and distribution agencies, the East African Indian National Congress argued strongly for one of the commissioners to be Indian. The government declined, supposedly because the candidates put forward by the Congress were not 'well known enough' or held commercial interests in food distribution and supply. Apart from Willan, the commissioners were W. H. Billington, general manager of the Magadi Soda Company, and J. L. Riddoch, a Kisumu businessman. They were selected on the grounds of 'impartiality' with respect to racial and sectional interests, as well as their 'standing in the community'; TNA: CO 533/530/7, Moore to Stanley (telegrams no. 261 and 282), 14 May 1943; Moore to Stanley (telegram), 24 May 1943.

⁷⁹⁴ No statistical evidence was given to substantiate the argument that African maize yields were declining and would be unable to satisfy domestic demand. The assertion appears to have been based on anecdotal evidence from various KFA representatives and officials, including the Director of Agriculture D. L. Blunt; Willan et al. *Report*, pp. 13–15, 54–5.

⁷⁹⁵ Willan et al. *Report*, pp. 45–6. The common official perception was that the 'psychological factors' of African producers – notably 'fear of a possible famine and consequent holding back of supplies' – ensured a degree of indeterminacy in their marketed output. As such, they argued that it was practically 'impossible' to estimate African production; TNA: CO 533/530/7, Lockhart to Seel (letter), 24 February 1944; Surridge to Seel (letter), 25 February 1944.

⁷⁹⁶ Willan et al. *Report*, p. 94.

⁷⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92; Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 122;

⁷⁹⁸ Bryceson notes a similar shift towards territorial (rather than household or district) self-sufficiency in Tanganyikan food policy following the war; 'Food Insecurity', pp. 147–8.

facilities should be developed from public funds to provide a famine reserve.⁷⁹⁹ The FSC confirmed the white farmer's ambitions of the 1930s: the security of their maize was now a 'national problem' deserving of special measures and attention. Accordingly, the war initiated an extended period of rapid, state-supported growth in the settler farming economy, as well as in commerce and secondary industry. African agriculture, by contrast, was to be reoriented away from cash cropping towards mixed farming and the growth of adequate food crops to ensure health and nutrition – in short, a return to the subsistence-oriented policies of 1939 (see chapter 5).⁸⁰⁰

Several authors have argued that the FSC set the agenda for government maize and marketing policy in Kenya and East Africa until at least the coming of independence in the mid-1960s.⁸⁰¹ They point to the post-war (and post-independence) persistence of a centralized maize marketing system pivoting on the payment of high guaranteed prices to producers, noting this to have been a key recommendation of the FSC. Such arguments, however, tend to overlook other proposals made by Willan and his colleagues. In section that follows, I will highlight one underexamined aspect of the FSC report that ultimately failed to significantly influence government policy. This was the report's emphasis on nutrition, on the need to change African diets, as well as its calls to develop cross-sectoral approaches to agricultural and food planning.

7.1.1 Nutrition and the failure of a needs-based food policy

Prior to the outbreak of war, nutritional knowledge and practice in Kenya had been tied up with the objectives of improving health and productivity. The experiences of malnutrition among African porters during the First World War, for example, had demonstrated the economies of labour-power afforded by better quality feeding (see chapter 3). Moreover, in the 1920s the Orr and Gilks study of diet and nutrition among the Maasai and Kikuyu peoples was directly concerned with the Kenyan 'labour problem'. This 'problem' had two main aspects: rates of African population growth, and individual worker productivity.⁸⁰² In this section, I will argue that nutritional work in the colony remained closely wedded to labour problems, even if the reasons for and nature of this focus changed. This was despite significant wartime interest in developing inter-departmental planning and coordination as a means to improve the nutritional status of the wider Kenyan population. I start by giving some background to the emergence of nutrition as a governmental problem in Kenya, before explaining why neither this population-wide perspective, nor a food and agricultural policy based on 'human needs', materialized after the end of the war.

⁷⁹⁹ The Commission recommended that part of the reserve should consist of finger millet due to its easier storage capacity and nutritional value; Willan et al. *Report*, pp. 43–5, 59, 94.

⁸⁰⁰ Willan et al. *Report*, pp. 55–6.

⁸⁰¹ Llewellyn, 'Government Marketing Control'; Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, p. 216; Yoshida, 'Historical Background'.

⁸⁰² Brantley, 'Kikuyu-Maasai Nutrition'.

Guided by the Orr and Gilks study, the anthropological work of Richards, and the strength of the emerging 'international food movement', during the 1930s the 'new science of nutrition' was increasingly applied to study the problems of colonial peoples.⁸⁰³ Some experts and officials drew upon this knowledge in arguing for economic policy reform in Kenya. Sir Daniel Hall, the former agricultural commissioner, for example, used nutritional research to argue for a 'system' of African agriculture oriented towards improving the welfare of the Kenyan population.⁸⁰⁴ By the end of the decade, Dr A. R. Paterson, Gilks' successor as Kenyan director of medical services, was referring directly to the work of Orr and Hall when discussing, in Legco, the need for coordinated inter-departmental policies to raise the African standard of living. For Paterson, like Orr, proper coordination of services would enable agricultural-economic problems and public health problems to 'cancel each other out'.⁸⁰⁵ Nutrition was a key part of this vision of state development policy centred on human needs.

However, executive authority did not necessarily back up the nutritional interest of medical officers like Paterson. In 1939, for example, a proposal to appoint a Kenyan nutrition officer – as per the general recommendations of an earlier Colonial Office report – was 'summarily dismissed' by Brooke-Popham, the governor.⁸⁰⁶ Once war had been declared, however, the new scientific knowledge of nutrition did come to play an important role in the government and security of Kenya and East Africa. As discussed in the previous chapter, officials used nutritional standards to calculate and plan production, distribution and rationing programmes. They were able to calculate ration scales to maintain and improve the physical efficiency of labour in mines, the military, agricultural industries and on government works.⁸⁰⁷ Moreover, I have mentioned how dietary standards were used to respond to urban labour grievances, by putting calculations of poverty and wage levels on a supposedly scientific footing, thereby 'objectively assessing basic needs'.⁸⁰⁸ Aside from its technical aspects, nutrition also confronted officials as a profound wartime health problem. The lingering nature of the food shortages in the early 1940s, while not resulting in major famine mortality, did lead officials to worry about evidence of rising malnutrition among the African population.⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰³ Rimmer, 'Basic Needs', p. 217; Worboys, 'Discovery'; Richards, *Land, Labour*, p. 2.

⁸⁰⁴ Hall, *Improvement of Native Agriculture*, chapter 4.

⁸⁰⁵ CPK, *KLC Deb 1937*, Vol. 3, 22 November, pp. 535–40. Paterson drew a systemic link between nutrition, agriculture, housing and labour problems: if people aspired to a higher standard of living, they would necessarily grow more crops alongside grazing cattle, they would practise better farming, eat a more varied diet, and conserve the soil. For Foucault, this emphasis on governing through incentives, within a milieu of natural elements, and of setting certain natural processes on course to 'cancel each other out', is characteristic of mechanisms of security; *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 37, 47, 65.

⁸⁰⁶ TNA: CO 859/164/2, Harvey to under secretary of state (letter), 20 January 1949. The recommendation was from the 1939 report of the Colonial Office's Committee on Nutrition in the Colonial Empire.

⁸⁰⁷ Mention of wartime experiments by the military in creating new ration scales and 'mixed meal' (including adding red millet, bonemeal and calcium carbonate to maize meal) is made in the Willan et al., *Report*, p. 59.

⁸⁰⁸ Cooper, *African Waterfront*, p. 63.

⁸⁰⁹ TNA: CO 859/116/5, *passim*.

The FSC heard evidence from medical officials including Paterson. Ten days after the commissioners met for the first time in Nairobi, in May 1943, the Hot Springs Conference – which would ultimately give rise to the FAO – began in Virginia.⁸¹⁰ The FSC's report made no reference of the Conference, but it echoed international thought by seeing food planning, and the prevention of future food shortages in the colony, as closely tied up with both agricultural policy and the question of nutrition. The commissioners proposed that a long-term agricultural policy for Kenya be developed around the basic objective of meeting the nutritional needs of the African population.⁸¹¹

In February 1944, the Colonial Office distributed the results of the Hot Springs Conference in a circular, urging colonial governments to consider a nutritional approach to economic policy. Rennie, the Kenyan acting governor, replied. Little progress had been made on nutritional issues due to war conditions, he explained, apart from work on developing new minimum ration scales for labour. He saw hope in nutritional surveys and field experiments being combined with the work of soil conservation officers who had been employed through a Colonial Development and Welfare Act grant. This would entail calculating local carrying capacities, plus the proportions of stock and crops needed to provide an adequate income and diet.⁸¹² Rennie enclosed a joint memorandum from the Kenyan Agriculture and Medical departments. It expressed a clear understanding of the need to balance farm planning with nutritional needs and education within the wider frame of 'native policy'.⁸¹³

Why was Rennie interested in such nutritional work? At least part of the urgency arose from the problem of demobilization and its social and political impacts – what would happen when military recruits returned to their rural homes, to a diet, 'physique' and standard of living below that to which they had become accustomed?⁸¹⁴ African agriculture, it was reasoned, should continue to provide ex-soldiers with an adequate diet and material standard of living. Moreover, officials were all too aware of the role that food and rationing had played in urban labour grievances and strike action during the war.⁸¹⁵ They wanted to preempt unrest and stabilize an urban working class through dietary change. While labour had been 'very disturbed' by any alteration to the established ration during the war, the opportunity was there, in the shape of the compromised maize supply position, to introduce a change.⁸¹⁶ Yet the question of African nutrition, at that stage, was not in the hands of a single agency. The Native Welfare Committee was meant to help coordinate agricultural, veterinary and medical policy. Like the Agriculture and Medical departments, it handled many

⁸¹⁰ Shaw, *Food Security*, chapter 1.

⁸¹¹ Willan et al., *Report*, pp. 54–60.

⁸¹² Rennie noted that one such survey/experiment was being undertaken in Central Province, although a lack of 'manpower' was likely to hamper a quick start.

⁸¹³ TNA: CO 859/116/5, Rennie to Stanley (letter), 10 November 1944.

⁸¹⁴ Willan et al., *Report*, p. 59. On Kenyan official hopes and fears around African demobilization, see Lewis, *Empire State-Building*, chapter 4.

⁸¹⁵ TNA: CO 859/164/2, Rennie to Blaxter (enclosure), 16 October 1946; Harvey to under secretary of state (letter), 20 January 1949.

⁸¹⁶ TNA: CO 859/164/2, Rennie to Blaxter (enclosure), 16 October 1946.

other pressing issues with a skeleton staff.⁸¹⁷ Nonetheless, Kenyan officials were vocally interested in improving African diet and nutrition through better agriculture and education. They thought, too, about using nutritional needs as a definite target and starting point for broader economic policy.

However, such enthusiasm appears to have been concentrated in officials like Rennie and Paterson. Sir Henry Moore, Kenya's governor from early 1940, appeared as unconvinced as Brooke-Popham by the need for nutritional research and planning during a time of war. This much was clear when, in March 1944, Seel in the Colonial Office wrote to Moore expressing his confidence that the colonial government would consider closely the FSC's recommendations regarding African nutrition and dietetics. The governor's reply did not brim with enthusiasm. His Executive Council had approved:

[M]ost of the long-term recommendations dealing with nutrition and so on, but we have not thought it necessary to go into them in any detail because there is in fact very little that is new about them so far as Kenya is concerned. Paterson seized the opportunity of the Commission to appear before it and spread himself on these and cognate subjects, on most of which he had already written at considerable length before.⁸¹⁸

Moore did not think it necessary to enlarge upon Paterson's inputs 'as heralding the advent of a new heaven and a new earth'.⁸¹⁹ Rennie, however, personally continued to push a nutritional agenda after the war. The 1946 report of the Kenyan Development Committee (which he chaired) recommended the formation of a central nutrition board to coordinate inter-departmental efforts around food supply, access and education.⁸²⁰ In February 1946, the government formed a Medical and Nutrition Sub-Committee to work out a five-year programme. However, the only step taken was to establish an Interim Provisioning Committee, which in practice focused on coordinating the food supply for employed labour.⁸²¹ At the time, it was still hoped that a nutrition board would be established in the future. The Colonial Office even offered to help engage a young female nutrition expert – one of several recently given 'special training in colonial nutrition' – to act as secretary of the proposed board.⁸²² But MacLennan, the new Kenyan director of medical services, turned down the offer. He preferred to appoint Dr D. Harvey, the government biochemist, trained at

⁸¹⁷ TNA: CO 859/116/5, Rennie to Stanley (letter), 10 November 1944.

⁸¹⁸ TNA: CO 533/535/13, Seel to Moore (letter), 1 March 1944; Moore to Seel (letter), 21 March 1944.

⁸¹⁹ TNA: CO 533/535/13, Moore to Seel (letter), 21 March 1944.

⁸²⁰ CPK, *Report of the Development Committee*, Vol. 2, p. 144.

⁸²¹ TNA: CO 859/164/2, Harvey to under secretary of state (letter), 20 January 1949. Appointed by the chair of the Kenya Supply Board, the Interim Provisioning Committee consisted of the various food control agencies, the APSB and the labour commissioner. It investigated and advised on 'best variations in diet and the means of obtaining the ingredients of the new diets'. Moreover, it considered how the planting programme for 1947 should incorporate a variety of crops in order to promote a 'more balanced' diet for the African worker; Rennie to Blaxter (enclosure), 16 October 1946.

⁸²² TNA: CO 859/164/2, MacLennan to Culwick (letter), 19 February 1946; Blaxter to Rennie (letter), 5 October 1946.

Aberdeen University and the Rowett Institute with Orr, as the board's executive officer. Harvey was apparently 'the right man for the job'. It was a demanding task, after all, calling for 'a first class man'.⁸²³

Unfortunately for Harvey, no nutrition organization or large-scale investigations existed by the end of the 1940s. He did not try to hide his frustration at this in later correspondence with the Colonial Office. Repeated proposals for organized nutritional work made to the Kenyan Medical Department had not even been acknowledged.⁸²⁴ Why was no nutrition board ever formed? There were several reasons. One was that Rennie, Harvey's nutritional ally in the administration, left to become governor of Northern Rhodesia in 1948. Another set of issues was financial. Through the late 1940s officials and politicians consistently balked at funding nutritional work. Harvey suspected this was because new dietary scales threatened to increase the costs of feeding labour.⁸²⁵ More directly, the Medical Department faced political pressure to increase its curative services, and could not provide the necessary specialized staff. A post for a government nutritional officer was included in the 1950 budget estimates, but was deleted by a majority vote of Legco.⁸²⁶

A further factor relates to the framing of the problem of malnutrition as a matter of *economic access*. More specifically, some Kenyan officials tended to see the basic problem as that of boosting African income in order to raise the standard of living. This was a continuation of the colonial policies of the 1930s.⁸²⁷ Moreover, the gamut of nutritional studies and reports released by institutions like the ILO during that decade invariably recommended increasing food production, boosting purchasing power, reducing prices, and planning distribution as the means to tackle malnutrition.⁸²⁸ Increased real income, it was reasoned, would be accompanied by efforts to shift market choices and consumption habits through education.⁸²⁹ With this view, and in a context where most people earned their income from agriculture, like Kenya, both nutritional and income issues boiled down to the basic object of increasing productivity. This sense would only have been enhanced by the urgent need, faced both during and after the war, to boost the total food supply to satisfy territorial market demand (discussed below). By 1953, the rationale that increasing production was the primary means to improve African nutrition was established enough that the Kenyan director of medical services could write:

An improvement in the nutritional state of the African can only be brought about by an increase in agricultural production or an increase in

⁸²³ TNA: CO 859/164/2, Rennie to Blaxter (letter and enclosure), 21 November 1946.

⁸²⁴ TNA: CO 859/164/2, Harvey to under secretary of state (letter), 20 January 1949.

⁸²⁵ Ibid.

⁸²⁶ TNA: CO 892/6/2, Farnworth Anderson, 'Replies to the Royal Commission Questionnaire No. 22', 15 January 1954.

⁸²⁷ For an indication of how, during the Depression, improving nutrition was framed as a problem of raising the 'economic status' of African people, see Gilks, 'Relation'. For an indication of this framing in colonial thought more generally, see Worboys, 'Discovery', pp. 217–19.

⁸²⁸ Rimmer, 'Basic Needs', pp. 221–4.

⁸²⁹ For one effort to integrate nutritional concerns into practical African education – at a school established in Turkana Province in the early 1930s – see Scott, 'Education and Nutrition'.

wealth which will make possible a diet for the population as a whole which is more ample in quantity and better balanced in regard to essential food factors.⁸³⁰

Given this kind of view, many officials probably saw little need for a nutritional board over and above the more fundamental challenge of boosting productivity. Whatever the reason for the failure of Rennie's proposal, most of the Kenyan state's nutritional initiatives in the post-war period concentrated on labour issues, which in turn centred on wage and income problems. Why should there have been this focus on labour? I would like to suggest three basic reasons. First, labour grievances and strike action during and following the war had shown the problems of food and diet to be urgent matters of security.⁸³¹ Second, labour was one domain where the state *could* intervene to shift patterns of consumption effectively. Labour regulations, combined with the statutory marketing system's responsibility to supply employers and workers, were an opportunity to reduce maize dependence by changing ration scales. As such, labour-focused interventions provided the opportunity to narrow down the nutrition problem into a more manageable form.⁸³² And third, nutritional work enabled the perceived problem of labour productivity to be addressed simultaneously. Wartime experience had shown that more balanced rations for the army and government labour conscripts fostered an improved physique, meaning individuals could potentially work harder for longer. In 1946, Rennie could write that the Kenyan 'labour problem' was now the low 'output per man', rather than a shortage in the overall supply of workers. Improving food and diet was one key step on the path to boosting worker output.⁸³³

What did officials do to address these issues? I have already mentioned the official use of nutritional knowledge to calculate the ratio between income and cost of living. This, in turn, was used to plan minimum wage scales. The 1945 report of the Phillips Committee, appointed to look into further labour grievances in Mombasa, built on this earlier interest in minimum household budgets using the latest South African scientific research into 'poverty datum lines'.⁸³⁴ It recommended that a 'permanent machinery for assessment and constant review of cost of living' for African workers be formed. It also called for a food rationing scheme. The proposals around monitoring living costs were accepted by the state, but not carried out supposedly due to a lack of 'reliable data' and qualified staff. A central advisory board was, however, formed to help calculate minimum wages.⁸³⁵ The rationing scheme was rejected outright, not

⁸³⁰ TNA: CO 892/6/2, Farnworth Anderson, 'Certain Aspects of the Public Health', 9 January 1953.

⁸³¹ On official concern over urban strike action towards the end of, and following, the war, see Cooper, *African Waterfront*, pp. 66–76.

⁸³² In this respect, the focus on labour was similar to post-war social welfare interventions focusing on African ex-soldiers – the *askari* provided the 'intellectual link between the metropolitan solution to welfare based on macro state intervention and self-help coping strategies within the colonial reality'; Lewis, *Empire State-Building*, p. 187.

⁸³³ TNA: CO 859/164/2, Rennie to Blaxter (enclosure), 16 October 1946.

⁸³⁴ Cooper, *African Waterfront*, p. 71. On the South African research, see Davie, *Poverty Knowledge*, chapter 3.

⁸³⁵ TNA: CO 859/164/2, governor's deputy to Jones (telegram), 31 March 1947.

least due to opposition from short-term and regular workers themselves. The latter group feared that any official provision of food would strengthen employers' opposition to demands for increased wages.⁸³⁶ Practice instead focused on strengthening price controls and establishing government-approved shops and 'municipal canteens'. Officials were far more inclined to simply regulate the rations provided by employers. As such, in 1946 the newly formed Labour Department developed a series of minimum dietary scales for labour. These were endorsed by the administration, but not given 'legislative sanction' due to the precarity of the food supply position.⁸³⁷

The logic and objectives of the nutritional focus on labour was captured by a study carried out the following year, 1947. It was a 'labour efficiency survey' conducted on at least 6,000 railway employees in Nairobi. The survey report framed the problem of urban labour productivity as intimately connected to the entire social world of the African worker – including conditions in the rural reserves. The analysis tied into a wider current of thought seeing the creation of a 'more differentiated, respectable working class' as an imperative of government policy.⁸³⁸ Diet and nutrition were critical pieces of this puzzle of 'decasualization'. They enabled three birds to be killed with one stone: Labour grievances and wider urban unrest could be pre-empted, good and tasty food could help to retain labour by making conditions of work more attractive, and better nutrition would improve efficiency and productivity.

This section has shown that a major emphasis of the FSC report – that on developing an agricultural and food policy based on African needs – failed to materialize following the war. The Medical and Labour departments instead focused their nutritional efforts on urban labour issues. This work involved interventions in the form of poverty and minimum wage calculations, as well as defining balanced ration scales, and tied directly into the emerging, pressing agenda of producing and stabilizing an 'urbanized working class'.⁸³⁹ As the problem of African nutrition was medicalized and oriented towards the new Kenyan 'labour problem', the focus of governmental attention shifted away from rural poverty, malnutrition and population stagnation (as described in chapters 4 and 5) to the body and productivity of the individual urban worker.

Essentially, the failed proposal for a Kenyan nutrition board removed any potential obstacle to the 'productionist' anti-scarcity rationale, embedded within the maize marketing system, that focused on securing total levels of supply against market demand. Maize control could basically get on with the job, without any disciplinary oversight from a nutritional board or other such agency. By the end of the war, the state was fully committed to two sets of obligations. Officials could neither disincentivize maize production, nor renege their responsibility to feed labour and prescribe scientific remedies for poverty and productivity. White farmers would have to be paid high prices for their maize.

⁸³⁶ TNA: CO 859/164/2, Grant, 'Nutrition Sub-Committee Notes on Visit to East Africa', 26 June 1947.

⁸³⁷ TNA: CO 859/164/2, Mitchell to Jones (telegram), 12 January 1949.

⁸³⁸ Cooper, *African Waterfront*, p. 88.

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

Workers would just have to be educated on how to have a better diet, and paid sufficiently well to afford it. A food and agricultural policy based on the population's 'human needs' was yet another a casualty of Kenya's political corporatism.

However, these factors do not yet explain why maize control itself was able to persist in Kenya beyond 1945. To understand this, we need to consider the changing nature of food supply and consumption in the colony; changes closely linked to the war's events and aftershocks.

7.2 Post-war Kenyan food systems and policy

The Second World War set certain trends and developments in motion that would be of lasting consequence for Kenyan food systems and their government. In this section, I briefly describe some of the key social and economic dynamics set in train by the war. The object is to indicate how these dynamics provided the conditions and demand for the continuation and stabilization of an anti-scarcity system geared towards securing sufficient aggregate food supply at a territory-wide scale.

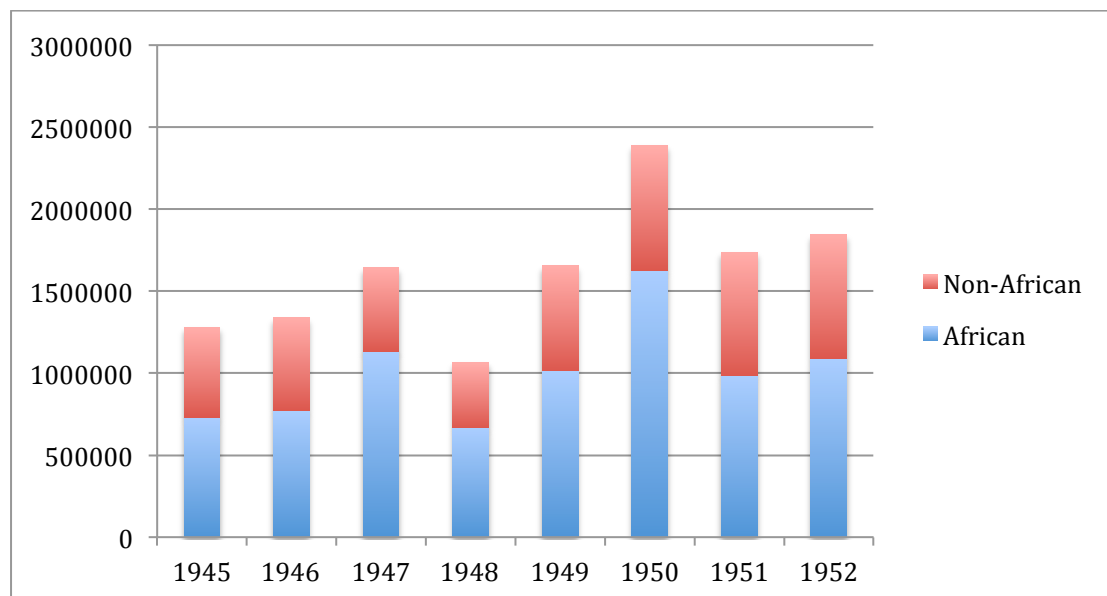


Figure 7.1. Total Deliveries to Maize Control, Kenya, 1945-52 (number of bags).
Source: CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Reports 1946-52*

The first key trend relates to widening socio-economic inequality. As indicated in chapter 6, wartime conditions helped to accelerate processes of social differentiation within rural African societies.⁸⁴⁰ Wealthy producers located near centres of demand or well served by marketing facilities could capitalize on favourable market trends to earn and invest more in land, labour or education. The poor, meanwhile, bore the brunt of food price inflation, with few means to cope with the inevitable rise in land values. Moreover, school fees and taxes had to be paid, and clothing bought. Population growth encouraged land

⁸⁴⁰ Zeleza, 'Second World War', p. 151.

fragmentation and exploitation in the reserves. The post-war years saw a decline in the real wages and household income levels of smallholders.⁸⁴¹

Proletarianization continued: by 1950, around half of the population of Kikuyu reserves were 'landless'.⁸⁴² Even households with some access to land increasingly supplemented their income through employment, either within or outside the reserves.⁸⁴³ Pressing conditions of poverty provided fertile ground for political discontent.

Second, the total number of employed labourers in Kenya remained high after the end of the war, even increasing slightly (see figure 5.1). Moreover, increasing rural landlessness, coupled with the growing demand for labour in the towns during and after the war, drove rapid urbanization. The size of the non-producing population grew in accordance. However, the proportions of the urban population should not be exaggerated – in 1948, even after wartime growth, the urban population only constituted around five per cent of the Kenyan total, rising to eight per cent by 1962.⁸⁴⁴ Nonetheless, these dynamics constituted a significant increase in market demand from the prewar level.

Third, the war helped to shift tastes and consumption habits. Africans on military service and living in towns were exposed to and became acquainted with new needs. In concert with the wartime impetus to industrialization and the development of a consumption-goods industry in Kenya, new items appeared in household budgets as 'socially necessary consumption needs' that could only be secured through cash purchase.⁸⁴⁵

Fourth, and related to the above factors, war conditions encouraged changes to modes of food access. It continued and intensified the trend whereby, for a larger proportion of the population, household subsistence was obtained through the market. This not only applied to urban and rural wage labour. In districts like Kiambu, poorer households increasingly switched to higher-risk strategies biased towards cash cropping and market purchases rather than direct consumption.⁸⁴⁶ The terms of trade were also shifting for livestock: in Ukambani during the war, people used cash to purchase food at inflated prices in preference to trading cattle. Beasts were becoming less valuable as a resource for long-term security. This reflected a more general process of rural transformation: cash-earning activities like commodity production, wage labour and trading were becoming more attractive as a basis of subsistence and accumulation than grazing herds of livestock on congested land. So too were household investments like education.⁸⁴⁷ By the end of the war, a gulf had opened up between the general prosperity of agricultural and pastoral

⁸⁴¹ Thurston, *Smallholder Agriculture*, p. 2..

⁸⁴² Zeleza, 'Second World War', pp. 160–1.

⁸⁴³ This trend would have been most pronounced in densely populated reserves such as Kiambu and Central Nyanza; Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, pp. 119–20, 130–33.

⁸⁴⁴ Ogonda, 'Transport and Communications', p. 143.

⁸⁴⁵ Cowen, 'Commercialization', p. 199.

⁸⁴⁶ Kitching, *Class and Economic Change*, p. 111.

⁸⁴⁷ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 125.

districts.⁸⁴⁸ For both rural and urban populations, then, food scarcity was increasingly a problem of balancing cash income and expenditure.

Fifth, the geography of rural scarcity and relief increasingly focused on congested areas where processes of commercialization and differentiation were most advanced. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, aside from ecologically marginal coastal areas, it was central, highly populated districts such as Machakos, Kitui, Meru, Nyeri, Fort Hall and Kiambu that regularly required substantial amounts of famine relief.⁸⁴⁹ The maize control continued to provide this relief via networks of 'established traders'.⁸⁵⁰ This constituted an additional source of demand.

In their combined effects, these trends ensured that the high wartime levels of food demand in the domestic market continued well after demobilization. In the context of the global post-war food shortage, which made imports near impossible, this meant Kenyan agricultural policy was forced to focus on maximizing cereal production until at least the end of 1948 (see figure 7.1).⁸⁵¹ It is worth noting, in passing, that this domestic policy position concurred with a wider imperial shift towards production-led development in the colonies – an approach embraced by Britain's post-war Labour government, now presiding over a nation starved of both resource and dollar reserves.⁸⁵² Locally, in Kenya, this productionist conviction served to justify the continued existence of state marketing controls as a means to boost the food supply to meet demand both in Kenya and within the wider East African Cereals Pool, which continued to function until 1952.⁸⁵³ In that year, the Ibbotson Commission reported that 'in the interests of stability' the controlled marketing of maize 'must continue'. The commissioners' report, noting 'the government's duty to ensure the stability of the colony's food supplies', rehearsed the standard argument that this could 'only be done by some system of price fixation in advance of planting'. However, it did recommend that maize control be operated under the provisions of an ordinance rather than emergency regulations, and in the hands of a statutory board or corporation.⁸⁵⁴

In the context of the global commodity boom, which lasted until the mid-1950s, there appeared to be little ground to refute the Commission's recommendations. High food prices on the international market meant maize control could continue to support settler growers by paying them above export prices, while selling to consumers below import parity. As such, there was no basis for political conflicts between producers and consumers, as there had been in the 1920s and 1930s.⁸⁵⁵

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 127.

⁸⁴⁹ CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Reports 1946–52*; English et al., *Land Resource Management*, pp. 17–19, 39.

⁸⁵⁰ CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Reports 1951–52*.

⁸⁵¹ CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Reports 1945–8*.

⁸⁵² Cooper, 'Modernizing Bureaucrats', p. 70.

⁸⁵³ The Cereals Pool was replaced by an inter-territorial mutual supply agreement; TNA: CO 822/668, *passim*.

⁸⁵⁴ Ibbotson et al., *Report of the Board Under the Chairmanship of Sir William Ibbotson on the Marketing of Maize and Other Produce*, pp. 14–15.

⁸⁵⁵ Lonsdale, 'Depression', pp. 123–4.

Yet centralized marketing persisted in Kenya even after high global commodity prices started to falter in the mid-1950s. Now, by contrast, it fulfilled a useful purpose in protecting producers under conditions of falling international prices, much like in the prewar years of economic depression.⁸⁵⁶ Moreover, the 1950s State of Emergency – a response to the Mau Mau Uprising – provided sufficient justification for maize control to persist under defence regulations, and for officials to maintain tight coercive controls over reserve agriculture.⁸⁵⁷ Indeed, the maize control system was a vehicle through which the state attempted to quell rural unrest, as a key aspect of larger programmes of rural resettlement and development implemented with the cooperation of the landed ‘incipient gentry’ of the central Kikuyu reserves.⁸⁵⁸

Ultimately, despite numerous critiques leveled at the statutory marketing system,⁸⁵⁹ Kenyan maize control continued to operate under emergency regulations until 1959, when it was eventually replaced by the Maize and Produce Board – a central statutory board that inherited and continued the policy of maize self-sufficiency.⁸⁶⁰ Following independence, the Board became a vehicle to expand smallholder production and integrate more African farmers into the formal economy – a key part of the ‘social contract’ forged between the national government and its subjects.⁸⁶¹ In 1979, it merged with the Wheat Board to form the National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB), which like its predecessors aimed to manage price fluctuations and provide a storage buffer to mediate surpluses and shortages. Food self-sufficiency remained a ‘key plank’ of state agricultural policy. The independent government, like its colonial forebear, continued to evince a ‘commitment to increase producers prices’ to achieve this aim, often to the detriment of consumers.⁸⁶² The NCPB itself became a key tool in the cultural and geographical patronage networks established by President Daniel arap Moi.⁸⁶³ The food marketing system thus remained a key mechanism within the ‘politics of the belly’ pursued by the postcolonial Kenyan state.⁸⁶⁴

⁸⁵⁶ The degree of favouritism and protection directed to producers was unique to Kenya. Organized marketing in other settings tended to serve the more important political groupings in those contexts: processors and exporters in Uganda; urban consumers in Northern Rhodesia and Tanganyika; Bates, *Beyond the Miracle*; Bryceson, ‘Urban Bias Revisited’; Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, pp. 218–9.

⁸⁵⁷ Castro and Ettenger, ‘Counterinsurgency’.

⁸⁵⁸ Bates argues that the Mau Mau conflict enabled the ‘aggressive elites of the Kikuyu reserves’ to enjoy even greater access to the ‘coercive power and economic resources of the colonial government’. This would have profound effects for Kenya’s political future, as it was this conservative elite that was poised to seize power on the eve of Kenyan independence; *Beyond the Miracle*, p. 39.

⁸⁵⁹ For a major contemporary critique of African statutory marketing systems, see Dow et al., *East Africa Royal Commission 1953–1955 Report*, chapter 7. For an overview of the problems created by a system of guaranteed producer prices, see Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, pp. 220–1.

⁸⁶⁰ Llewellyn, ‘Government Marketing Control’, p. 2; Yoshida, ‘Maize Marketing’, pp. 4–5.

⁸⁶¹ Jayne and Jones, ‘Food Marketing’, pp. 1510–12.

⁸⁶² Hornsby, *History Since Independence*, pp. 363–4.

⁸⁶³ Sitko et al., ‘Maize Sector Policies’, p. 248.

⁸⁶⁴ Bayart, *The State in Africa*.

It is important to note just how a small proportion of Kenya's total agricultural output was represented by the official market supply. Van Zwanenberg and King report that throughout the post-war period (up to the mid-1970s) only around half of the crops sold by the Kenyan maize control were sourced from African smallholders, representing around five to ten per cent of their total production. Around 80 to 90 per cent of Kenya's total crop did not pass through the official system at all. The vast majority of maize was either consumed directly or channeled through 'black markets'.⁸⁶⁵ These markets – still designated 'illegal' – continued to take on particular importance during times of drought. As such, high levels of domestic market demand remained an effective argument for draconian practices of market segmentation that favoured particular groups of maize growers.

Another major implication of the sustained high levels of post-war domestic food demand related to state policy for development in the African reserves. The need to maximize cereal production largely prevented the implementation of 'mixed farming' and rotational cropping policies as recommended, for example, by the FSC (see above). In principle, post-war development plans for African areas invoked the subsistence-oriented ideas of the late 1930s. Here the 1946 Worthington Plan was the government's major effort, designed to 'arrest the physical and social deterioration of the reserves'.⁸⁶⁶ The problems identified by the Plan were familiar, having already been defined prior to the war: manage surplus population, ensure adequate food supplies, and conserve soil fertility. Its latent objectives were to restrain African competition to the now-profitable settler farming sector, and to maintain 'the localized containment and control of the African population'.⁸⁶⁷ In practice, this meant denying Africans private property ownership and the chance to grow higher-valued export crops.⁸⁶⁸ Officials hoped that mixed farming could slow down and cap the spread of African commodity production and 'excessive individualism', which they continued to blame for a growing ecological and social crisis.⁸⁶⁹ Household and district self-sufficiency were the key aims. Cash cropping was not to be discouraged *per se*. African standard of living had to be raised, which required some cash income. Commodity production was necessary and acceptable provided the fertility of the soil did not suffer and nutritional needs were met from direct consumption.⁸⁷⁰ As in the 1920s and 1930s, it was thought that only surplus crops (above household subsistence needs) should be marketed.⁸⁷¹

However, given the urgent need to maximize cereal production after 1945, in practice development efforts focused on ameliorative conservation measures in

⁸⁶⁵ Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, pp. 220–1.

⁸⁶⁶ The Worthington Plan was a ten-year scheme financed by the Colonial Development Corporation with 11 million pounds. Half of these funds were dedicated to the African Land Development Programme, which focused on soil conservation projects. In part, the Plan was motivated by the need for 'food security'; Zeleza, 'Second World War', p. 160.

⁸⁶⁷ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, pp. 256–7.

⁸⁶⁸ Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, pp. 47–8.

⁸⁶⁹ Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, p. 161.

⁸⁷⁰ CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1945*, p. 22.

⁸⁷¹ Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, pp. 47–8.

the reserves – especially contour ridging, terracing and enclosures.⁸⁷² To ease implementation, officials hoped to revive ‘traditional’ systems of authority and communal solidarity, to function alongside state powers of coercion.⁸⁷³ Conservationist interventions were combined within large-scale ‘betterment schemes’ – projects that provoked concerted bitterness and resistance, particularly from the women who were corralled into the compulsory hard labour of terracing.⁸⁷⁴ Officials also hoped to relieve land congestion through settlement schemes, and halt fragmentation via group farming projects. Some small-scale projects were devised, but ultimately both resettlement and group farming lost momentum by the early 1950s.⁸⁷⁵

The basic policy of encouraging food sufficiency remained the nominal foundation of state policy for African agriculture through to the early 1950s. By 1952, this was common sense enough that the Agriculture Department’s annual report could state: ‘The first duty of this department is to ensure the food supplies of the people’.⁸⁷⁶ Yet there were changes in emphasis within these objectives. By the end of the 1940s, a different view of the soil problem started to gain traction in official debates. The ‘new school’ of agricultural officers, linking soil degradation with the longstanding restrictions imposed on the growth of high-value cash crops by Africans, began to win over.⁸⁷⁷ For them, forcing African farmers to terrace their fields and grow large yields of low-value cereal crops was the problem; crops such as coffee and tea could produce more income, on less land, and more lightly on the soil. By 1950, Africans were both allowed and encouraged to grow high-priced cash crops – a measure motivated by the need to raise the general standard of living.⁸⁷⁸ Moreover, the hope of relying on ‘traditional’ communitarian systems was rapidly giving way to a more favourable view of African economic individualism.⁸⁷⁹ Some officials and experts argued that only the individualization of land tenure could solve the problems of land fragmentation in the reserves.⁸⁸⁰

Building on these shifts, the early 1950s saw a push for farm planning. Land use in each Kenyan province was to be planned according to distinct ecological zones

⁸⁷² CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1945*, p. 4; *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1948*, p. 15; Throup, *Origins of Mau Mau*, pp. 141–3.

⁸⁷³ Thurston, *Smallholder Agriculture*, chapter 2.

⁸⁷⁴ Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, pp. 161–7.

⁸⁷⁵ Some small-scale resettlement schemes were devised, but in practice the focus fell on communalism. Planned group farming was implemented in Nyanza between 1948 and 1952; Throup, *Origins of Mau Mau*, pp. 70–1; Thurston, *Smallholder Agriculture*, p. 24; Van Zwanenberg and King, *Economic History*, p. 48.

⁸⁷⁶ CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1952*, p. 2.

⁸⁷⁷ Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, p. 167; Throup, *Origins of Mau Mau*, pp. 69–70.

⁸⁷⁸ CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1951*, p. 2; Thurston, *Smallholder Agriculture*, pp. 31–2.

⁸⁷⁹ CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1949*, p. 16; Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance*, pp. 165, 167.

⁸⁸⁰ ‘[T]he natural evolution seems to be that the more progressive will slowly accumulate more land and more wealth and that the eventual pattern of development will be a land-owning class employing paid labour’. Individual title will enable credit to be obtained and invested in development, and would prevent land fragmentation; CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1950*, p. 17.

corresponding to differing agricultural potential, as determined by the relations between climate, vegetation and topography.⁸⁸¹ Within these zones, the normative spatial and economic notion of the 'farming unit' was deployed to plan mixed farms and appropriate conservation measures.⁸⁸² These kinds of practices formed a key part of the state's rejoinder to growing rural poverty and the Mau Mau Uprising. The Swynnerton Plan of 1954 encapsulated this response. The Plan materialized the policy shift towards promoting individualization of land tenure, survey and consolidation of high-potential African lands, as well as high-value cash cropping – all framed within the broader objectives of promoting mixed farming and food availability.⁸⁸³ Now, however, the emphasis was on territorial sufficiency more than household subsistence. Food production in key areas would be stimulated to help feed urban populations, labour and, to some extent, for export.⁸⁸⁴ The market was officially becoming more acceptable as a strategy for rural production and food access. For officials, this commercialization brought certain scarcity-related risks into play.⁸⁸⁵ Maintaining state control of the food market as a means to secure an adequate territorial supply therefore had a further rationale.

In summary, the Second World War designated a policy outlook towards both settler and African development that was sustained by conditions after 1945. The imperative of managing food scarcity was central to this outlook. While Lonsdale suggests that soil degradation provided 'the language of retentive white control, the closure of options',⁸⁸⁶ food scarcity proved a key deciding factor in post-war development practice. After 1945, officials had hoped to develop a two-track anti-scarcity system: one securing adequate supply for the official market, the other focusing on promoting rural subsistence. They were unable to implement the latter: the urgent need to meet food demand trumped the longer-term dream of mixed farming and direct consumption. By the time the domestic and international food supply position started to stabilize, at the end of the 1940s (see figure 7.1), officials were already looking towards commercialized production as the route to African welfare (including improved nutrition) and environmental conservation. As rural local subsistence receded as a policy objective, a market-based strategy of boosting productivity remained on centre stage. Post-war conditions thus allowed the wartime mode of anti-scarcity practice to persist. The FSC report, while sometimes credited with setting the

⁸⁸¹ For a discussion of the history of ecological survey and planning for purposes of promoting colonial African development, see Anker, *Imperial Ecology*; Duminy, 'Ecologizing Regions'.

⁸⁸² The 'farming unit' was defined as 'the minimum unit of land necessary for the average family to grow its food requirements and obtain a cash income from surplus crop and stock products and from appropriate cash crops which will enable the standard of living to be raised well above the present level'; CPK, *Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1952*, p. 1.

⁸⁸³ Swynnerton, *Plan to Intensify*. Records and interviews related to the development and implementation of the Swynnerton Plan are available in the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (BLUO): MSS. Afr. s. 1717, *passim*. Also see Makana, 'Peasant Response'; Chenevix Trench, *Men Who Ruled Kenya*, chapter 21.

⁸⁸⁴ Swynnerton, *Plan to Intensify*, p. 10.

⁸⁸⁵ According to the traditional colonial 'food versus cash crop' theory of famine. See Vaughan, *Story of an African Famine*, pp. 8–11 and chapter 3.

⁸⁸⁶ Lonsdale, 'Depression', pp. 119–20.

agenda for post-war marketing control, was a relatively negligible factor in enabling its existence and persistence.

7.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to show how developments associated with the Second World War persisted beyond the end of hostilities. In particular, I have tried to describe how post-war conditions entrenched the rationale, structure and techniques of an anti-scarcity system that, in many respects, has outlived the institutions of statutory marketing itself. This was a market-based mode of government that sought to balance levels of territorial supply with demand – a rationale and mode originally established as part of the state’s wartime responsibility to feed labour and other non-producing populations (see chapter 6).

The persistence of this system was by no means straightforward. The rationale of state marketing control offering high guaranteed prices as a means to boost food availability was originally motivated as an emergency wartime measure. Although the FSC recommended that maize control continue after the war, it also advocated steps to reorient agricultural policy towards the nutritional needs of the population, and towards mixed farming. Post-war political and economic conditions meant these objectives were significantly curtailed. The comforting official ideals of rural subsistence, mixed farming, and to some extent soil conservation, were sacrificed for the sake of food production and sufficiency. The state’s nutritional interventions, meanwhile, came to focus on pressing urban labour problems, with a medical inflection. As such, despite interest from officials and experts in developing a Kenyan food policy based on human need and demand, a supply-oriented anti-scarcity system was able to continue and consolidate. Arguably, its echoes can still be heard in the framing of contemporary food problems, and in the way that Kenyan ‘food and nutrition security’ is governed through the priority of productivity. I return to these points in the thesis conclusion.

So, what do these dynamics reveal about the governmentalization of food scarcity, and the emergence of a rationale and mode for the ‘government of life’? On one hand, this chapter has shed light on the rise of a biopolitics of food that targeted labour, specifically the increase and reproduction of labour-power, to an extent not seen before. This involved ensuring the availability of food supplies for labour on the official market, and regulating the molecular-nutritional content of both food and body to increase the total labour-power of the workforce. It was a mode of biopolitics that acted on the market calculations and consumer decisions of workers and their families, or sought to control what workers ate through direct rationing and the development of recommended ration scales. It aimed to secure the productivity of the (increasingly urban) labour force for economic and security objectives. This mode operated alongside, and in some respects superseded, a form of biopolitics that was interested in food from the perspective of managing the reproduction of rural populations (and hence the total supply of migrant labour) within the bounds imposed by

land and resource scarcity. Food and nutrition thus emerged at the centre of the post-war vision to foster a stable and productive urban working class.

On the other hand, the chapter has also depicted a political failure: that of Kenyan officials to apply one of the great ideals of liberal governmentality and biopolitics. That is, to arrange natural processes and circulations so that certain problems (in this case, problems like hunger, malnutrition, population pressure, soil erosion and income) might 'cancel each other out'. Such ideas were certainly proposed for the colonial Kenyan context, and attracted some support both within and beyond the state. Yet this kind of anti-scarcity model was never able to materialize due to a range of contextual factors – some of the more important being the exigencies of wartime and post-war food shortages, the politics and vested interests of maize production and marketing, as well as the economics of labour. The end result was the persistence of a mode of an anti-scarcity practice that operated through the processes and mechanisms of the official market, and within the bounds of tight bureaucratic surveillance and control. This degree of state intervention in the market, far from being the expression of some innate colonial logic of control and coercion, was rather the result of a confluence of events, interests, reflexive interventions, and their effects.

8. Conclusion

This thesis set out with two main aims. The first was to address the lack of historical research on food scarcity and its government in Kenya. The second was to present this history in a way that enhanced our understanding of present-day 'food security' practice, both in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa.

My interest in these questions arose from my involvement in a research project that sought to understand the intersections between poverty and food insecurity in African urban areas.⁸⁸⁷ The project was positioned within a larger critique of food security practice in Africa: one arguing that food strategies tended to overlook the specificities of food dynamics in the continent's towns and cities. By painting urban food problems within the general frames of scarcity and production (including the more recent groundswell of interest in 'urban agriculture'), the project argued, African food strategies effectively overlook a whole range of interventions to improve food accessibility for Africa's increasingly urban population.

I wondered why this tendency – to think about food in terms of scarcity and availability – existed. Why did it appear to be so persistent? Over the course of project meetings and discussions, I became aware of the lack of historical understanding of why 'productionism' *does* dominate the food security agenda in different African contexts. The more I dug into this history, the more I became convinced that this was not a straightforward narrative: neither of capitalist development, nor of colonial paternalism, nor of the post-Second World War influence of developmental institutions and discourses. Rather, it seemed to present a complex story of competing political forces meeting economic tensions, ideological imperatives and technical precedents. My hunch was that Kenya could provide us with an important part of this wider story. This was not only because it had been understudied in the literature on African food and famine history. I also suspected that Kenya's past could reveal some of the tensions tearing at the heart of food regulation and government in former settler colonies more generally.

The questions that I set out to answer were: how did central officials and other actors think about and respond to food scarcity? How did this change? And how were the roles and duties of the state defined within these arrangements? I attempted to answer these questions in a way that shed light on current food practices. I wanted to understand why 'food security' is the way it is, to reveal how practices of the past continue to shape those of the present. I sought, also, to show that there was nothing inevitable about the emergence of these ideas and practices, but that they emerged in a particular context, through particular conditions and contingencies.

⁸⁸⁷ The 'Consuming Urban Poverty' project operated by the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town, which studied secondary cities in Zambia (Kitwe), Kenya (Kisumu) and Zimbabwe (Harare/Epworth).

The main arguments of the thesis can be recounted through a brief synopsis of the preceding chapters. Chapter 2 showed how scarcity in Kenya – while primarily driven by natural disasters such as drought, disease and pestilence – was also linked to the politics of colonial conquest, and the increasing presence of both market and state in the region. Massive episodes of hunger like the Great Famine saw the colonial state play a limited role in providing relief – one largely relying on the initiative of local administrators plus other actors, like missionaries. In chapter 3, I discussed the major scarcity of 1918–19: one driven by drought and aggravated by disease, but fundamentally linked to the conditions and state exactions of the First World War. For the first time, the state's response took the form of a centrally coordinated production and relief programme involving legislative, bureaucratic and coercive measures. These relief efforts faced concerted opposition from some corners of the settler public, who were generally starting to find their voice in demanding greater official support for settler agriculture, particularly with respect to labour control. Food distribution by the state favoured the entitlements of employed labour.

That scarcities and their responses were increasingly linked to wider political dynamics and the development of the capitalist market was demonstrated in chapter 4, focusing on the 1920s. By 1929, following extended drought and pestilence, a major episode of scarcity presented the formidable risks of inflation and speculation. Officials saw scarcity as a collective economic problem requiring emergency intervention by the central state to control market processes and prices. The official response included reducing the longer-term risk of scarcity by promoting rural self-sufficiency and developing transport infrastructure. Chapter 5 indicated that scarcities of the 1930s were still driven by drought and pests, but were also linked to contraction of the settler economy and wage employment stemming from the global economic depression. Scarcity was increasingly seen as a problem of rural poverty to be met by raising peasant productivity and cash income. Forced to defend their privileged position in the midst of patent economic failure, settlers and their official advocates began to frame the threat of food scarcity within an eco-Malthusian triptych that saw food scarcity as systemically linked to dynamic soil and population problems. Meanwhile, the imperative of fiscal austerity meant central officials were increasingly keen for 'local native councils' to shoulder the costs of famine relief.

Chapters 6 and 7 focused on the changes wrought by the Second World War. Here a major food shortage was driven by drought, but the scale and urgency of the shortage was fundamentally determined by war conditions and the nature of the statutory marketing system. Urban populations suffered equally if not more than those in the countryside. Officials saw food scarcity as a threat to security, and a risk to be managed through marketing control. Their responses involved calculative and economic techniques to an extent not seen previously. At the same time, arguments around soil and scarcity were successfully deployed to secure unequal state support for settler farmers, and drove a short-lived post-war revival of rural subsistence policy. Wartime dynamics established the basic outlines of an anti-scarcity system that, given the failure to develop a food policy based on human nutritional needs, persisted through to the 1950s State of

Emergency. Indeed, I will argue below that we continue to see traces of this system in contemporary 'food security' thought and practice.

Across these chapters and their respective time periods, I have tried to highlight several overall patterns. I attempted to show that the conception of the problem of scarcity, the definition of the state's role and duty, plus the techniques used to respond, all shifted in conjunction with the changing realities of the food system and patterns of dearth. For a rising proportion of the population, hunger was experienced through the market in the form of indirect entitlement failure: exchange or 'an individual's position in relation to the terms of trade' grew in significance as a cause of and response to suffering.⁸⁸⁸ At the same time, scarcities were increasingly governed through the market, notably through forms of producer support, consumer subsidization and price control. But this process was not quite so straightforward. Commercialized production and marketized access offered their own political and economic risks for Africans, settlers and administrators alike. One result of this ambivalence was that Kenyan state policy towards African agriculture, like many household strategies,⁸⁸⁹ tended to swing between the objectives of direct consumption and commercialization, according to what was fiscally and politically expedient.

I have tried to outline broad changes in the way that the problem of food scarcity was conceptualized in relation to the practices and rationalities of government. While famine was always seen as fundamentally linked to the misfortunes of nature, scarcity was increasingly understood as a problem involving human drivers, including cultural factors and market reactions. By the end of the Second World War, food scarcity was less a natural calamity than a probable risk calling for long-term mitigating measures. For Kenya, scarcity had ceased to be a matter of 'bad luck'. Food sufficiency had indeed become a domain of 'governmentality'.⁸⁹⁰

The duty and role of the state shifted alongside these changes. In fact, one finds a gradual transition from scarcity as a domain of 'duty' (implying a moral commitment of sorts) to one of 'responsibility' (in the sense of an institutionalized state of being accountable for, or required to do something). Initially, state relief functions were framed in moral terms: the *duty* to prevent the indigent from starving, to stop market speculation and cornering, or to provide Africans with marketing facilities and the means of earning cash income. But, over time, the state's role was increasingly regarded as a matter of administrative responsibility, without any significant moral injunction. During the Second World War, officials talked about the state's *responsibility* to 'feed labour' and ensure adequate production for local and territorial self-sufficiency. In this sense, one can say that the state's role was progressively *responsibilized*. This was driven by a combination of moral notions, practical precedents and political-economic expedients.

⁸⁸⁸ Watts, *Silent Violence*, p. 310.

⁸⁸⁹ Cowen, 'Commercialization'.

⁸⁹⁰ Watts, *Silent Violence*, p. lxxvi.

Moreover, we have found that state responsibility was increasingly, if unevenly, *centralized*. It was the central state that assumed more functions in relation to the food system, even if local authorities and institutions remained important for famine relief. Its involvement grew in concert with scarcity being recognized as a collective economic and political problem, whether in the form of inflation hurting consumers, or labour strike action shutting down essential industries. The process was 'uneven' in at least three ways. First, in the sense that the centralization of market control was often highly contested, which meant that initial experiments (like the 1929 Food Control Board) could quickly lead to reversals in policy and strategy. Second, it was uneven in the sense that state responsibilities were directed asymmetrically at different groups and places. The previous chapter showed that the specific nature of the post-Second World War food system in Kenya was marked by two, often conflicting domains of responsibility, each progressively established over the preceding years: the first entailed supporting settler maize growers to guarantee adequate supply, the second to feed labour and ensure their economic access to food. Neither could take priority over the other. The state was committed both to paying high prices to producers, and to subsidizing consumption. If the dynamics of post-war Kenyan politics were marked by hapless pursuit of the 'irreconcilable' objectives of 'intensified production and social order', then it is important to recognize how the politics of food was central to both aims.⁸⁹¹

These processes of centralization were uneven in a third sense, relating to the delegation of responsibility. As central officials assumed more responsibility over particular food-related functions, they simultaneously attempted to delegate certain functions to individuals and other institutions. This included relying on 'native authorities' and LNCs to help coordinate and finance relief in addition to local anti-famine and conservation efforts. It meant continuing to trust in the capacity of local administrators to arrange relief supplies, calling on central assistance only when absolutely necessary. By the Second World War, it also included assigning individual subjects with the responsibility for their 'own salvation', to 'play their part' in alleviating food shortages.

In sum, the findings of the thesis depict a broad narrative of transformation, centring on the mutual production of scarcity, market and government. In the following sections, I discuss two ways that this research holds significance: for our historical knowledge of African food scarcity, on one hand, and colonial government, on the other. I point, firstly, to the political-economic specificities of Kenyan history as a way to understand its place within a wider history of famine and anti-scarcity government on the continent, and to how an 'analysis of government' contributes to this body of historical knowledge. Secondly, I introduce some ideas of how this research might contribute to notions of 'colonial governmentality', as they relate to Africa in particular. Thirdly, I consider how this work speaks to our historical and theoretical understanding of food and colonial biopolitics. This is followed by a discussion of how this historical knowledge, in turn, enhances our critical understanding of

⁸⁹¹ Cooper, *African Waterfront*, p. 264.

contemporary food policy and practice in Africa. I conclude by considering on the limitations of the research, with some suggestions for future inquiry.

8.1 Kenya and the history of African food scarcity

What does this study of a particular colonial context, Kenya, contribute to historical knowledge of African famine and food scarcity? In the thesis introduction I argued that this literature has neglected *Kenya* as a specific empirical context, and has further provided an incomplete *analysis of government* for the problem of food scarcity. Recognizing what this particular history adds to our empirical knowledge means identifying areas where Kenyan experiences were similar or different to those of other African colonial contexts. Here I will highlight some of these specificities along three thematic axes: political, economic and spatial.

At a broad level, the specificity of Kenyan political economy has to be seen in relation to its status as a settler colony. The presence of a food-growing settler community, with aspirations for self-government, profoundly shaped the history of land allocation, food production, famine relief, agricultural policy and marketing control.⁸⁹² Likewise, colonial rule in Kenya involved high degrees of coercive and discriminatory state intervention into African societies and operations of the market – more so than ‘peasant export economies’ like Nigeria, Ghana or Uganda.⁸⁹³ But Kenya’s specificity goes deeper than this. As argued by Berman, Kenya, unlike other settler colonies to the south, saw the development of ‘unusually strong’ forms of African capitalist production that, despite discriminatory state policy, were able to compete effectively with the estate economy.⁸⁹⁴ The Kenyan state thus lumbered within two ‘internal and conflicting capitalist projects’: the clash between settler and metropolitan interests, and that between white and African producers.⁸⁹⁵

These processes of production and accumulation shaped how scarcities manifested in Kenya, both in spatial and social terms. Over time, it was the areas most affected by European settlement and capitalist development that started to experience the effects of food shortages most consistently and acutely. By 1945, it was not only remote rural places that regularly required state relief, but often those, like parts of Kiambu and Ukambani, where cash cropping was more specialized. These Kenyan dynamics resemble those Iliffe has described for Southern Rhodesia, but with important differences.⁸⁹⁶ In Kenya, rural development could proceed such that the same reserve areas tended to supply the most labour *and* cash crops. Rural economies in parts of Kikuyu, Kamba and Nyanza provinces were increasingly if unevenly monetized, with food access strategies increasingly based in market exchange. Complex and graded processes of social and household differentiation meant food shortages started

⁸⁹² Mosley, *Settler Economies*.

⁸⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 5–8, 236; Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 40.

⁸⁹⁴ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 40.

⁸⁹⁵ *Ibid.* For this argument, see also Lonsdale and Berman, ‘Coping’.

⁸⁹⁶ Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*.

to hurt the growing numbers of landless poor most.⁸⁹⁷ It therefore seems likely that the geographic and social distribution of rural suffering in Kenya took a different, more complex form than that found in the settler states of Southern Africa, where state intervention 'generally destroyed any possibility of capitalist transition within indigenous societies'.⁸⁹⁸ Identifying these specificities would require further research, but this might prove a useful hypothesis to be probed.

The strength of the competing forces within Kenya's agrarian economy also had important implications for official anti-scarcity efforts. Each 'mode of production' made demands on colonial officials that profoundly shaped their responses to food issues. This was clearly seen in the domain of agricultural production, the persistent focus and outspoken priority of Kenyan state policy. The question of how to 'develop' the colony was always caught in the tension and rivalry between African and settler. When depression struck, the 'peasant option' could be pursued.⁸⁹⁹ When growth seemed possible or seemed likely, 'subsistence' production supplemented by wage income could be invoked as the chief objectives of African development.⁹⁰⁰

This meant the Kenyan domestic food market was a particularly contested terrain, more so from the start of the 1930s, when settler farmers enviously eyed the higher prices available to Africans through their established local markets. Settler appeals for state support posited the unpredictability of production in the reserves, recounting the threat it offered both to long-term food availability and soil fertility. The need to boost production during the Second World War provided them with the argument and means to secure a share of that market; those means were quickly secured through the state marketing system. The idea that African maize growers were unreliable and harmful emerged as an important aspect of Kenyan political economy, and framed the ways that officials and settlers legitimized their privileged claims to land and market shares. Kenya's settler interests knew the political value of the 'scare of scarcity' all too well.⁹⁰¹ More so than their counterparts to the south, they were forced to use it effectively.

One further result of these dynamics was that Kenyan state policies aiming to promote rural food subsistence and sufficiency had a particular political and economic inflection. Bryceson has argued that preventing famine emerged as the focus of district administration in Tanganyika due to a combination of existing peasant household strategies, ecological and economic realities (a lack of valuable export crops that could be grown by Africans) and a widely shared official ideology of paternalism.⁹⁰² In Kenya, by contrast, policies for local self-sufficiency emerged from a different confluence. These included settler demands for support and protection, growing concerns over soil erosion and malnutrition,

⁸⁹⁷ Watts, *Silent Violence*, p. 273.

⁸⁹⁸ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 40.

⁸⁹⁹ Anderson and Throup, 'Myth', p. 329.

⁹⁰⁰ Cowen has made this point about the concept of 'subsistence agriculture', 'Commercialization', pp. 199–200.

⁹⁰¹ Mehta, 'Scare, Naturalization'.

⁹⁰² Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity', pp. 68–75 and *passim*.

and rising settler influence within the state institutional apparatus. Briefly, this is how it happened: During the 1920s, promoting rural subsistence and food sufficiency was part of the rationale to exclude Africans from the export market. In the 1930s, officials encouraged Africans to crop maize to ensure local sufficiency, as well as revive rural income and state revenue. Wartime worries over scarcity and soil erosion enabled settler farmers to secure a share of the lucrative domestic maize market from the 1940s. In each case, the objective of local food sufficiency expressed a certain political rationale and economic agenda.

As for the influence of paternalistic ideology, possibly the most remarkable aspect of Kenyan famine history is the extent to which a perceived administrative duty to prevent African starvation was tempered by liberal market ideology and opposition (or, at least, the desire to avoid provoking such) from powerful elements of the settler public, who saw in scarcities the opportunity to boost the labour supply and make tidy profits from higher maize prices. For officials, moral commitments, economic prescripts and political expedience were hard upon each other. Generally, they were forced to frame anti-famine efforts as developmental opportunities – chances to build new communications infrastructure, for example – more than paternal moral commitments.

These factors, perhaps, help to explain the Kenyan preference for public relief works programmes. These projects fulfilled multiple objectives. They resulted in valuable infrastructure that helped to ‘open up’ the countryside, and they provided a moral compromise by both instilling a will to work in the African male *and* saving helpless African souls from the ‘ancient wrong’ of famine.⁹⁰³ In India, such programmes were employed as a ‘last resort’, only once the doctrine of liberal political economy had truly failed, and could attract stinging criticism in Britain for their supposed ‘extravagance’ in saving ‘a lot of black fellows’.⁹⁰⁴ They were relatively uncommon in Southern Rhodesia, only appearing in the 1920s.⁹⁰⁵ In Kenya, public relief works were often the first reaction of the state. They they effectively appeased a vocal source of internal political pressure while assisting with the tricky business of colonial and official legitimation. In these ways, the nature and shape of Kenyan anti-scarcity policies cannot be understood without referring to the specific political and economic conditions through which they emerged.

Other specificities of the Kenyan experience and government of scarcity can be identified through the specific historical and geographical dynamics of the food market. In Kenya, industries, administrative offices, labour and communications infrastructure concentrated around the railway line and its urban nodes in the south-western quadrant of the country.⁹⁰⁶ All goods and capital funnelled these

⁹⁰³ Hall, *Improvement of Native Agriculture*, p. 60.

⁹⁰⁴ Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, pp. 36–7, chapters 1 and 5; Stahl, ‘Economics of Starvation’.

⁹⁰⁵ Iliffe argues that the persistent demand for labour for private enterprises works made relief works an unattractive option in the early years of colonial rule; *Famine in Zimbabwe*, chapter 7.

⁹⁰⁶ Soja, *Geography of Modernization*, p. 29

'narrow channels'.⁹⁰⁷ One result was a market food system in which disruptions in one key part could create immediate and serious consequences for many others. Localized drought and crop failure in a specific area, for example, could drastically reduce the total maize supply coming onto the private or official market. This could quickly drive up prices across the territory, hurting a broad range of 'consumer interests' who in turn might demand state intervention to curb speculation and inflation.

As such, the clustered and relatively integrated makeup of this space-economy and food system helped to give Kenyan food crises a particular immediacy, and a particular kind of economic and political charge. When considered in relation to the territory's agrarian political economy, these realities shed some light on the specific tendencies of the colonial state. In Kenya, times of scarcity often forced the state to intervene to perform a delicate balancing act between different interest groups, not least between competing settler factions. Officials tried to ensure producers received a 'fair price', while also attempting to protect the household and labour costs of consumers. Unlike in the Rhodesias or South Africa, where mineral wealth enabled employers to pay high prices for protected settler maize, there was no clear path for Kenyan officials to follow.

These factors begin to explain why Kenyan responses to scarcity tended to be far more *ad hoc* and fulminatory affairs than those of other British African governments, which often developed relatively sophisticated (if unimplemented) anti-famine codes and plans.⁹⁰⁸ In Kenya, the central administration would spring into action only when conditions were acute: when food shortages, as in 1929, threatened to derail the entire economic balance between producers and consumers. When this happened, its intervention could provoke such heated opposition (from those interests perceiving themselves to have been disadvantaged in some way) that any further effort along these lines could be quickly and effectively discouraged. As such, preventing and addressing food scarcity was just one of the domains in which Kenya's political 'stalemate' was felt, and in which the state preferred to 'muddle through' periodic crises rather than developing any sort of overall policy.⁹⁰⁹ Comprehensive and targeted interventions were only possible on the rare occasions when settler and official interests aligned, as with African marketing control during the 1930s.

The divided nature of Kenyan political economy had specific implications for the government of scarcity. The Kenyan state's 'cooptive corporatist' strategy (or, rather, non-strategy) to deal with the colonial society's sharp internal tensions came to mark its functions in relation to famine relief and food production.⁹¹⁰ Not only that, but arguments and practices around food scarcity played a key role in constituting this corporatist agenda. In this respect, the 1929 Food Control Board was an early (if unsuccessful) experiment in political corporatism.

⁹⁰⁷ Cooper, *African Waterfront*, p. 61.

⁹⁰⁸ For the case of Nigeria, see Watts, *Silent Violence*, chapter 6; for Sudan see De Waal, *Famine Crimes*, chapter 2; for Tanganyika see Bryceson, 'Food Insecurity', chapter 3; for Southern Rhodesia see Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe*, chapter 7.

⁹⁰⁹ Berman, *Control and Crisis*, pp. 185–6.

⁹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Moreover, during the Second World War, it was food issues that enabled the 'corporatist planner's heaven' to be designed and implemented in the form of institutions like the Agricultural Production and Settlement Board.⁹¹¹ In Kenya, food control was invariably invested in such boards rather than specific individuals. The choice of an individual 'famine controller' held too many political risks in relation to the strength of the competing economic interests affected by scarcity.

Political and economic factionalism came to bear on food problems in other ways. One was that Kenyan responses to scarcity tended to consist of fragmented sectoral interventions pursued without any coherent strategic oversight. This was clear in the anti-scarcity system that emerged and stabilized during the Second World War: maize production would have to be increased through high guaranteed prices, *and* adequate food access would have to be ensured through subsidization. Both settler maize growers and urban labour were appeased: the first through a corporatist coterie of production committees operating with state financial guarantees; the second, a more 'welfarist' domain, managed by Labour and Native Affairs departments. Kenyan officials, consequently, could never take the steps called for by the Food Shortage Commission, to intervene to significantly shift consumer demand away from maize. The state was too invested in the maize industry, financially and politically, to let it falter. Settlers were too reliant on state support to allow a biochemist 'nutrition officer' free reign to set their economic fate with agricultural policies centred on 'human needs'. Kenyan food policy was, in more ways than one, designed by committee.

The picture that emerges of Kenya's experiences with food scarcity and government suggests that it shared in many of the trends seen elsewhere in British Africa, fitting between some of the more extreme cases. Kenyan dynamics were similar to those of settler colonies to the south – marketing boards, 'powerful farm lobbies', price supports for European growers – but it lacked significant reserves of mineral wealth, and the political and economic power of its settler community was more curtailed, complicated by the strength of African commercial production.⁹¹² Many Kenyan food and marketing policies resembled those of peasant-led economies like Tanganyika, but with more state control and settler bias.⁹¹³ Against this backdrop, Kenyan famine history appears as a bricolage of forces and effects: similar in many respects, uniquely Kenyan in others.

Up to this point I have discussed the specificity of Kenyan experiences of scarcity and government in relation to those of other African settings. Now I wish to reflect, briefly, on how an approach to the 'analysis of government' can contribute to the history of food scarcity in Africa. My point is that a perspective seeing food scarcity as *governmentalized* allows one to understand precisely the relationship between the colonial state, in its emerging forms, and the wider field of strategies and means employed to govern food problems. One can also see how this relationship changed in space and time. Take famine relief as an

⁹¹¹ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 123.

⁹¹² Jayne, 'Managing', p. 143.

⁹¹³ Jayne and Jones, 'Food Marketing', p. 1506.

example. At the start of the twentieth century, relief practices involved a whole range of actors and institutions, including missionaries, philanthropists, private traders and, increasingly, the state. Even when the state was involved, actual efforts often relied on local initiative rather than central coordination. Ultimately, such practices were intended as much as a way of 'breaking the corner' and managing inflation as of saving the rural indigent. Similar points can be made of state marketing control, a system built upon pre-existing networks of producers, traders, marketing organizations and infrastructures. State responsibilities and entitlements emerged from within this wider field of governmental practices in an uneven way, as certain aspects of the food system became more or less *problematic*. They came to concern the conduct of people and arrangements of space in different ways, at different times, for different aims. Labour control, 'better' African agriculture, communications development, increased maize production, soil conservation, wartime wage bonuses, nutritionally-informed consumption – scarcity, as a kind of political discourse and technology, circulated between all these fields, plus others.

Anti-scarcity practices in Kenya therefore took shape under specific discursive, political, economic and cultural conditions. Certain ideas and ways of responding to food problems informed subsequent responses to the same or related issues. The thesis has captured at least three dynamics to this process. The first relates to the importance of memory and reflexivity. I have described moments when governing actors recounted memories of past scarcities, as well as the results of previous interventions, and used these recollections to justify their contemporary actions.⁹¹⁴ Second, I have shown that many of the practices and objects used to control food scarcity had been borrowed from other domains of government and repurposed. This included customs duties and import-export controls, the 'native authority' system, labour rationing, KFA marketing facilities, and so on. And third, I have noted that scarcity-related techniques helped to constitute some of the practices applied in other domains of government. Anti-scarcity movement controls and 'betterment' programmes, for example, laid the foundation for later production and marketing policies. Problems of food and soil scarcity were central to the strategies and objectives formulated for schemes of post-war 'development'. Moreover, such problems played a critical role in the emergence of relatively capacitated state institutions capable of planning and implementing those schemes.

Given these kinds of dynamics, the government of food problems in Kenya cannot be seen *only* as the functions of a state determined by the contradictory articulation of competing 'capitalist projects'.⁹¹⁵ Neither were they simply the expressions of grand ideological or political visions of planning and social

⁹¹⁴ For a discussion of the place and study of reflexivity within governmentality, see Li, 'Governmentality', p. 277.

⁹¹⁵ For this basic argument, see Berman, *Control and Crisis*; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*; Watts, *Silent Violence*. My problem does not lie with the core argument, that the actions of colonial officials were caught within conflicting and contradictory forces. Rather, I am concerned with the implications of a rigid theoretical definition of the state and political power for how we think about the historical government of something like food.

transformation.⁹¹⁶ Both perspectives would fail to account adequately for the origins or development of certain kinds of governmental rationalities, practices and subjectivities surrounding food problems. Rather, a historical *analysis of government* calls our attention to the ways in which governing arrangements may be ‘pulled together from an existing repertoire, a matter of habit, accretion and bricolage’.⁹¹⁷ It enjoins us to recognize the events and cyclical processes through which issues become problems, problems enjoin practices, and practices produce effects. It means, too, that we can take food scarcities and practices seriously as problems through which the objects, institutions, rationalities and practices of governing were, and are, constituted.⁹¹⁸ In accounting for these dynamics, we can avoid writing a history of colonial government that takes the state as an *a priori* subject. Instead, we might understand the precise ways in which different actors and agencies – states, markets and subjects included – have been unevenly and differentially *governmentalized*.⁹¹⁹

These points lead us to consider the more general implications of this research, with its specific focus on the problematization of food scarcity, for our knowledge and understanding of African colonial governmentality. This is the focus of the following section, wherein I highlight food’s utility as a category of critical historical analysis.

8.2 Governmentalities of the colonial

What can a historical focus on the problematization of food scarcity tell us about the nature of colonial government in Kenya and Africa? I argue, firstly, that such a focus sheds light on the particular ‘politics of population’ expressed by African colonial governments like that of Kenya, including the impact of a Malthusian paradigm of scarcity, population and crisis on the notions and practices of administration. Secondly, I argue that this focus provides a novel and nuanced understanding of the multiple kinds of rationalities, techniques and spatialities constituting colonial rule.

What, then, does a critical historical analysis of food scarcity reveal about a colonial ‘politics of population’ in Africa? By this, I mean the various ways in which colonial rule was (or was not) oriented towards ‘population’ as a real-world process, and as an object to be known and governed. Indeed, the history of the problematization of food scarcity reveals the full force of what Dean refers to as the ‘Malthus Effect’ on the problematics and modes of colonial government in Kenya.⁹²⁰ This was a mode of governing that assumed and worked against definite limits of natural and economic resources (whether minerals, humus, water, food, or capital) in order to avert a crisis of subsistence. It was a mode built on the fundamental concern of how to regulate human beings’ place in the

⁹¹⁶ Li makes this critique with particular reference to the work of J. C. Scott; ‘Governmentality’, p. 276.

⁹¹⁷ Li, ‘Governmentality’, p. 276.

⁹¹⁸ For a similar argument, see Vernon, *Hunger*, chapter 9, here p. 273.

⁹¹⁹ Death, ‘Governmentality at the Limits’, p. 785.

⁹²⁰ Dean, ‘Malthus Effect’.

biosphere, of how to manage the disequilibrium between ‘human procreative power’ and the power of the growth of the means of subsistence.⁹²¹

From the thesis findings, one can note several important dimensions of this so-called Malthus Effect as it was felt in Kenya. One, it is evident that Malthusian notions of scarcity and population were often overlaid on existing problems, and could run against established ways of thinking and acting, such as official notions of the paternalistic moral duty to relieve suffering, or the politics of rural district collaboration. Second, expressions of Malthusian ideas were fundamentally shaped by the relations and conflicts of Kenyan political economy – one example being the notion that only African workers on settler farms should be fed by the state, others, showing less ‘industry’, should not (see chapters 3 and 4). Third, and related to the foregoing, the Malthusian thematic was multivalent, circulating between very different registers and arguments. It could be deployed in an anti-statist context (as with arguments launched against the Food Control Board in 1929) *and* as part of the logic of central government control (as with arguments made in favour of maize marketing control in the 1930s).⁹²² So, a large degree of rhetorical versatility was possible within the Malthusian paradigm.

Fourth, we have seen that the Malthus Effect generated different modes for the government of food problems. On one hand, there emerged a biopolitical interest in regulating scarcity through the processes and mechanisms of the market. This was a calculative mode of governing that aimed to guarantee a food supply for non-producing populations, especially labour. It also involved attending to the nutritional value of labour rations, as well as the spending and consumer habits of the increasingly urbanized workforce. The objective was the efficient conversion of potential into actual labour-power.⁹²³ Food and the state’s control of food supplies were thus mobilized to secure the productivity of the working population and capitalist economy as a whole. Moreover, as an anti-scarcity strategy, this mode of biopolitics was integrally related to the political and economic objectives of developing agricultural industries and trade in Kenya, especially in the case of settler-grown maize. It was thus caught directly within the political-economic struggles that raged between different factions of settler industry, as well as those between African and settler producers. This was a mode of governing that sought to work through the free economic subject, or the ‘subject of interest’: one capable of exercising ‘autonomous choice’ on the market, of being conducted through their incentives and desire for self-improvement.⁹²⁴

Alongside this paradigm, food scarcity problems were also at the heart of the emergence, in Kenya as in other colonial settings, of a different form of biopolitics – one that Dean might term ‘genopolitics’: a form that centred on ‘the recurrent problematization of the very reproductive capacity of the human

⁹²¹ Dean, ‘Malthus Effect’, p. 21.

⁹²² Dean notes similar variations in the forms of the Malthusian problematic on a wider global level; ‘Malthus Effect’, p. 35.

⁹²³ Mukherjee, *Hunger*.

⁹²⁴ Dean, ‘Malthus Effect’, pp. 23, 35.

species', and which channelled governmental interventions into the lives of the vulnerable and poor of society.⁹²⁵ By contrast to the calculative, market-based approach described above, this genopolitics operated at a wider scale, with a rural focus, and relied more on practices of coercion and discipline. It involved promoting certain kinds of subsistence and commercial agriculture so as to prevent mortality from famine, or ill-health from malnutrition. Thus it sought to encourage population growth (and reproduction of the total supply of migrant labour) in areas where it was needed, while raising standards of living in places already hosting a population surplus. This, then, was a biopolitics of population that blurred the lines between biology, economy and ecology, encompassing and addressing itself to a broad range of 'forms of life' (including plant, animal, wage labourer, rural smallholder) and the material conditions that worked to sustain them (minerals, humus, terrain, water, property, capital, and so on).⁹²⁶ It was a mode of government that attempted to create and govern through the responsible, provident subject. When the latter was seen to be absent, legal powers of compulsion could be invoked.

This last observation leads to the fifth, and final, point. That is, although these two paradigms were built upon certain notions of the governable subject, those views of subjectivity were curtailed and contradictory in various ways. Africans could not be treated as full economic subjects, collectively capable of delivering harmonious results (that is, the general interest of the population) through self-interest, competition and autonomous choice, because they simply would not respond to price and income incentives in the manner expected – as noted in chapter 6, Africans could simultaneously be seen as too responsive to prices, not responsive enough, or responsive in a 'perverse' way. The African maize farmer, for one, could rarely be trusted to produce for commercial profit, as they might drive nearer a Malthusian crisis by short-sightedly exploiting the soil for profit. Likewise, Africans could not be treated as full responsible subjects because they were too rooted in customs and tradition, like the infamous 'cattle complex', in order to enjoy a proper capacity for foresight and futurity. In both cases, the African was a subject to be reformed, or if necessary compelled. For, if the objective of colonial officials was to govern, in part, through people's interests, 'autonomous choices', or through their capacity for providence, then African people first had to be made to learn what to desire, how to choose, and how to plan.⁹²⁷ Indeed, it was the clash between these two paradigms of government – between market and Malthus – as they were mobilized in specific situations and problems, that resulted in some of the key ambiguities surrounding colonial notions of African subjectivity.

The two principal themes of food and biopolitical government, described above, emerged alongside one another, and operated within the coordinates of a wider Malthusian thematic of scarcity, population and imminent crisis. Sometimes one could take prominence over the other in official policy: a market-based logic, for example, could prevail over that of subsistence, as in the early 1930s, during the Second World War, and from the late 1940s. Nevertheless, they coexisted, as

⁹²⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

⁹²⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

⁹²⁷ Ibid., p. 28.

pieces of a larger governmental puzzle: how to satisfy moral commitments to relieve suffering; how to ensure political stability; how to depress the costs of social reproduction; and how to overcome political and economic conflicts between settler factions, state and African groups.

I now wish to step back, and reflect briefly on what food scarcity tells us about the particular kinds of 'politics of population' expressed in Kenya versus those found in other British colonial settings. Let us consider colonial India. The subcontinental famines of the nineteenth century arguably provided the conditions through which 'population' could emerge as an object of knowledge and 'modern' government.⁹²⁸ Through discourses surrounding famine, Kapalgam argues, the colonial Indian government 'sought to establish a numerical discourse linking population, resources and wealth'.⁹²⁹ As Indian officials attempted to understand famine in terms of the statistical 'fluctuations and peculiarities' of population and wealth, their governmental efforts targeted human fertility and reproduction.⁹³⁰ The sexuality of vulnerable and poor subjects became the key interface of colonial government.

In Kenya, by contrast, officials made very little effort to understand the dynamics of famine and scarcity in numerical terms. Even during the Second World War, when East African food scarcity became a local and imperial priority, colonial administrators knew remarkably little about the statistical dynamics of population in the territory, even for the relatively well-documented foreign communities. Moreover, rather than attempting to understand how scarcity was precisely linked to overall dynamics of population and economy, Kenyan officials and settlers were more interested in blaming African farmers for their own miseries. It was the African agriculturalist's 'lack of skill', as the Land Commission put it in 1934, that made land and resource scarcity a problem in the first place. The solutions proposed by officials targeted agricultural production rather than biological reproduction.⁹³¹ Put differently, Kenyan authorities attempted to secure the means of subsistence, and hence the reproduction of life and labour-power, by conducting African agricultural and dietetic practices, rather than by intervening in the 'race-sex nexus', as in India.⁹³²

Why should this have been so? I suggest just one hypothesis: In Kenya, the threat and government of food scarcity – an implied Malthusian result of soil degradation and population pressure – was specifically enrolled within the political economy of resource allocation. It formed part of the answers that colonizers sought for troubling political questions around land alienation,

⁹²⁸ Hodges, 'Governmentality, Population', pp. 1158–9.

⁹²⁹ Kapalgam, *Rule by Numbers*, pp. 162–6.

⁹³⁰ Hodges, 'Governmentality, Population', p. 1158.

⁹³¹ Ittmann notes that the Colonial Office showed increasing interest in African demographic planning, particularly from the start of the 1940s, and partly as a result of food shortages during and following the war. In Kenya, official and settler concerns over population pressure in the African reserves grew in this period. However, despite this interest, the emphasis of anti-scarcity policy and intervention still lay on the side of bolstering food production and availability rather than family planning and birth control; 'Population Question', pp. 68–9.

⁹³² Arondekar, *For the Record*, p. 14.

property ownership and agricultural production.⁹³³ Population, as a concept, mainly held a rhetorical relation to food scarcity, rather than providing a calculative means to manage and govern famine. Together, they helped constitute the rationale to reserve the boundaries of the White Highlands, and to intervene in and extend state and market control over the reserves. Accordingly, the Kenyan official response to famine relied more upon the genopolitics of rural 'betterment' and subsistence than any attempt to quantify, understand and control the overall economic and biological processes discoverable within the population.

These findings lend weight to the argument that 'modern' forms of liberal governmentality, or at least those depending on a detailed knowledge of population, were highly circumscribed in African colonial contexts. Famines, along with health crises, were some of the few occasions when the 'politics of population' did become more central and overt as an aspect of colonial state policy.⁹³⁴ However, the Kenyan case confirms that such crises did not typically result in a significant elaboration of the 'knowledge capacities' of the state.⁹³⁵ Moreover, even when officials worried about food availability and distribution at a more territorial scale, as during the Second World War, their concern targeted the security of specific groups, according to specific economic and political objectives: government labour, 'essential' industries, troops, and so on. The vast majority of Kenyans were left to get by with very little, if anything, by way of state assistance, or they actively suffered from state exactions. As such, by examining colonial responses to problems such as food scarcity, one can gain a better sense of how a colonial biopolitics in Africa, while aiming to secure the reproductive capacity of the range of forms of life constituting the population, nonetheless enjoyed a patchy and inconsistent governmental reach, with varying degrees of intensity, over complexes of 'people and things'.

Yet this begs the question: how did people govern in Africa, if not through the various fluctuations discoverable within the population? Here I suggest that food can be a particularly useful lens in responding to this question. Indeed, in the previous section, I made the point that food problems can and should be taken seriously as constituting the objects, institutions, rationalities and practices of government. Food touched on a range of serious governmental problems, perhaps more so than other (better-studied) domains of colonial governmental interest like sexuality and medicine.⁹³⁶ It is precisely food's salience as a political, economic and cultural issue that makes it a key entry point to understand how different governmental logics and practices were combined within programmes of colonial rule. Food is an ideal domain through which to examine the uneven combination of coercive strategies with more disciplinary as well as market-based techniques, and how these arrangements shifted over time.⁹³⁷ Rather than exaggerating the importance of 'liberal' ideas and practices within a supposed 'colonial modernity' or, conversely, staking the colonial limits to 'modern'

⁹³³ Dörnemann, 'Seeing Population'; Elden, *Birth of Territory*.

⁹³⁴ Pesek, 'Foucault Hardly Came to Africa', pp. 45–7.

⁹³⁵ Curtis, *The Politics of Population*.

⁹³⁶ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire; Carnal Knowledge; Vaughan, Curing Their Ills*.

⁹³⁷ Death, 'Governmentality at the limits'.

techniques, examining food problems may help us to understand precisely *how* people governed in colonial Africa. They may have sought the production of 'racialized political subjects' in some key respects, but they also sought to foster particular kinds of economic subjectivity.⁹³⁸ African colonial government often operated through 'repressive' and 'objectifying' forms of power,⁹³⁹ but it also targeted the subjective behaviours, habits, interests and desires of those being governed. That was so even if these governable factors (and the population as a whole) were grasped through the frames of race and ethnicity, and if expectations of African subjectivity were riddled by all manner of contradiction. Understanding these intersections and specificities is critical to developing our historical and theoretical understanding of past and present problems, including those related to food.

In addition, a food lens provides a novel way to think about how techniques used to govern *society* intersected with those targeting *space*. In this thesis, the empirical and analytical emphasis was on the social aspects of government – practices directed at and attempting to shape the conduct of people. However, at various points I have indicated how space featured in those processes. I showed that, from the 1920s, officials attempted to manage scarcity and trade by designating and extending their control over the space of the food market and the African reserve. I described, also, how the 1930s saw food scarcity brought into a spatial relationship with problems of marketing and trade, population pressure and soil degradation. In Kenya, territorial techniques used to manage scarcity were enrolled within the political economy of land and production, and took a range of forms. These forms included calculative planning of maize plantings, population density and carrying capacity; instruction and training of African farmers in 'better' techniques of land husbandry; as well as direct coercive intervention through enclosure, destocking or terracing programmes. As such, by studying the techniques applied to a vital domain such as food, one is ideally positioned to understand the specific imbrications of biopolitical and geopolitical problems and practices underpinning colonial government.⁹⁴⁰

Given these points, the kind of genealogical understanding of colonial government presented here, assembled around the specific issue of food scarcity in Kenya, seems well suited to avoid the potential pitfalls of an 'essentialized' notion of 'colonial governmentality', or a monolithic reading colonialism as a 'grid to read the effects of colonial domination on subject populations'.⁹⁴¹ It warns against too easily resorting to abstract and generalizing notions of colonial governmentality as containing an 'internal coherence', rooted in a 'libidinal economy' of violent and coercive state control, in order to explain actual processes of colonial rule and socio-political change.⁹⁴² Moreover, one can see that the spatialities and spatial practices of colonial government did not

⁹³⁸ Frederiksen, 'Authorizing', p. 3.

⁹³⁹ Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills*, p. 203.

⁹⁴⁰ An argument I have made in Duminy, 'Ecologizing Regions'.

⁹⁴¹ Wickramasinghe, 'Colonial Governmentality', p. 34.

⁹⁴² See, for example, Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, chapter 1; Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', p. 5; Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', p. 24; *On the Postcolony*, chapters 1, 3 and 5; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 56.

simply involve the extension of violent or disciplinary practices (characteristic of enclosed, divided spaces such as the plantation) to the wider population and territory.⁹⁴³ In colonial Kenya, for example, the market emerged as a particular kind of governable space, with a distinct topology and mode of territorialization, when contrasted with the space of the African reserve: the former operating through the infrastructures, places and techniques of political economy; the latter through the hybrid politics of district collaboration, through subjective categories of ethnic and racial difference, through coercive terracing and terraforming, through demonstration and training. Developing an adequate understanding the nature of colonial power means recognizing and examining these specificities.

In sum, I am suggesting that the value of examining the historical problematization of issues such as food scarcity, through an empirically-biased 'analytics of government',⁹⁴⁴ is the capacity to recognize how processes of colonial government emerged and operated through multiple kinds and combinations of rationalities and practices, with differing objectives and effects.⁹⁴⁵ This raises important questions about how 'colonial governmentality' is theorized and mobilized in historical and contemporary analysis of Africa. In this thesis I have been driven to examine the actual 'governmentalities of the colonial' surrounding food scarcity problems, rather than understanding these problems by applying a prefigured notion of 'colonial governmentality'. I believe this approach to be closer to Foucault's own commitment to practising a form of historical nominalism, to seeing histories as contingencies of events and effects rather than expressions of universal forces and contradictions, while also engaging in an inductive mode of conceptual analysis and elaboration. But there are also specific advantages accruing to such an approach for African scholarship, which may of interest to those engaged in a wider postcolonial critique of governmentality studies. Indeed, uncovering the specificities of the governing rationalities and techniques that were actually expressed in various African settings would be a critical step to writing a history of government beyond the normative frames and narratives of Europe or the global North. It might, too, help to challenge South Asia's coronal position in the canon of colonial governmentality studies.

In the following section, I take this discussion further, and focus on a related but distinct issue. I reflect, in particular, on what this work might contribute to an understanding of the relation between food, biopolitics and colonialism.

8.3 Food and colonial biopolitics

That Foucault's analyses of the historical emergence of political techniques in Europe paid far less attention to the dynamics of colonial settings is a well-established argument.⁹⁴⁶ In the realm of food scarcity this is clear. Colonial

⁹⁴³ Redfield, 'Foucault in the Tropics'.

⁹⁴⁴ Death, 'Governmentality at the Limits', especially p. 786.

⁹⁴⁵ Barnett, 'Culture, Geography'.

⁹⁴⁶ See, for example, Pesek, 'Foucault Hardly Came to Africa'.

settings in twentieth-century Africa experienced something different from that Foucault described for early modern France and Europe. Kenya, for example, did not see a straightforward, gradual displacement of a 'moral economy of hunger' (with the market subject to strict state regulation) towards a 'political economy of food security' that promoted food supply and access through the operations and mechanisms of the market.⁹⁴⁷ Kenya's experience, rather, was one where the extension of the market and marketized food access was often accompanied by increasing state intervention and control. The Kenyan state attempted (through 'force and law') to both create a market, where it did not exist, and to circumscribe and control that market in the favour of certain objectives and interests.⁹⁴⁸ Such actions served to erode the moral economies of the majority rural population, thereby increasing the vulnerability of certain groups to scarcity and famine. Yet Kenyan officials also sought to protect African customary entitlements in various ways, and with varying degrees of 'wishful thinking' – one example being the rural subsistence and communalist policies pursued for African development in the late 1940s.⁹⁴⁹ Thus the application of biopolitical techniques around food scarcity in Kenya differed markedly from that in Europe.

Nally's response to this mismatch between metropolitan and colonial experiences of biopolitics is to view the latter as a condition of possibility for the former. Colonial state intervention is understood as part of a coercive trial of 'new forms of agricultural production and labour control' devised to ensure European consumers access to cheap imported goods.⁹⁵⁰ Colonial dynamics are interpretable within the emergence of an overall 'global provisioning system' and the development of capitalism. Yet, based on the preceding analysis of Kenya, one would be hard pressed to claim that increasing state intervention was purely a function of external capitalist relations. Kenyan state marketing control emerged out of a pre-existing set of problems and agendas surrounding rural self-sufficiency and income, dwindling state revenue, the vulnerability of settler industries, and so on. Maize control ultimately sought to boost (settler) producer prices and ensure self-sufficiency, rather than churn out cheap exports. State intervention was the product of complex local political and economic dynamics. It was not the result of imperial demand for cheaper breakfasts or starched shirt collars.

These findings raise questions about how one places and understands colonial dynamics within a larger historical and theoretical understanding of 'biopolitics'. Deducing the history of colonial food policy and production from the functional needs of metropolitan capitalism would be inadequate to understanding more localized dynamics and their long-range effects. The challenge is to uncover precisely how local political-economic conditions and interests fit within, ignored, promoted or inhibited larger patterns of accumulation and control.

⁹⁴⁷ Nally, 'Food Provisioning', p. 37.

⁹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 42–3.

⁹⁴⁹ Lonsdale, 'Depression', p. 117.

⁹⁵⁰ Nally, 'Food Provisioning', p. 43.

Recognizing and examining these realities may help to ‘provincialize’ European biopolitical and anti-scarcity regimes.⁹⁵¹

A second potential contribution to the literature on food and colonial biopolitics relates to the theorized division between ‘population’ and ‘people’ that is sometimes mobilized as a basis to understand the colonial government of famine (see the thesis introduction). The foregoing chapters have indicated that colonial government rarely operated through a neat division between a relatively civil ‘population’, to be governed through their capacity for autonomous choice and pursuit of self-interest, versus a more or less expendable mass of ‘people’, suspended as ‘bare life’, to be ruled ‘for their own good’ or simply exposed to death.⁹⁵² In Kenya, this was occasionally the case – certainly for the 10,000 or so women, children and men ‘repatriated’ from Nairobi in early 1943, and for the rural households forced to give up their reserve food supplies to help keep the colony’s ‘essential’ wartime industries ticking over. At a broad analytical level, the population/people couplet appears to hold some utility. The risk lies in mobilizing it as a theoretical basis from which to deduce and explain local historical dynamics. A strict reading of this perspective would fail to account for much in the Kenyan case – why, for example, a hungry child in Meru might receive free or subsidized famine relief from the state, but a working-age man in Kiambu would be told to find work. Or, why district agricultural officers, largely on their own initiative, attempted to boost food productivity for rural self-sufficiency and cash income during the 1920s.

The problematization of food scarcity has shown that colonial power was directed unevenly at archipelagos of problems and spaces as they emerged and demanded a response. In Kenya, geographies of state care and coercion developed over time, through successive and reflexive attempts by governing actors to cope with scarcities or secure future food access. These geographies varied markedly between spaces and groups based on the more immediate priorities of the state, as well as its capacity to govern. In accordance, responsibilities and entitlements arose gradually, as certain problems intensified, practices were repeated, and precedents established. Government and state-society relationships grew within these kinds of problematizations, rather than from the application of singular rationalities or ideological and political binaries. Accounting for these specific conditions through critical historical work is one way to identify and reveal the limits to their echoes in contemporary thought and practice. I elaborate on this point in the following section.

Before moving on, a final word is warranted about the Malthus Effect within the genealogy of modern liberal government and biopolitics. Dean argues that modes of genopolitics, finding their principle in the Malthusian thematic of population and scarcity, were largely overlooked by Foucault in his genealogical accounts of governmentality and biopolitics. This thesis, by contrast, and as discussed in the previous section, sheds important light on the emergence and

⁹⁵¹ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

⁹⁵² Mbembe, ‘Necropolitics’. For a critique of ‘ontological’ readings of the concept of biopolitics, represented by Agamben, see Koopman, ‘Two Uses’, pp. 3–8.

consolidation of the Malthusian paradigm in a specific colonial context. The historical analysis of food problems has shown how a genopolitics of scarcity intertwined with a more market-based logic, wrapped within a wider project of governing life. But, I believe, these findings can also help us to think beyond colonial confines, to rethink the development of modern government more generally. This is particularly so considering that, as Dean points out, colonial government was a condition for the articulation of the Malthusian principle of population in the first place.⁹⁵³ If it is so, that ‘to bring the Malthus Effect into our genealogy of governmentality is to recast how we might think about modern, liberal governing more broadly’, then this work stands as one example of how this can be done.⁹⁵⁴

8.4 Critical history and food security

In the thesis introduction I noted various critiques of the ‘productionist’ orientation of African food security strategies. I noted, too, that explanations for the origins and persistence of this agrarian bias have tended to highlight the dynamics and influence of overarching discursive trends, capitalist processes and international development or humanitarian agencies. However, the specific history of Kenya presented in this thesis has shown that a calculative, market-based and state-driven approach to food problems, centred on increasing agricultural production (and supplemented by reactive, targeted welfare interventions) emerged within a specific array of existing conditions and problems. Production-oriented food strategies did not simply ‘trickle down’ from the forces of global capitalism, or from the dispositions of international institutions and discourses. Rather, they emerged from situations, practices and arguments resulting from the intensification of problems confronting those tasked with governing.

Take one example of how local and broader dynamics intersected to give rise to a specific policy objective: that of territorial self-sufficiency. Ideologies and techniques of food sufficiency – as those of fiscal sufficiency – were built into government anti-scarcity practices from the beginning of colonial rule in Kenya and East Africa.⁹⁵⁵ It was a key part, so to speak, of colonial ‘common sense’.⁹⁵⁶ Imports were expensive and unreliable, and to be avoided. Gradually these ideas and techniques were rescaled from an emphasis on local or district sufficiency, to encompass a more territory-wide and inter-territorial perspective (or, at least, one concerned with the topology of the capitalist market). How sufficiency was scaled and understood played an important role in driving the emergence of specific forms of government intervention in agricultural production and marketing. That international institutions like the FAO championed policies geared towards boosting agricultural production for territorial self-sufficiency in

⁹⁵³ Dean, ‘Malthus Effect’, p. 26; also see Bashford, ‘Malthus and Colonial History’.

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

⁹⁵⁵ On the origins of policies of colonial financial self-sufficiency, see Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, pp. 23–6.

⁹⁵⁶ Plageman, ‘Colonial Ambition’; Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*.

the 1970s,⁹⁵⁷ and that this objective was reflected in Kenya's national food strategies of the early 1980s,⁹⁵⁸ seems to indicate less the diffusion and influence of global 'food security' discourse, and more that international thought aligned with a pre-existing infrastructure and way of thinking and acting on the problem. The question then remains as to the precise pathways through which international influence came to bear on this pre-existing understanding.

In the introduction I further argued that uncovering these historical pathways is of more than academic interest. That is so because contemporary policies and strategies continue to express ways of thinking about and addressing food problems that have roots in colonial conditions, priorities and problems. Even if national sufficiency is no longer an objective of most African food security strategies, including that of Kenya, we continue to see its influence. Many African state food strategies are still preoccupied with ensuring a 'positive food trade balance'.⁹⁵⁹ The 2011 Kenyan National Food Security and Nutrition Policy still aims for *regional self-sufficiency*,⁹⁶⁰ an objective that should be understood critically and historically – as the outcome of past inter-territorial trading and customs agreements, as well as wartime food allocations between the regional territories. Likewise, more recent interest in understanding and promoting African food security through local food systems and urban 'foodsheds' could be productively and critically probed through a historical examination of colonial ideologies and practices of local and district self-sufficiency.⁹⁶¹ Beyond the specific problem of 'sufficiency', we might also open up the assumptions underpinning 'food-for-work' programmes and their historical antecedents in colonial labour problems and public relief works.

The main point is this: in order to understand the persistence of a certain way of thinking about and addressing food problems, including 'productionism', we need to understand its particular histories and geographies. Only by recognizing the specific conditions under which policies and practices have emerged will we be able to see adequately how and why the residues of the past remain in the present. Then, too, we will have a more informed basis to critique aspects of knowledge and practice that continue to have harmful effects for millions of Africans. The point of this would not be to show that a practice has a colonial precedent, and is therefore inherently violent or invalid. Neither would it be to attribute the causes of contemporary social, political and economic problems to the institutions and structures of a distant colonial past.⁹⁶² Rather, thinking historically about the problematizations surrounding food may help us to question the 'self-evidence' of certain food planning interventions and their 'implicit assumptions'. Put differently, and following Huxley, we will be better

⁹⁵⁷ Shaw, *Food Security*, chapter 17.

⁹⁵⁸ The first Kenyan National Food Policy of 1981, for example, aimed to maintain 'broad self-sufficiency in major foodstuffs' through government control of prices and inputs; GOK, *National Food and Nutrition Security Policy 2011*; also Hornsby, *History Since Independence*, pp. 363–4.

⁹⁵⁹ Haysom, 'Food System Governance', p. 6.

⁹⁶⁰ GOK, *National Food and Nutrition Security Policy 2011*, p. 16.

⁹⁶¹ For an example of a major food security project invoking the notion of the local urban 'foodshed', including in the Zambian context, see the 'Food for the Cities Programme', FAO, accessed 1 August 2017, <http://www.fao.org/in-action/food-for-cities-programme/en/>.

⁹⁶² Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa*, p. 11.

placed to assess whether the questions we continue to ask of 'food security' are still relevant, and whether 'currently taken-for-granted rationales and practices still serve as adequate answers'.⁹⁶³ In doing so, the neat relation between 'what is' and 'what ought to be' expressed within conventional framings of 'food security' can be prised open, creating new opportunities for research, critical debate and practice.⁹⁶⁴

I will make one final, theoretical point on the benefits of taking a historical approach to 'food security'. This point needs further research and elaboration, but warrants a brief mention. That is, critical historical studies of food may ask new questions around the presence of the term 'security' in 'food security'. Studies like this thesis invite a more careful consideration of the work of *security* that food does, and how this work has changed over time. This could relate, in a relatively straightforward sense, to preventing rural or urban unrest, or securing rations for fighting troops. But thinking about food *security* also encompasses the place and importance of food within wider 'mechanisms of security' deployed to regulate and shape the life of populations or to govern territories. Moreover, one is led to ask how food governance has been increasingly *securitized* as part of a wider process of securitizing state and society.⁹⁶⁵ There remain, therefore, important questions to be asked about the precise imbrications of food and security within historical and contemporary regimes of government. It is my hope that this thesis has provided a starting point for research in that direction.

8.5 Limitations and further research

This study focused on a particular African context: Kenya. Time after time, in both archival and secondary sources, I came across evidence of the 'mobility' of ideas, policies and practices used to control and prevent food scarcity. The Kenyan dynamics examined in this thesis represent only one aspect of these wider networks of institutions, personnel and knowledge exchange. I have not been able to uncover precisely how these processes of sharing and referencing unfolded. Writing the history of food's government as a 'history of transfer' would probably require a different kind of study.⁹⁶⁶ Nonetheless, a fruitful topic of further research would be to examine the specific pathways by which colonial knowledge was created and 'travelled' to other settings, and the specific conditions under which this production, distribution and translation took place.⁹⁶⁷

The thesis also focused on a particular subject: food scarcity. Nutritional and ecological knowledge and interventions received less emphasis than problems of food production, distribution and access. I have not been able to uncover the precise connections between food-related knowledge and techniques and those

⁹⁶³ Huxley, 'Historicizing Planning', p. 1529.

⁹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1531.

⁹⁶⁵ Owens, 'Human Security', p. 549.

⁹⁶⁶ Pesek, 'Foucault Hardly Came to Africa', p. 46.

⁹⁶⁷ Huxley, 'Historicizing Planning'.

in other governmental domains, such as medicine, education and labour. Far more remains to be written on their relations with food.

Ultimately, for reasons of time, resources and personal disciplinary bias (towards policy studies), the study's empirical sources were limited to imperial archives. Consequently, my empirical sources and analysis consistently reflect an 'official voice'. I do not claim to have written an exhaustive account of the government of food scarcity in colonial Kenya. It is not comprehensive from the official point of view, due to the exclusion of local administrative dynamics. Detailed research in Kenyan national and county archives would likely reveal sources and findings that contradict some of the arguments presented here.

More significantly, the study has been unable to give adequate attention to the experiences of famine and government 'from below', the voices and agency of the actual Kenyans affected by and engaged in processes of government. When reading colonial reports and correspondence on some significant event or policy, I have often thought: how did this actually happen? What did people think, and how did they react? Answering these questions, again, would require a different kind of historical study. An ethnographic approach would have provided much insight into the ideas and practices recounted in this thesis. It would allow the many ways in which Africans were engaged with anti-scarcity practices to be examined, to uncover how governmental practices emerged from and responded to various points of resistance. It might also reveal how such engagements and practices resulted in the formation of new kinds of subjectivities, changing the manners in which people understood themselves in ways that moved beyond dualities of domination and resistance, collaborator and resistor.⁹⁶⁸

Uncovering the precise arrangements and reformations of power surrounding food issues takes on particular importance when considering the limits to colonial governmental power. Colonial state interventions were socially and spatially focused, targeting groups and places associated with narrow domains of problems. Many were hopelessly ineffective, or produced effects that spun rapidly beyond the state's control. I have only been able to touch on these dynamics of coproduction, and on the actual effects produced by programmes of government. Further research is needed.

The prominence given to the 'official voice' in this study, written in Cape Town in 2017, takes on a particular epistemological and ethical charge in the current context of calls to 'decolonize' higher education and historical studies in South Africa. Indeed, detailed study of colonial governmentality would surely stand accused of reproducing precisely the kind of bias towards colonial worldviews and matrices of power currently being critiqued by student movements across the country's campuses. I have not been able to 'step out of the shadows of the colonial archive'.⁹⁶⁹ Yet, I believe, undertaking careful, thickly descriptive analysis of colonial events, of how colonial government was actually envisaged and discharged, might be one potential avenue to 'demythologize' colonial

⁹⁶⁸ Cooper, 'Conflict and Connection', p. 1534.

⁹⁶⁹ Lalu, *Deaths of Hintsa*, p. 254.

history and 'whiteness' – a means to unveil it as the ordinary, contingent, problematic endeavour that it was, rather than a universal yardstick for measuring all change and experience.⁹⁷⁰ The task of demythologizing should, in my view, involve careful empirical analysis of how the interpretative frames of 'coloniality' have been thought and incorporated into specific problems and techniques, of which we can still see the traces to this day. Decolonization could mean understanding the specific processes by which these frames have become hegemonic, and how this influences the ways that problems are thought and addressed in the present.

I acknowledge all these limitations. My hope, however, is that I have presented, in sufficient historical detail, the outline of how a key social and developmental problem has emerged, stabilized and changed, such that we can understand more about food government, past and present, in Kenya and Africa. I hope, too, that this research can be part of a broader critical project examining the relationship between knowledge, practice and colonialism.

⁹⁷⁰ Mbembe, 'Decolonizing Knowledge'.

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Appendix: Note on Primary Sources

The primary sources for this study came from archives in the United Kingdom and from online repositories. The main archival documentation was found at the National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA) in Kew. This included official documents of and correspondence between the Kenyan government, the Colonial Office, as well as other British government departments. The main records used were the files of the Colonial Office relating to Kenya (especially CO 533); food supply, agriculture and marketing issues (CO 852, Economic General Department) and nutrition (CO 859, Social Services Department). The files concern the period from the late 1920s to the early 1950s. They are particularly rich for the Second World War. Those related to the Ministry of Food and wartime food supply issues are available in the MAF 83 series. CAB 58 provided Cabinet committee records dealing with various colonial food issues, especially nutrition. Primary sources were also consulted at Weston Library, Oxford University, where the personal papers of many colonial officials, plus records of food-related African development initiatives, are held as part of the University's Commonwealth and African collections.

The British Library was the source of several of the government documents included in the bibliography. Others were secured at the Wellcome Library (London), the University of Cape Town Library (Government Publications Section), and the National Library of South Africa.

Numerous documents relating to the history of Kenyan colonial government are freely available online. This includes the complete set of colonial annual reports spanning the period from 1905 to 1938, available from the website of the University of Illinois Library. A near-complete collection of Kenyan Legislative Council debates are also available through Google Books. These resources provided a valuable perspective on local Kenyan priorities, perspectives and political debates.