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Colonialism and the Remaking of the Abagusii Family Institution: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract:

This study investigated the impact of Western cultural influences on the transformation of the Abagusii family institution in Gusiiland. It adopted a historical research design, relying on evidence from Primary data including oral interviews, archival documents and secondary data. Informants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling and data from the various sources were cross-referenced to enhance accuracy and reliability. The study was guided by Cultural Diffusion Theory, which provided a framework for analysing how external cultural forces interacted with established family systems. The findings show that the Abagusii family institution was cohesive and governed by clear generational and gendered roles prior to sustained colonial and missionary presence. However, the introduction of colonial administration, Christian missions and Western education altered these foundations in significant ways. Taxation, labour recruitment and the disruptions of the two world wars weakened indigenous mentorship and reduced male presence in homesteads. Missionary activity cultural institutions, while formal schooling redirected youth from indigenous pathways to adulthood. This study contributes to the social and cultural history of Gusiiland by demonstrating how Western cultural influences reshaped the organisation, authority patterns and daily functioning of the Abagusii family during from the early colonial period up to the end of the second world war.

Key Words: Colonialism, Missionary Activity, Western Education, Indigenous Family Systems and Social Transformation

1. Introduction

Prior to European contact through British colonial administration and missionary expansion, African societies already possessed organised and stable family systems founded on communal cohesion, extended kinship and entrenched moral authority (Mbiti, 1975). These indigenous frameworks functioned to regulate social behaviour, uphold ethical standards and ensure continuity through collective responsibility and intergenerational transmission of values, thereby sustaining order within marriage practices, inheritance patterns and everyday family relations (Ojua et al., 2014). Inglehart (2018) argues that societal values and behavioural responses are significantly influenced by perceptions of security, which explains why certain African communities accepted Western education, healthcare and religious institutions, while others actively resisted external cultural imposition. Similarly, Mesoudi (2011) contends that cultural systems perceived as dominant tend to endure and spread at the expense of less powerful ones, a process that became evident as European cultural norms increasingly displaced African traditions. This broad regional transformation was also observable in Kenya, for instance among Aembu of Embu North, family structures before 1895 were grounded in traditional religious practices, communal responsibility and regulated moral discipline. However, the introduction of colonial governance and the establishment of the Kigari mission station in 1910 initiated a gradual restructuring of indigenous family life, as Western modes of belief, communication, dress and authority increasingly reshaped domestic organisation and destabilised long-standing cultural foundations (Kaaria et al., 2022). This wider transformation is evident among the Abagusii of Kenya, where Western culture introduced during colonial rule significantly reconfigured family organisation. Mokua (2014) demonstrates that the shift from communally governed marriage systems to monetised and individualised arrangements weakened elder authority, reduced extended family involvement in decision-making and redefined marriage from a collective obligation to a personal arrangement. The introduction of Western education, Christianity and wage labour further altered gender relations by expanding female autonomy and diminishing patriarchal control, thereby undermining the kinship cohesion that had traditionally sustained Abagusii family stability and redefining the structure of the family institution.

2. Statement of the Problem

In the pre-colonial period, the Abagusii family institution was the hallmark of social, economic and political organisation in Gusiiland, serving as the primary structure through which kinship relations, productive activities and authority were regulated. It functioned both as a foundation and an organising framework for communal cohesion, resource management and governance. However, with the onset of colonial rule, which introduced Western cultural influences into Kenya and Gusiiland in particular, the Abagusii family institution underwent significant disruption. By the time Kenya attained

independence, the family institution no longer commanded the same sense of respect and prestige among the Abagusii as it had during the pre-colonial period. Generally, the formerly cohesive family institution that constituted the predominant organising force among the Abagusii in the pre-colonial period was fundamentally altered under the influence of Western culture, resulting in a weakened kinship system and a reconfiguration of traditional socio-economic stability. Consequently, households that had once derived status and security from indigenous livelihood practices experienced increasing marginalisation and reduced social standing within the transformed family institution in Gusiiland. It is therefore necessary to examine and detail the influence of Western culture in the apparent transformation of the Abagusii family institution in Gusiiland.

3. Literature Review

Informed by existing literature, Adaki (2023) maintains that colonial rule functioned as a primary channel through which Western socio-cultural norms were embedded within African societies, fundamentally altering indigenous family institution. He demonstrates that colonial administration, reinforced through missionary activity, formal education and statutory governance, disrupted extended kinship systems while introducing new concepts of authority, marriage and gender relations, thereby weakening communal cohesion and redefining household structure. Similarly, Alber, Häberlein and Martin (2010) observe that in West African contexts, for instance in Benin and Togo, colonial intervention reconfigured kinship practices through the introduction of monetised economies, institutionalised schooling and state-regulated legal systems, reshaping child-rearing, marriage processes and obligations towards the elderly. These shifts facilitated a transition from lineage-based collectivism to more individualised domestic arrangements, often accompanied by tensions over labour, care and decision-making. While both studies illuminate colonialism as a force of structural transformation, they offer limited attention to the ways in which African communities negotiated, adapted or resisted these changes in order to sustain cultural continuity.

A study by Tyali (2018) examines the impact of colonial-apartheid on African family structure in South Africa and illustrates that state-sanctioned systems such as migrant labour, incarceration and residential segregation systematically dismember the nuclear family by separating fathers from their households, weakening parental authority and eroding kinship cohesion, thereby institutionalising patterns of fragmented family life under colonial control. In support, MacGaffey (1983), writing on Central Bantu societies of the Congo Basin, demonstrates that colonial administration restructures lineage-based family organisation by subordinating indigenous descent systems to external legal and political authority, altering marriage regulation, inheritance rights and domestic governance in ways that destabilise traditional family coherence. The studies by Tyali (2018) and MacGaffey (1983) therefore present strong scholarly evidence that colonial regimes actively reconfigure African family institution through enforced separation and structural reorganisation. However, these works focus on South Africa and Central Africa respectively and cannot account for the specific dynamics of colonial impact on family institutions among Kenyan communities such as the Abagusii, indicating both a geographical and contextual gap in existing scholarship.

Meier zu Selhausen (2014) illustrates that colonial and missionary authorities in Buganda and Toro (Uganda) reshaped the family by formalising Christian monogamous marriage, diminishing the authority of elders and extended kin in arranging unions, and promoting individual marital choice, particularly among women exposed to mission education and wage labour, who married later and with narrower age gaps, reflecting a reconfiguration of household power towards a more nuclear and individualised structure. In contrast, Spalding (1996) shows that colonial administration in southern Tanzania, especially among the Makonde and Ndendeuli, unsettled pre-colonial family systems characterised by fluid kinship networks and decentralised authority by imposing rigid governance frameworks that constrained lineage autonomy and weakened family-based social organisation. While the Ugandan case demonstrates transformation through religious regulation of marriage and domestic roles, the Tanzanian case reveals disruption through administrative restructuring of communal life; together, they confirm that colonial rule consistently eroded extended family authority while manifesting through context-specific mechanisms shaped by regional socio-cultural conditions (Meier zu Selhausen, 2014; Spalding, 1996).

Kaaria et al. (2022) have written on the impact of colonialism among the Embu North Sub-County and illustrate that colonial administration and missionary activity destabilised indigenous family systems by eroding communal values, reshaping gender roles and weakening traditional authority, as taxation, forced labour and western cultural norms reconfigured the family into a strained socio-economic unit (Kaaria et al., 2022). Similarly, Ng'etich (2025) explains that among the Nandi of Kenya, colonial labour migration disrupted household organisation as men entered wage employment, leaving women to assume broader economic and social duties while adopting strategies such as trade and cooperative farming to sustain family stability under colonial pressures (Ng'etich, 2025). In the same vein, Mokua (2023) demonstrates that among the Abagusii of South-Western Kenya, colonial penetration through missionary influence, economic monetisation and labour migration transformed marriage and family practices by weakening traditional moral controls, altering bridewealth systems and redefining marital authority, consequently diminishing indigenous family cohesion (Mokua, 2023). Although these studies offer valuable insight into colonial disruption of family institution among the Aembu, Nandi and Abagusii, literature specifically on the impact of western culture on Abagusii family institution remains scanty.

4. Results and Discussions

Colonial establishment and its implications for the Abagusii family structure

Although British colonial intrusion into Kenya began in 1894, the Abagusii only came under direct administration in 1902 when their territory was incorporated into Uganda's Eastern Province. Maxon (1989) notes that the Mogisero, the smallest Abagusii clan, sought British protection after repeated attacks from the larger Kitutu clan, forcing them toward Wanjare where they then faced livestock raids by the Luo. In 1904, H. B. Partington, the Kericho officer, visited North Mugirango and was received positively, yet F. W. Isaac's entry into Kitutu in 1905 met firm resistance, signalling growing opposition to colonial rule. As Maxon (1989, p. 31) observes, this resistance triggered the first British military expedition against the Kitutu clan. Later that year,

troops were deployed to Gusiiland following accusations of livestock theft and a killing in Luoland, further extending colonial involvement. During this process, the British mapped the region and, in 1907, established Getembe as the administrative centre, appointing G. A. S. Northcote as Assistant District Commissioner. Building on this evidence, this marked the earliest phase of colonial intervention that disrupted clan cohesion and eroded indigenous family institution by imposing new administrative structures. Choti (1998) argues that during this period hut tax was imposed by the colonial administration which required each and every hut to settle the tax obligation which led to closure of a number of the Abagusii cattle Kraals, *ebisarate*. Similarly, Onyancha asserted

The abolition of ebisarate resulted from the imposition of the hut tax, which compelled young men to abandon cattle-keeping duties in favour of wage labour. The functioning of *ebisarate* had depended on the presence of young men who safeguarded family herds and received systematic instruction on the roles expected of them as future household heads. Its erosion therefore disrupted the indigenous process through which boys were socialized into adulthood, weakening the transmission of responsibilities, authority and moral order that anchored the Abagusii family structure (Onyancha, O.I., 29/04/2024).

The findings above suggest that the abolition of ebisarate disrupted the socialisation of boys, weakening the mechanisms through which the family transmitted roles and maintained cohesion. According to the District Commissioner's 1909 report, this shift was reinforced by the colonial imposition of hut tax on cattle villages, a measure that compelled young men to leave these communal spaces and return to their parental homes, thereby contributing to the erosion of the indigenous family structure (KNA DC/KSI/1/1, 1909). This pattern is corroborated by Nyamwaka (2011) who notes that dismantling cattle villages reconfigured family roles among the Abagusii, as duties once handled by men were transferred to women. With men increasingly engaged in colonial wage labour, women became responsible for tasks such as milking and maintaining cattle enclosures, resulting in a heavier domestic workload and a noticeable shift in the gendered structure of family responsibilities.

With the dissolution of cattle villages, many young men were compelled to seek wage labour in order to meet their tax obligations. Those recruited for were often compensated in cattle and by 1910, 300 Abagusii men had been sent to Sultan Hamud in Machakos. Nearly a third later deserted and returned to Gusiiland, reflecting widespread reluctance to engage in wage labour (KNA DC/KSI/1/1, 1910). This pattern demonstrates that the colonial administration deliberately used taxation and labour recruitment as strategies to draw the Abagusii into wage work and integrate them into the emerging money economy. A key informant indicated that duties previously undertaken by men such as guiding, disciplining and preparing boys for adulthood were increasingly transferred to women. He noted that prolonged male absence resulting from labour obligations and taxation pressures left wives to assume the primary role in mentoring young males, thereby taking over responsibilities that had traditionally been organised and supervised by male elders (Atuya, O.I., 29/04/2024). This implies that prolonged male absence shifted core responsibilities to women, hence weakening the indigenous gendered foundations of the Abagusii family structure. In a similar study, Kaaria, Kithinji and Nkonge (2022) note that British taxation policies among the Aembu forced men to seek wage labour away from home, compelling women to take over household and child-rearing responsibilities. This mirrors the Abagusii experience, where prolonged male absence due to labour demands shifted the mentorship of boys to women, thereby weakening the gendered foundations that had traditionally sustained family organisation.

Missionary Work and Abagusii family Institution

The expansion of missionary work in Gusiiland began in 1908 when Northcote, the Assistant District Commissioner for South Kavirondo, invited Father Brandsma of the Mill Hill Mission to survey the area. After traversing Gusii from the Luo side, Brandsma identified *Getembe* present-day Kisii town as an appropriate location for a mission. His tour initiated a permanent Catholic presence and in 1909 he settled at Nyabururu, appointing Michael Butiko as the first catechist. This development paved the way for the official opening of the Nyabururu mission on 13 December 1911 by Fathers Brandsma, Jack de Wall and Stam (Magoma, 2014, p. 13–14). In a similar account, Maangi (2011) notes that the Seventh-day Adventist mission took root in 1912 following the earlier Catholic entry at Nyanchwa in 1911. Pastor Carscallen, who had pioneered Adventist work at Gendia, helped extend SDA influence into Gusii, with I.A. Evanson serving as the first resident missionary at Nyanchwa. Yakobo Olwa of Karachuonyo facilitated this expansion by linking the mission to local networks and accompanying Evanson to Nyanchwa, where Evanson began evangelising. These initiatives confirmed 1912 as the year the SDA mission was firmly established in Gusiiland, forming the basis for subsequent growth through schools, catechists and mission villages. This early development laid the groundwork for long-term cultural and social transformation that would eventually penetrate domestic life and reshape Abagusii family organisation

Missionary penetration into Gusiiland relied on the spreading of the “Good News” and Missionary education as a tool in attracting converts. (Bogonko, 1977). Early Catholic and SDA missionaries introduced clothing, agricultural tools, medical care and food supplies, which appealed to communities recovering from the 1905-1908 military assaults and the subsequent loss of livestock and homesteads (Burgman, 1990; Magoma, 2014). Despite these incentives, the Abagusii initially resisted missionary influence, largely because they viewed missionaries as inseparable from the colonial administration that had violently subdued them. Central to the resistance was the cult of Mumbo. Mumbo's declaration stated:

I am the God Mumbo whose two homes are in the Sun and in the Lake. I have chosen you to be my mouth-piece. Go out and tell all African...that from henceforth I am their God....The Christian religion is rotten (mbovu) and so is its practice of making its believers wear clothes. My followers must let their hair grow-never cutting it. Their clothes shall be the skins of goats and cattle and they must never wash. All Europeans are your enemies, but the time is shortly coming when they will all disappear from our country (Nyangweso, 1930, p. 13.)

The Mumbo message represented a direct rejection of colonial authority and missionary influence, promoting a return to African spiritual and cultural autonomy. By affirming indigenous ways of living, it defended practices that upheld generational hierarchy, communal obligation and ancestral customs, thereby countering the Christian-led shifts that were reshaping the Abagusii family institution. Magoma (2014) notes, the memory of British punitive

expeditions meant that missionaries were met with suspicion, hostility, and low participation in early mission efforts. However, missionary education gradually became the most effective tool for softening this resistance and this shift later became central in transforming household roles and authority structures.

According to Bogonko (1977), the missionaries undermined the foundations of Abagusii family life by condemning the traditional spaces where boys were instructed in adulthood roles “heathenish surroundings” such as the venues of circumcision rites and *ebisarate*. By discrediting these settings, missionaries weakened the indigenous systems through which families prepared boys for responsibility, respect for elders, and communal obligations. This attack on indigenous institutions reduced the authority of elders and clan-based mentorship, gradually shifting the basis of authority from lineage to mission education. Although colonial authorities later supported mission schooling, He emphasizes that the initial damage to African modes of nurturing discipline, identity and moral order stemmed from missionary intervention. This suggests that missionary education was largely theoretical and detached from Abagusii realities, leaving the indigenous Abagusii system rooted in family structure helpless in the face of new moral and cultural expectations. Omote stated:

It was only men who accessed missionary education, for those who did they were often recruited into the settler farms as administrators or as clerks in mission stations. Men who embraced Christianity also became preachers, a shift that altered household roles as women remained at home to care for children and the elderly (Onyancha, O.I., 29/04/2024).

The findings above indicate a reorganisation of family responsibilities among the Abagusii, as men who entered missionary education or church service were frequently away from home, leaving women to manage children, the elderly and domestic affairs, thereby reshaping the gendered foundations of household life. Onyambu (2023) supports this observation, noting that village elders and colonial chiefs actively encouraged the community to adopt missionary education, which was primarily reserved for men. She adds that men who acquired skills through mission training later sent remittances home, enabling women to invest in more productive farming activities, further expanding their economic role within the household. This shift marked a transition from a household structure dependent on men’s physical presence to one sustained by women’s daily labour and men’s external earnings, redefining economic and social roles within the family. Mission schools at Nyabururu and Nyanchwa continued to offer literacy, vocational skills and new opportunities linked to the emerging colonial order, drawing young boys away from livestock-based training and domestic responsibilities (Nyaundi, 2012; Maangi, 2011). This movement of boys from cattle villages to classroom learning reoriented pathways to adulthood, replacing communal mentorship with mission instruction. This trend is further demonstrated in the table below:

Table1.0

Schools’ Attendance and Catechist Allocation at Nyabururu Roman Catholic Mission, 1922

Location	No. of Schools/Churches 1920	No. of Catechist 1922	No. of Attendants 1922
Bobasi	1	2	12
Bagetutu	6	3	31
Bogusero	1	0	0
Nyaribari	1	3	29
Bonchari	4	2	4
North Bogirango	3	6	40
Bomachoge	2	0	0
South Bogirango	1	6	121
Total	19	22	237

Source: KNA DC/KSI/1/1, 20-22

Table 2.0

Schools and Enrolment under Nyanchwa SDA Mission, 1920-1929

Year	No. of Schools	Student Population
1920	1	20
1921	1	55
1922	11	183
1923	13	600

1924	20	1131
1925	19	1019
1926	27	1597
1927	40	2222
1928	81	3000

Source: KNA DC/KSI/1/21-29

From the tables above it can be deduced that missionary education was becoming a central institution in Abagusii society, reshaping social expectations, redefining pathways to status, and influencing the organisation of family life. The growing involvement of boys in schooling and catechism also suggests an emerging generational shift, where formal education began to replace traditional modes of socialisation and initiation as routes to adulthood and prestige. Nyamwaka (2011) notes that the Abagusii's growing interest in formal education followed sustained campaigns by missionaries and colonial administrators, who encouraged chiefs and village headmen to emphasise schooling. However, girls were excluded on the assumption that their duties were confined to domestic work. This selective access to education gradually altered the Abagusii family institution, as men began to derive status from schooling and wage labour, while women remained tied to household responsibilities. The result was a redefinition of gender roles within the family, with male authority increasingly linked to educational attainment and women assuming an expanded domestic burden.

African Family Systems During the Two World Wars

The outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 disrupted British administration in Gusiiland as German forces advanced into the district to undermine British control in East Africa. Although the Kisii District Commissioner organised patrols along the Anglo-German frontier, a German unit crossed the border near Isebania in early September, prompting the withdrawal of the local administration and allowing German troops to enter Kisii Station without opposition (Omwoyo, 1990). Gordon (1946) notes that British reinforcements later engaged the Germans in a day-long battle, after which both sides withdrew during the night. While the British regrouped to the north of Kisii, the temporary administrative vacuum enabled sections of the Abagusii to attack government premises, mission stations at Nyabururu and Nyanchwa, and trading centres at Riana and Rangwe. When it became clear that no further German assault would follow, the British reoccupied Kisii Town on 14 September with additional forces, re-establishing control over the district. This suggests that the Abagusii were dissatisfied with British rule, which they felt disrupted their family life and social order.

However, as Nyamwaka (2011) observes, this resistance provoked a decisive colonial reaction. British forces undertook punitive expeditions that resulted in the confiscation of about 3,000 head of cattle, and numerous Abagusii men were arrested and sent to work outside the district as part of the reprisals. The First World War thus had a significant impact on the community, as these punishments occurred at a time when the colonial administration was also intensifying its demand for African labour, particularly for carrier corps in the campaign against German forces. The extent of this wartime labour mobilisation is reflected in the table 3.0 below:

Table 3.0

Labour recruitment during World War I

Year	Carrier Corps Labour	Other Labour	Total
1914/15	8,915	5,055	13,970
1915/16	6,822	1,070	7,892
1916/17	9,558	1,658	11,216
1917/18	8,758	1,052	9,810

Source: KNA/DC/KSI/1/2, 1914-1918.

The data above showing extensive mobilisation of Abagusii men for carrier corps and other wartime duties aligns with oral testimony indicating that their prolonged absence significantly altered the structure of family life. According to an informant, the withdrawal of male labour left many homesteads without adult men, compelling women to assume responsibilities traditionally performed by men, such as supervising cultivation, organising daily tasks, and managing homestead affairs (Kinaro, O.L., 29/04/2024). This testimony corroborates documentary evidence that the First World War reshaped domestic organisation in Gusiiland, with women and children undertaking expanded productive and managerial roles to ensure household continuity in the absence of male family members.

The reconfiguration of family life brought about by the First World War constituted an important inflection point in Gusii social organisation and these adjustments shaped the community's experience of the Second World War. When hostilities resumed in 1939, the colonial administration re-intensified labour mobilisation and expanded its demands on African households, producing a renewed cycle of male absence and domestic restructuring. As observed in the DCs report he noted:

It appears that in the last war the young men were caught and sent wholesale to the carrier corps, where overwork, undernourishment and disease killed a large proportion of them, and they now greatly dread a possible repetition of this experience (KNA/DC/KSI/1/4/1938.)

The statement suggests that the memory of suffering endured by Abagusii men during the First World War had a lasting impact on the community, shaping their attitudes toward subsequent colonial labour recruitment. Similarly, a key respondent recounted that her father had previously married a woman who did not bear children, leading to her homestead falling into disuse. She explained that during the Second World War, when colonial agents intensified the recruitment of young men from local villages, many youths actively avoided conscription. According to her account, those seeking to evade mobilisation often used the abandoned house as a temporary refuge, entering under cover of darkness to rest and departing before dawn to minimise the risk of being apprehended.

Although initial attempts at recruitment during the Second World War were met with reluctance, this hesitation diminished over time as many young men eventually resumed their occupations, while others were compelled into military service. The conflict had wide-ranging implications for Gusiiland. Nyamwaka (2011) observes that during this period, the colonial government introduced manpower conscription, which relied on both coercion and persuasive campaigns. Formal recruitment into the East African Military Labour Service began in 1940, followed in 1941 by “assisted recruiting” for key civilian roles. These measures placed considerable pressure on the district’s labour supply, intensifying the responsibilities borne by Abagusii women as more men were removed from local households. Gordon (1946) indicates that out of the roughly 98,000 Kenyans involved in the Second World War, Gusiiland accounted for nearly 10,000 military recruits, in addition to an even higher number of men compelled to serve in various civilian labour roles. These findings indicate that the large numbers of men drawn from Gusiiland for wartime service significantly depleted male presence in households, compelling families to reorganise daily responsibilities in new ways.

Western education in Gusiiland expanded significantly in the 1930s following sustained lobbying through the Kisii–Bakoria Local Native Council (LNC). According to Maxon (1981), the LNC became the most important institutional platform through which Gusii chiefs and mission-educated Africans articulated their dissatisfaction with the mission-run schools. The missions especially the Catholic Mill Hill Fathers and the Seventh Day Adventists offered instruction that was heavily religious, of limited academic depth and slow to adapt to the needs of a modernising African population (Maxon, 1981, p. 118-119). As a result of these combined pressures, the Kisii Government African School (later Kisii School) finally opened in 1935, marking the first significant step toward secular, government-sponsored education in Gusiiland. Makori narrated:

Formal education was gradually accepted in Gusiiland, and this change began to shift the ambitions of young men who had long identified with the warrior age-set. As literacy became more valued, boys and girls no longer spent as much time on the household duties that shaped our indigenous family roles. For example, those of us who grew up in the cattle kraals saw our parents become influenced when our age-mates returned home speaking English, prompting them to send their own children to school. This, however, separated us from the cattle kraals, where boys traditionally learned the responsibilities expected of them within the African family institution.

These findings suggest that the growing acceptance of formal education gradually drew young people away from the indigenous pathways through which family roles were traditionally learned, thereby weakening the mechanisms that had long underpinned Abagusii family organisation. Nyamwaka (2011) similarly observes that wartime experiences exposed Abagusii soldiers to new ideas, nurturing a greater willingness to engage with formal schooling and contributing to shifts in labour patterns that reshaped domestic life.

5. Conclusion

From the findings above, it can be concluded that colonial administration, missionary activity and Western education reshaped the Abagusii family institution between 1904 and 1945. Besides, the adjustments that occurred during this period show that colonial policies and wartime labour demands weakened the traditional foundations of authority, gender roles and socialisation. The abolition of cattle villages, hut tax and the removal of men for First World War carrier duties disrupted the training of boys and altered household organisation. Missionary influence further changed family life, as Christian teaching questioned long-standing customs, limited the authority of elders and introduced new expectations in marriage, morality and domestic behaviour. Although missionaries attempted to replace indigenous systems, families blended selected Christian ideas with their own practices, maintaining continuity while responding to new pressures. Further, Western education redirected young people away from communal mentorship, creating new paths to status linked to literacy and wage employment. As men pursued schooling or were drawn into labour, women took on wider domestic and productive roles. These pressures intensified during the Second World War, when renewed recruitment again removed many men from Gusiiland, leaving homesteads dependent on the labour of women and children. These developments show that the transformation of the Abagusii family institution from 1904 to 1945 involved a negotiated shift, combining elements of tradition with new administrative, religious and educational influences, alongside the disruptions brought by the two world wars. The family institution that emerged reflects both adaptation and continuity within a rapidly changing colonial environment.

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