

**A REVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF THE KAREN COUNTRY CLUB FROM 1937 TO 2017: ITS
ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the history of the Karen Country Club in Nairobi, Kenya from its foundation in 1937 to 2017. Utilising the human agency perspective, the project focused on how the club emerged as a social space for leisure but increasingly fashioned and sustained class and racial cleavages within Kenyan colonial society something that was legally expunged after independence. The study established that in colonial times the club was emblematic of the White racial dominance in social, economic and political spheres that not only shaped the country's history but was reflected in the club's structure, culture, strictures and operations. With the decline of European hegemony in post-colonial times, African elitism replaced racial segregation and privilege as class boundaries were sustained and pervaded its ranks through economic segregation that became the leading force in defining the historical trajectory of the Karen Club.

Keywords: *Social Clubs, Recreation, Leisure, Origin, Development, Growth*

INTRODUCTION

Institutional historians have presented clubs positively as avenues of sociability, self and communal empowerment,¹ a sanctuary of culture, and social engineering,² as well as negatively as centres of racial exclusivity,³ among other functions. These representations obscure the multifaceted function that social, economic and political dynamics play in shaping their genesis and development. Clubs mirror societal subtleties that are demonstrated in their membership, *modus operandi* and standard of life. This study examined the centrality of social, economic and political dynamics in influencing the origin and development of social clubs. It proposed that Karen Country Club was more than just a leisure space patronized by individuals; instead, it was an embodiment of developments, contradictions and nuances of the society in which it developed. The chapter examined the historical background of social clubs in Kenya then proceeded to the origin of the Karen Country Club and finally its development and growth over time.

Historical Background to Social Clubs in Kenya

The history of European social clubs in Kenya is closely linked with the declaration of the country by Britain as a segment of the British East Africa Protectorate on June 15, 1895.⁴ Shortly after the declaration, the Uganda Railway was constructed for administrative, economic and strategic reasons. Britain was interested in the Kingdom of Buganda located in the northern part of Lake Victoria which seemed wealthy.⁵ Also, a crisis was developing in the Nile Valley that threatened British interests and dictated Britain's presence in the region. Furthermore, the Kenya highlands and the lake region areas required exploitation for economic gains, concurrently, the railway would enhance communication between the interior and coastal regions. However, the railway had to finance itself without burdening the British taxpayers. Hence, the colonial office in London pressured the administration in Kenya to ensure that the protectorate sustained itself economically. Resultantly, the colonial government undertook a campaign to encourage European settlements, particularly in the highlands. There were expectations that European immigrants would initiate agriculture, trade and develop the territory independent of the British taxpayers. Subsequently, from early 1902, there was an influx of Europeans from South Africa and Britain.⁶ This set a precedent for more White immigrations in succeeding years.

The European immigrants demanded the introduction of a racial segregation policy citing social expediency warranted by their political status and economic accomplishments in Kenya. Racial segregation was prevalent in settler colonies in Africa such as South Africa, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Algeria and South-West Africa (Namibia). Furthermore, the majority of Kenya's pioneer settlers originated from South Africa where racial segregation was already in place.⁷ They, therefore, wanted to enjoy similar privileges as those guaranteed in South Africa. The colonial government did not yield to their pressure. Nevertheless, racial discrimination pervaded all facets of daily life unsupported by any legislation.⁸ An informal racial hierarchy was established. On top of the pyramid were Europeans, below them Asians who comprised of Pakistanis, Indians, Goans and

¹ Paul Dimeo, 'With Political Pakistan in the Offing...': Football and Communal Politics in South Asia 1887-1947, *Journal of Contemporary History* 38, no.3, Sports and Politics (July 2003):377-394, accessed April 27, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3180643>.

² Marlene Laruelle, "Patriotic Youth Clubs in Russia, Professional Niches, Cultural Capital and Narratives of Social Engagement," *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no.1 (2015):8-27, accessed October 25, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2014.986965>.

³ P.J.L. Frankl, "The Early Years of the Mombasa Club: A Home Away from Home for European- Christians," *History in Africa* 28 (2001):71-81, accessed August 1, 2017, doi.10.2307/3172208.

⁴ Sir. Charles Eliot, *The East Africa Protectorate* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966), 29.

⁵ Harm J. de Blij, *Mombasa: An African City* (Northwestern University Press, 1968), 28.

⁶ Robert M. Maxon, "The Establishment of the Colonial Economy" *In An Economic History of Kenya*, William R. Ochieng' and Robert M. Maxon, eds., (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1992), 67.

⁷ M.P.K. Sorrenson, *Origins of European Settlement in Kenya* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), 1.

⁸ Richard Frost, *Race Against Time: Human Relations and Politics in Kenya Before Independence* (London: Rex Collings, 1978), 116.

Arabs, and at the bottom were the Africans who were the majority. Scientific racism which gained prominence in the nineteenth century was used as a reference to validate repressive policies and the superiority of the White race over Africans.⁹ While this theory might have justified the practice, Europeans' helm at political power and control of the means of production contributed to this master-servant attitude.

By the European's position in the pyramid of power, they benefited from the best facilities and services available. Some of the advantages included the best occupations in both the private and civil sectors, ownership of the fertile Kenyan highlands which they labelled "White highlands" and large-scale farming. Additionally, residential areas and public utilities were designated by race. For instance in Nairobi, Europeans resided in suburbs such as Lower Kabete, Muthaiga and Langata. Asians lived in areas such as Parklands and Pangani, and Africans in Pumwani and Kaloleni. Likewise, facilities such as schools, places of worship and healthcare institutions were branded by skin colour. In this case, the best amenities were designated for Europeans, followed by those for Asians and Africans respectively. The politicization of race aimed at supporting the exploitation of the country's resources by the colonizers.

Social discrimination was also functional in social and entertainment facilities. Social clubs were spaces of racial distinction. They differentiated the colonizers from the semi-colonizers and the colonized. Consequently, each race had exclusive social clubs. For instance, Muthaiga Country Club and Nairobi Club were European spaces, Goan Institute for Goans, Sir. Ali Muslim Club for Muslim Indians and Gymkhana Club for Indians, and Pumwani Social Club for Africans. Thus, Kenya's early clubs were mono-racial until the founding of the United Kenya Club in 1946 as a multiracial institution.¹⁰ European clubs were not only places where Whites would converge for social and leisure activities, but they also symbolised the prestigious status and esprit de corps of Europeans as a race, and created a social rift between the colonizers and colonized.¹¹ Social clubs thus naturalized racial distinctions that pervaded society.

At Kenya's independence, some of the single-race clubs fully embraced multiracialism for economic or social considerations, or due to the new government's racial desegregation policy. Others such as Nanyuki Club continued to deny admission to Africans but reluctantly changed their stance over time.¹² Probably awakened by the aftermath of the European exodus at Kenya's independence, and the realization that devoid of the financial input of Africans, they were predestined to extinction. Nonetheless, some clubs remained unrelenting mono-racial spaces, for instance, the Goan Institute, Gymkhana Club and Simba Union. Other clubs such as Muthaiga Country Club improvised strategies to limit the admission of Africans and Asians to elude criticism of racism.¹³ Multiracialism was, therefore, a multifaceted affair in different clubs. Although racial segregation was legally abolished at independence in Kenya, racial discrimination practices continued to infiltrate society as a multifaceted reality. Africans continued to be discriminated against by other races. For instance, in occupations, schools, social clubs, hotels and so on.

The Karen Country Club from its nascent years was an integral part of the wider colonial society in Kenya. Historically, it symbolised societal subtleties which were demonstrated in its membership, way of life and operations. Although it was an avenue for leisure activities, the club was a personification of developments, contradictions and nuances of the society in which it developed. Hence, its history is a compendium of political, economic and societal subtleties of the country.

⁹ B.A. Ogot and W.R. Ochieng', *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya, 1940-93* (London: James Currey, 1995), 9.

¹⁰ Julius S. Nabende, "The Origins, Development and Social Impact of United Kenya Club from 1946-1963," (Masters Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1990), 2.

¹¹ Dominique Connan, "Race for Distinction: A Social History of Private Members' Clubs in Colonial Kenya," (PhD Dissertation, European University Institute, 2015), 34.

¹² "Kenya Club to Bar African Officers," *Times*, January 1, 1962.

¹³ Connan, "Racial for Distinction," 142-143.

Origin of Karen and Karen Country Club

The history of the Karen Country Club is incomplete without linking it to that of the Karen area in Nairobi. The Karen Club is located at what was originally Baroness Karen Blixen's coffee farm. Karen Blixen whose real name was Isak Dinesen was formerly married to Baron Bror van Blixen Finecke of the Danish royal family. It was through this marriage that she became Baroness Karen Blixen. It is from her name that the area that was part of Ngong takes after her name Karen. The Baroness was a settler farmer and a renowned author. Some of her celebrated works include *Out of Africa*, *Anecdotes of Destiny* and *Seven Gothic Tales*. After her divorce from Baron Bror van Blixen Finecke in 1921,¹⁴ Blixen decided to remain in Kenya and continue with coffee farming as a full-time commercial venture. Blixen's acquisition and management of a coffee estate in a colonial setting show that she embraced a masculine role in a society that was patriarchal, and which in some instances curtailed women from thriving. But this was not unusual, there are indications that the colonial societies were not an exclusively male domain. White women also contributed to imperialism through social and political participation. For instance in Kenya, European women gained the right to vote and participate in elections in 1919, earlier than their colleagues in Britain.¹⁵ Resultantly, some European women embraced positions that were formerly reserved for men. For example, Grace Collicot became the first female mayor of Nairobi.

Blixen owned an expansive 6,000 acres of land. Out of which 600 acres were endowed with coffee trees, around 1000 acres comprised of a squatters' section, while the remaining thousands of acres were covered with native forest and grassland.¹⁶ Blixen's farm encountered challenges right from its establishment. Its location in the Ngong area was unsuitable for coffee growing. The terrain was not only high for coffee cultivation but also the area tended to be chilly during cold seasons. This caused the coffee trees and berries to wither and brown. The region also experienced drought and wind spells and diseases affecting the crop.¹⁷ Also, the estate was poorly managed.¹⁸ The travails of Blixen's farm seem to have originated from logistical errors, uncondusive weather and crop diseases. But the problem of poor administration cannot be underrated. Blixen admitted that before managing the farm her interests were in shooting and travelling.¹⁹ In essence, she had no previous experience in coffee farming. Furthermore, the farm seems to have encountered similar challenges to those of many European farms in Kenya which were characterised by self-induced and financial challenges that rendered them fruitless and unproductive enterprises.²⁰

The settler economy was primarily agricultural and depended on the export of farmed products to Europe. The government facilitated European agriculture through the alienation of African-owned land in agriculturally favourable areas, and imposed taxes on indigenous Africans such as hut and poll tax that were deducted from waged labour. Taxes guaranteed the colonial administration a constant source of revenue and cheap labour for the development of infrastructure. They also ensured that European farms benefitted from African labour. In areas such as central Kenya where Africans were displaced due to the alienation of their land, a semi-feudal system existed. Families of squatters were permitted to build semi-permanent houses, graze their livestock and cultivate gardens for their use on condition that they provided labour when required.²¹ Blixen's coffee farm like other European farms relied on Black labour for production to ensure profitability. However, it seems like

¹⁴ Robert M. Maxon and Thomas P. Ofcansky, *Historical Dictionary of Kenya*, Second Edition (Lanham and London: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 33.

¹⁵ Sybil Oldfield, ed., *International Woman Suffrage: Ius Suffragii, October 1918-September 1920*, Volume IV (London and New York: Taylor and Francis, 2003), 155.

¹⁶ Isak Dinesen, *Out of Africa*, with an introduction by Bernardine Kielty (New York: Random house, 1952), 9-10.

¹⁷ Karen Blixen, *Out of Africa* (London: Putnam, 1938), 343-344.

¹⁸ Nobert C. Brockman, *An African Biographical Dictionary*, Second Edition (New York: Grey House Publishing, 1994), 79.

¹⁹ Karen Blixen, *Out of Africa* (Random House, 1938), 14.

²⁰ Norman Miller and Rodger Yeager, *Kenya: The Quest to Prosper* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 18.

²¹ Ibid.

even with the reduction of costs through the capitalization of African labour, the farm's fortune did not change.

Blixen farm's problems could also be attributed to an economic crisis occasioned by the Great Depression that had begun in New York before spreading its effects worldwide. The depression caused a reduction in exports of primary goods to industrialized nations, a drastic drop in prices of primary commodities including coffee, and upset the balance of trade.²² It also left many European farmers in a precarious economic position. Blixen's farm experienced financial privation such that "they had to live from hand to mouth."²³ Cornered by the plight of the estate, Blixen negotiated for a loan from the London Merchant Bankers, Arbuthnot Lathan and Company Limited.²⁴ But the details of the loan remain unknown even in her memoir *Out of Africa*. However, this did not change the farm's fortunes. The estate's loss-making trend persisted such that it could hardly service its debt nor maintain its operations. Failure by Blixen's Karen Coffee Company Limited to meet its loan obligation forced her creditor London Merchant Bankers Arbuthnot Lathan and Company to send Jean Remi Martin to Kenya to join Tyson Brothers Limited (the firm's representatives in Kenya) and find a solution to the problem. By early 1931 it was apparent that the farm's financial position was irredeemable.²⁵ Martin convinced his family back in England to raise funds to purchase the estate and develop it into a residential area. Subsequently, on 1st April 1931, a contract was signed between the Baroness and Martin in Copenhagen, Denmark.²⁶ This marked the end of Blixen's expansive coffee farm and paved the way for the establishment of a suburban estate. Karen Estates Limited (KEL) was formed to foresee the development with Remi Martin as its Managing Director. KEL encountered the challenge of attracting buyers to this new suburban area. The company envisioned that the formation of a golf course and a club would entice land buyers to the region.²⁷ A recreational facility would be an additional value, draw the attention of buyers and enrich the experiences of residents. The concept of creating a golf club with the intention of enticing buyers and adding value to the surrounding area was not new. It was common, particularly during the Edwardian period when landlords leased their land to prepare the surrounding area; usually suburban expanses to increase their monetary value by the time of disposal.²⁸ Jane George observed that life for the middle class in suburban areas spun around sporting activities, particularly golf and tennis.²⁹ This could have informed KEL's decision to establish a club and golf course in a suburban area.

Nonetheless, the company faced more hurdles. Accessing the Karen area was problematic, particularly on rainy days. The existing road was not tarmacked and became muddy increasing one's risk of getting stuck in sludge. As a preventative measure, one had to carry chains to wade through the mud.³⁰ Another problem for KEL was how to entice golfers from other already well-established golf courses such as Nairobi Club, Railway Club and Muthaiga Country Club. Hence, the company formulated a strategy to provide greens as compared to other golf courses that proffered 'browns.'³¹ Browns is a section or a golf course which comprises sand and red earth and is an advantage in precision in putting but is prone to be monotonous.³² On the other hand, greens refer to a precisely trimmed grassy section of the course that surrounds the flagstick and

²² Ochieng' and Maxon, eds., *An Economic History*, 212.

²³ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, with an introduction," 345.

²⁴ D. White and C. White, *Karen Country Club: The First Fifty Years*, Nairobi, 1987), 2.

²⁵ Karen Country Club, *Karen Past and Future*, (Nairobi, 1977), 9.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Geff Mwai, ed., *Karen Turns 80, 1937-2017* (Nairobi, 2017), 10.

²⁸ Wray Vamplew, "Concepts of Capital: An Approach Shot to the History of British Golf Club Before 1914," *Journal of Sport History* 39, no.2 (Summer-2012): 300.

²⁹ Jane George, 'Ladies First'?: Establishing a Place for Women Golfers in British Golf Clubs, 1867-1914, *Sport in History*, 30, no.2 (2010): 289, accessed August 20, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17460263.2010.481211>.

³⁰ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 8.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Niblick, "Golf in Eastern Africa," *East African Annual. Kenya. Tanganyika .Uganda. Zanzibar*, October 1931-32, 57-59.

in some instances, it denotes the entire golf course.³³ In the case of the Karen Club, a green golf course would offer a unique golfing experience as it would provide a more challenging and interesting experience.

Incidentally, very few golf courses offered a green experience in Kenya at the time. Those in existence included Brackenhurst at Limuru and Scott and Bradshaw's at Upper Kiambu.³⁴ Creating greens would not only distinguish the envisioned club from the rest, but would be a means to entice aficionado golfers from other clubs, motivate them to take a risk and set out to the Ngong region which remained remote, largely unknown, and a rough terrain to venture during rainy seasons. It is also clear that the idea of creating a golf course and a club was an afterthought by KEL after the firm encountered problems with attracting buyers to the secluded area of Ngong. The development of the previous coffee estate gained momentum in 1933.³⁵

The foundation work began with the golf course. However, finding a golf course designer proved difficult. Consequently, Remi Martin was entrusted with the work based on self-acquired surveying skills from his youth. The labour arrangement during the period might have contributed to a shortage of golf designers. The minority Europeans were largely concentrated in skilled occupations and business, and Asians comprised traders, artisans and subordinate staff. Likewise, Africans occupied clerical jobs, semi-skilled and unskilled positions.³⁶ The workforce was largely inclined to the imperial agenda. The challenge of recruiting a golf designer by KEL is an indication that there was a scarcity of experts in some fields oriented towards everyday living. The first phase comprising nine holes was completed in late 1933 and the fairways were planted during the long rains in 1934.³⁷ The excitement elicited by the first phase of the project led to the initiation of the second phase with an equal number of holes in 1934.³⁸ Shortly after, the fairway was planted during the rainy season in 1935.³⁹ Failure to get a qualified golf course designer did not deter KEL's plan of creating a golf course. Martin oversaw the completion of the 18-hole course successfully.

After the conclusion of the golf course, the next stage was to establish a club and clubhouse. KEL had already laid out a plan for the construction of a clubhouse which was to be finalised by October 1937.⁴⁰ Messrs Cobb and Archer were appointed as the architects and Lalji Visram and Co., the contractors. But KEL was inert in taking up the proprietorship of a club like in the case of Muthaiga Country Club which was owned by the Morrison Estates. The company's core business was real estate. The firm had to look for debenture takers. The company placed debentures to the European community but the response was poor. This was attributed to the economic situation in Kenya. During the 1930s, the country was already grappling with an agricultural depression instigated by an invasion of locusts and drought.⁴¹ A worldwide economic depression that began in 1929 further worsened the situation.⁴² The global crisis was instigated by a crash in New York's stock market and spread to other countries. Developed countries' dependence on the United States of America's economy for the importation of products and financial lending and the adoption of the gold standard as a means of the fixed exchange rate by many countries also contributed to the crisis. The crisis compelled many countries to embrace protectionist measures to salvage their economies and led to a decline in global trade.⁴³ The economic downturn affected the financial positions of many businesses.

³³ Michael Corcoran, *The Golf Dictionary, A Guide to The Language and Lingo of The Game* (Texas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1997), 92.

³⁴ Karen Country Club, *Karen Past*, 11.

³⁵ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 4.

³⁶ Ogot and Ochieng, eds., *Decolonization and Independence*, 111.

³⁷ Karen Country Club, *Karen Past*, 13.

³⁸ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 2.

³⁹ Karen Country Club, *Karen Past*, 13.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Mills, *The History of Muthaiga*, 119.

⁴² Nicholas Crafts and Peter Fearon, *The Great Depression of the 1930s, Lessons for Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-45.

⁴³ Crafts and Fearon, *The Great Depression of the 1930s*, 1-45.

Farmers in Kenya were not spared from the effects of the depression. The country, like many African countries, was a primary goods producer and depended on industrialized countries for markets. As part of precautionary measures, these countries reduced their investment and trade with Kenya contributing to a drastic drop in prices of the primary goods due to low demand and affecting the balance of trade.⁴⁴ The worldwide economic recession impacted the financial ability of Europeans given that the settler economy was agriculturally grounded. This was reflected in the poor response to the debenture initiative by KEL. Ultimately, KEL contacted some prominent Europeans to take up the debentures and 30 responded positively. They included: J.A. Armstrong, A. J. Borland, Miss H. Bradbury, D.E. Castleman-Smith, R.A. Campbell, D. Duncan, D.F. Duncan, Mrs D.F. Duncan, F.S. Dunn, R.D. England, C.M.N. Harrison, H. Hemstead, Mrs M. H. Hoey, J. D. Leonard, Col. C. G. Lloyd, E. Wright, J.R. Martins, P.V. Martin, E. B. McEntee, S.A. Mortiboys, K.C. Moss, E.J. Mulligan, A. Murphy, Brig. D.G. Ridgeway, W. G. Rodway, W. T. Shapley, Col. Stanbrough, Sir. A. Vincent, T.A. Wood and W.H. Wood. All the founder members of the Karen Club were Europeans.⁴⁵ This suggests that the club was an exclusive club for Europeans. It concurs with Dominique Connan's observation of European clubs in Kenya; that they were racially defined. Non-whites were excluded from European Clubs in line with the racial boundaries that pervaded the colonial society.⁴⁶ In this case, the club prescribed the colour bar that permeated the country.

According to the existing information on some of Karen Club's founders, W. T. Shapley was a leading solicitor whose clients included prominent personalities such as the 22nd Earl of Errol, Josselyn Victor Hay. Shapley also served as a member of the Municipal Council of Nairobi. Sir. A. Vincent was a European statesman and businessman. Some of the positions he held included the leader of the European Elected Members, chairman of the European Elector's Union (EEU), member of the East Africa Assembly, Director of Agriculture, and chairman of East African Airways among other reputable positions. Capt. E.J. Mulligan held some posts in the veterinary department such as the acting Assistant Chief Veterinary Officer and Acting Director of Veterinary Services. The veterinary department was responsible for influencing policy on veterinary matters, imposing quarantine measures in case of animal disease outbreaks and so forth. W.G. Rodway was also a businessman and an appointee to the Central Advisory Angling Board.⁴⁷ The board was responsible for advising the agriculture department on matters of fisheries.

Furthermore, S.A. Mortiboys was a company director and member of several government committees which included the Sisal Industry Committee tasked with policy and advisory tasks within the sisal industry⁴⁸ and the sub-committee in the District Production and Manpower Committee of Athi River responsible for labour-related matters,⁴⁹ and was a Nairobi District Juror. A.J. Borland was a postal services employee and 1932, 1933 and 1934 winner of the prestigious golf championship Barry Cup. His achievements in Barry golf tournaments were unmatched until 2016.⁵⁰ J.R. Martin was a financial expert, a managing director and also served as a councillor in the Nairobi City Council. (See more details on some of the founder members in

⁴⁴ Ochieng' and Maxon, eds., *An Economic History*, 212.

⁴⁵ "About Us," Karen Country Club, Last modified in 2020, accessed November 11, 2017, <https://www.karencountryclub.org>.

⁴⁶ Connan, "Race for Distinction," 24-45.

⁴⁷ "Central Advisory Angling Board," *The Official Gazette of the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya*, Vol. XLVII, No.24 (Nairobi, May 21, 1946), 250.

⁴⁸ "The Sisal Industry Ordinance, 1934," *The Official Gazette of the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya* Vol. XXXVII, No.28, Gazette Notice No.402 (Nairobi, 4 June 1935), 670.

⁴⁹ "The Increased Production of Crops Ordinance, 1942, District Production and Manpower Committees," "Government Notice No.200, *The Official Gazette of the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya* Vol. XLIX, No.8 (Nairobi, 25 February, 1947), 102.

⁵⁰ "Francis Kimani Wins Coveted Coast Open Prize Barry Cup 2016," *Coast Week*, July 31, 2016, www.coastweek.com/3932-sports-01.htm (accessed October 17, 2020).

Chapter four.) From the profile of some of the club's founders, it is evident that they were drawn from the professional and business and were from the upper tiers of colonial society. The Karen Club's founders concur with Peter Clark's observation of associational life in the British Empire's satellites; it tended to be identified with the professional, commercial and ruling classes and it also reflected the status of members.⁵¹ The successful recruitment of founder members led to the official foundation of the club.

The club was officially amalgamated on May 19, 1937, as a limited company by guarantee.⁵² The club was to be a member's club as opposed to a proprietary club such as in the case of Mombasa Club which was originally owned by Rex Boustead. In recognition of Karen Blixen's role in its history, the new club was named Karen Country Club. The main objective of the club was to support sporting activities, and other interests and to embolden social interaction among its members.⁵³ From the objective, it can be deduced that the club was founded as an exclusive social and recreational facility for its membership. Karen Club was therefore established as a leisure space for Whites in line with the racial structure that pervaded Kenya's society. Just like other European clubs in Kenya, its purpose was to perpetuate racial unity.⁵⁴ After the launch of the club, attention turned to the recruitment of members. Karen club's initial membership included 15 female members drawn from the founders' families and nominated by them. They joined the club on July 2, 1937.⁵⁵ An additional 131 fee-paying members designated the title of First members also became members. Among the members were women.⁵⁶ The lists of members show that the club was founded as an all-gender inclusive club. This was rare in urban clubs in Kenya which remained largely a male domain. However, in the rural areas where the European population was small, clubs admitted women.⁵⁷ Probably Karen Club founders identified the club with the rural set-up due to its location on a former coffee farm. With the membership in place, the focus turned to the creation of more facilities.

Among the initial facilities were four tennis courts and the clubhouse which was completed in October 1937.⁵⁸ And on the same month, the golf course was officially opened with an inaugural golf match between Karen Club and the Kenya Golfing Society. In the evening, His Excellency the Governor of Kenya, Air Marshall Sir Robert Brooke-Popham graced the official opening of the clubhouse.⁵⁹ One can only speculate that the presence of the governor was meant to highlight the status and prestige of the club and its members and to create a bridge between the British Empire and its elites. George Bennet argued that European settlers in Kenya had a great sway on the colonial government.⁶⁰ The inauguration of clubhouse officially opened the facility to its patrons. Although Karen Country Club was created as a leisure space, its origin and development were influenced by peripheral factors in colonial society. The club was a product of intricacies and contradictions in the broader society.

Development and Growth of the Karen Country Club

The Second World War (WWII) period was a blessing to the Karen Country Club. The war had begun with Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939 and the subsequent incursion of Belgium, Holland, France, Britain and the USSR.⁶¹ This compelled Britain to join the war which affected the whole world. In

⁵¹ Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, 428.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Shapley, Schwartze and Barret Advocates, "Karen Country Club: Memorandum and Article of Association," (Nairobi, 1937), 2.

⁵⁴ Connan, "Race for Distinction," 183.

⁵⁵ "About Us." Karen Country Club.

⁵⁶ "About Us." Karen Country Club.

⁵⁷ Connan, "Race for Distinction," 40-45.

⁵⁸ "About Us," Karen Country Club.

⁵⁹ "Karen Course Opening," *East African Standard*, October 9, 1937.

⁶⁰ George Bennet, *Kenya, A Political History, The Colonial Period* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 4.

⁶¹ Basil Davidson, *Modern Africa A Social and Political History*, Third Edition (London And New York: Routledge, 1994), 61

Africa, fighting took place in North Africa and the horn of Africa. Being a neighbour to Italian East Africa, British Kenya was drawn into the war. Italy invaded some parts of the northeastern and took control of some towns such as Moyale.⁶² Due to Kenya's involvement in the war, a lot was carried out as part of the war effort. Resultantly, Ngong road was tarmacked up to the Karen shopping centre due to the presence of two British military bases situated along Ngong road; Karen Barracks in Karen and Buller Camp (part of which Kenyatta National Hospital stands) for ease of movement.⁶³ This was an added advantage to Karen Club. It eased accessibility to the club and exposed the region to more settlers and golfers. As a result, the club's membership increased.⁶⁴ Karen Club's improved fortune was, therefore, a direct result of the Second World War. Nevertheless, it was short-lived.

Natural calamities threatened the club's dream of a green golf course; the main selling point was when a clew of armyworms and a swarm of locusts overran the course in 1940.⁶⁵ The Locust invasion in Kenya began in late 1939 and extended into the 1940s. They devoured vegetation in the country, hatched more larvae leading to further destructions and disrupted the livelihood of communities that were dependent on agriculture for sustenance.⁶⁶ Likewise, during the same period, Kenya experienced an incursion of armyworms and drought which affected crops, vegetation and society in general.⁶⁷ Furthermore, a water shortage worsened the situation as KEL failed to sustain its promise of providing the club with 10,000 gallons of water per day; a problem attributed to an inefficient pumping water system and its poor maintenance occasioned by the Second World War.⁶⁸ Natural catastrophes and war impeded the development and growth of the Karen Club in the late 1930s to early 1940s. However, the setback was temporary.

There was an improvement in the club's financial position by 1943. The club purchased a fruit machine for 59 pounds (£) in 1943. The machine became the club's primary source of income. Also, there was a rise in bar and subscription revenue to £45,204 and £78,544 respectively.⁶⁹ The rise in member spending could be attributed to an economic boom during the Second World War induced by the demand for agricultural products for foreign markets and an increase in capital investments. During the period, the government-supported settler farmers through loans to increase production. Also, there was an increase in the prices of products due to demand.⁷⁰ This means that Europeans were able to recover from the losses incurred from the drought, locust and armyworm invasions. Their improved financial status meant that they could afford to indulge in leisure activities. This accounts for the improvement in revenue at Karen Club during the period. Karen Club's improved monetary status enabled the club to purchase 65 acres of freehold and 131 acres of leasehold land for £2,500 in December 1944.⁷¹ Resultantly, an existing 35-year lease agreement between the club and KEL for the golf course which was to expire in 1972 was cancelled.⁷² This enabled the club to shift its focus to other pressing projects after relief from the burden of paying rent. It can be concluded that Kenya's economic prosperity in the war period impacted positively on the club as the purchasing power of Europeans improved they were able to invest in leisure activities.

⁶² Andrew Steward, *The First Victory: The Second World War and the East Africa Campaign* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 54-58.

⁶³ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 10.

⁶⁴ Karen Country Club, *Karen Past*, 23.

⁶⁵ Karen Country Club, *Karen Past*, 23.

⁶⁶ Peter Ndege, "Past Locust Attacks and How They Were Confronted," *Nation Africa*, January 13, 2020. <https://nation.africa> (accessed October 18, 2020).

⁶⁷ Hilary Scott and Jackie Ayton, eds., *60th Anniversary, Karen Country Club*, (Nairobi: Vernon Ayton, 1997), 7.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 10.

⁷⁰ Bruce Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1990), 262.

⁷¹ "About Us," Karen Country Club.

⁷² Scott and Ayton, eds., *60th Anniversary*, 7.

The end of WWII in 1945 affected Karen Club negatively. The majority of the members serving in the British military departed for overseas such that, by 1947 only six remained. This caused a drop in revenue for part of 1944 and by 1947 the club documented losses.⁷³ When the Second World War broke out in Europe, Britain had anticipated an attack by Italy (a member of the Axis block) on the northeastern part of Kenya which bordered Italy Somaliland. In preparation for war, there was militarisation of East Africa. Also, Commonwealth and British forces were congregated particularly between May and June 1940.⁷⁴ After the war, the majority of the military personnel departed for home hence the decline in membership at the club.

Clubs that thrive during war periods respond differently after the cessation of conflict. Some encounter hardships, while others flourish. For instance, after the end of the American Civil War, the Metropolitan Club in the United States of America, which had prospered from a rise in membership began to experience financial problems as the military personnel departed to other locations from Washington.⁷⁵ On the contrary, Muthaiga Country Club continued to prosper in the immediate post-Second World War period despite a large number of its members' participation in the war. The majority of Muthaiga Club members were settlers and therefore remained in Kenya after the war.⁷⁶ This was the opposite of the Karen Club whose members were mostly foreigners. The setback was temporary as a new development in the country occurred in the post-war period. During the post-WWII period, there was an inflow of European immigrants into Kenya as a result of efforts by the imperial government to encourage more European immigration. Part of the arrangement was the initiation of a settlement scheme to encourage ex-soldiers from Britain to immigrate with the hope that they would invest their war perks and other capital in the 'vacant land' in the highlands.⁷⁷ Apart from immigrants from England, others originated from New Zealand, Australia and other British territories. This led to an increase in Karen Club's membership to more than 400 by 1948.⁷⁸ The rise in numbers and over-reliance on fruit machines as the primary source of revenue necessitated the club to diversify its activities.⁷⁹ Clubs play a significant role in improving the life experiences of expatriates and at the same time provide spaces for interaction in a foreign land.⁸⁰ The inflow of new immigrants with money to spend and in search of avenues for assimilation into the new society explains the growth in membership at Karen Club. The club's immediate task was to expand its facilities to cater to the growing number of members.

Subsequent club meetings strategized on expansion and improvement of facilities. The club's initial debenture was due for redemption. An Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) held in 1947 proposed a new issue of £20,000. Members approved £8,000 for the creation of a bowling green and a borehole by the second green.⁸¹ The establishment of the bowling green was timely as Nairobi Municipality's City Park Bowls Club had closed down during WWII. Karen Club's bowling green would therefore fill the gap. The bowling green was officially inaugurated in 1949 and was privileged to be home to Kenya's Senior Bowls Club.⁸² This propelled Karen Club to a principal position in bowling in Nairobi.

Also, on the priority list of facilities to be initiated to match the growing number and diversify club activities was a squash court, swimming pool and billiard room. To this end, a sub-committee comprising John

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Andrew Stewart, *The First Victory, The Second World War and The East Africa* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 48.

⁷⁵ Glover III, "A Brief History of the Metropolitan Club," 270.

⁷⁶ Mills, *The History of Muthaiga*, 140-158.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ "About Us," Karen Country Club.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Jonathan Beaverstock, "Servicing British Expatriate 'Talent' in Singapore: Exploring Ordinary Transnationalism and the Role of the 'Expatriate' Club," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no.5. (2011):724-725, accessed June 20, 2017, doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2011.559714.

⁸¹ Karen Country Club, *Karen Past*, 29.

⁸² Scott and Ayton, eds., *60th Anniversary*, 37.

Palfreman, Brig. Dods and Harry Archer were established in 1948. Their immediate task was to identify the most suitable location for the swimming pool.⁸³ Likewise, an AGM convened on March 1949 mandated the sub-committee to formulate a means to the realization of a swimming pool, squash court and billiard room within six months.⁸⁴ This was subject to the outcome of a petition to the Governor to retain gaming machines after the Commissioner of Police's threatened to ban them in July 1949.⁸⁵ At the time moral and social controversies surrounded their use. In an EGM convened in August 1949, the Main Committee reported that the club was in a stable financial position and able to fund only two of the initially proposed projects; a billiard room, squash court and swimming pool. This followed the positive outcome of the gaming machines' petition. Members opted for a swimming pool and a billiard room. The budget allocated for each project was around £3,000.⁸⁶ The growth in membership at Karen Club dictated that the club expands its facilities to accommodate the leisure and recreational needs of its members. Also, the need to expand its sources of revenue called for the expansion of facilities. In this case, internal pressure inspired Karen Club's expansion. Internal pressures also dictated that the club changes its status from golf to a country club.

The transition of the Karen Club to a country club was approved in the August 1949 EGM.⁸⁷ A golf club refers to an organisation of members where golfing is the main activity whereas a country club provides a variety of activities. Consequently, the Gymkhana category; which refers to non-golfing membership was introduced to encourage those interested in other activities apart from golf to join the club. Before the classification, tennis and golf players paid full subscriptions while bowlers were exempted as they were considered non-playing members. A categorisation of members would help the club to earn more income unlike before. James Mayo argued that by investing in a country club, elites purposively invest in a leisure space that isolates them from other regular people socially and geographically.⁸⁸ This means that country clubs as institutions are a means of maintaining the social status of their membership away from the commoners. While there is no conclusive evidence to show that this was one of the driving forces for change at Karen Club, the need to diversify its revenue sources could not be overlooked given its unstable financial position at this point and time.

Apart from the changes that were taking place at Karen Club, the golf course and players grew in prominence in the 1940s and 1950s. For instance, the club hosted the Kenya Amateur Championship in 1950 which was for the first time held on a green course in Kenya.⁸⁹ Also, the club's golfers became reputable for their prowess. For example, Kevin Hogan won the Coronation Trophy in 1949 and later in 1954 became Karen's first winner of the Amateur Championship.⁹⁰ The achievements in golfing seem to have built the repute of the Karen Club and contributed to increased interest in the club due to visibility. This paid off; it led to an influx of new members during this period as indicated earlier in the discussion. The strides achieved by Karen Club in the post-war period were overshadowed by the Mau Mau uprising that spiralled in the early 1950s and culminated in the declaration of a state of emergency in 1952 by the British government.⁹¹ The unrest was caused by various reasons. The British administration imposed policies that negatively impacted indigenous Africans which included land alienation and loss of means of sustenance, obligatory labour and taxation and other social, economic and political inequities.⁹² It was also an insurgence against the British authority, the

⁸³ Karen Country Club, *Karen Past*, 29.

⁸⁴ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 10.

⁸⁵ Karen Country Club, *Karen Past*, 29.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Scott and Ayton, eds., *60th Anniversary*, 8.

⁸⁸ James M. Mayo, The American Country Club: An Evolving Elite Landscape, *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 15, no.1, Theme Issue: Elite American Landscape (Spring, 1998):25, accessed November 15, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43030441>.

⁸⁹ R.W. Hooper, ed., *The Game of Golf in East Africa* (Nairobi: W. Boyd, 1953), 153.

⁹⁰ Hooper, ed., *The Game of Golf*, 153.

⁹¹ Charles Hornsby, *Kenya: A History Since Independence* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2012), 40-48.

⁹² *Ibid.*

White society in general, the economy that favoured Europeans, and a minority of landowning Kikuyu government supporters who were perceived as traitors by Africans.⁹³ These reasons point out a general discontentment by native Africans by what they perceived as harsh and degrading treatment, and deplorable living conditions imposed on them by the colonial government in conjunction with Europeans and African collaborators in Kenya.

The Mau Mau revolt adversely affected the club's activities. The club's revenue dipped as bar profits declined and around 40 members resigned by 1954.⁹⁴ Those resigning included some settlers and expatriates. Moreover, the remaining members were unable to maximise the club's facilities due to the prevailing security situation. Also, the club experienced a decrease in the number of visiting golfers despite Karen and Kenya being on the world map through recurrent visits by golf professionals Dai Rees and Harry Weetman from 1951 through 1953.⁹⁵ The Mau Mau's guerrilla tactics of spontaneous attacks on Europeans and their farms, and the use of native house servants as co-conspirators to gain access unsettled many settlers such that many devised a defence mechanism of sleeping and eating with a pistol.⁹⁶ The apprehension shows how the uprising was brutal and the level of insecurity it posed in the country. This accounts for the resignation of some of the club's members, the lack of participation in the club's activities and a decrease in international golfers. It is also indicative of how intensely Karen Club was impacted by the uprising. The club's status began to change with the decrease in violence.

Karen Club began to experience a golden era in golfing in 1958.⁹⁷ Among the club's outstanding golfers were David Dobie the winner of the Amateur Championship in 1959, Stan Keane, Ken Finlayson who had won the Amateur Championship in 1958 and his brother Derek Finlayson who later won the Amateur Championship in 1964 and 1965.⁹⁸ The achievements in golf in the later period of the 1950s coincided with relative tranquillity and a growing sense of normalcy that followed the cessation of the Mau Mau revolt in 1956.⁹⁹ There was a renewed sense of security in the country. Renewed confidence led to deliberations on the furtherance of the planned projects in 1959.¹⁰⁰ First on the priority list was a squash court followed by a children's playground, swimming pool, new staff quarters and a billiard table respectively. The Main Committee advised members that these could be realized if they were willing to issue a new debenture of £10,000.¹⁰¹ However, this failed to materialise following a new political development in Kenya.

The first Lancaster House Conference was held in London in March 1960 between Kenya's Legislative Council and Ian Macleod; Britain's Secretary of State to deliberate on Kenya's constitution and independence. The outcome of this conference was a new constitutional framework (Macleod Constitution of 1960) that provided for more slots in government for the majority of native Africans and marked a huge step towards Kenya's independence.¹⁰² During this period there was a feeling of apprehension. Rumours abounded that the state was planning to repossess land for public use and golf courses that were suitable for the development of housing units. This led to a stall of proposed projects of a squash court, a children's playground, a swimming pool, and a billiard table. Instead, only the staff quarters were constructed as it was deemed essential. The club assumed a 'wait and see' status as they awaited the outcome of the new changes in the government and land

⁹³ Miller and Yeager, *Kenya: The Quest to Prosper*, 24-25.

⁹⁴ Karen Country Club, *Karen Past*, 35.

⁹⁵ Scott and Ayton, eds., *60th Anniversary*, 9.

⁹⁶ Leroy Thompson, *Dirty Wars, Elite Forces VS The Guerrillas* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 1991), 98.

⁹⁷ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 8.

⁹⁸ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 8.

⁹⁹ Wunyabari O. Maoloba, *Mau Mau and Kenya: An Analysis of a Peasant Revolt* (Nairobi: East African Publishers, 1994), 114.

¹⁰⁰ Karen Country Club, *Karen Past*, 36.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Assa Akoth, *A History of Africa: African Nationalism and the De-colonisation Process*, Vol.2 (Nairobi, Kampala and Dar-es-Salaam: East African Educational Publishers, 2006), 89.

policy. Further developmental setbacks accompanied the period of political uncertainty. The dawn of Kenya's independence in 1960-1963 inspired many Asians, European settlers and civil servants to leave the country due to the uncertainty the political changes posed.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the Main Committee realised that an estimated £1000 from bar sales could not be accounted for, the club's secretary had pilfered the money. Hence the club recorded a loss in 1961.¹⁰⁴ Being a European establishment meant that the club was heavily affected by the exodus. The reduction in member numbers implied a shrinkage in revenue as some members resigned. Likewise, the loss of finances further deepened the financial woes of the club. It was also detrimental to the club's plan to expand its facilities.

The shrinkage in revenue meant that Karen Club was overly dependent on overdrafts to an extent that it became an issue of concern to the Main Committee and led to discontentment among the members. And a proposal in the 1961 AGM to increase the subscription fee to cater to the deficit was vehemently rejected. In desperation, the Main Committee had to appeal to members for donations amounting to £3,000.¹⁰⁵ Failure by members to respond to the appeal forced the club to apply for a debenture in the same year with the support of a few astute and dedicated members. They included Duggie Duncan, Harry Archer, John Van Dijk, H.J. Thompson (Tommy) and Remi Martin who acted as guarantors for 10 years.¹⁰⁶ The intervention and sacrifice of a few foresighted members managed to sustain the operations of the Karen Club during a financially difficult time. The management's search for alternative avenues of financing the club to keep it afloat shows how deep the financial crisis was. However, the club's golfers and golf course continued to thrive. The club's golden era which began in 1958 persisted into the 1960s.¹⁰⁷ Some of the prominent golfers included Bunny Sykes who won the Amateur Championship in 1962 and John Higginson winner in 1966.¹⁰⁸ Also, some international teams and golf professionals visited the club. They included an amateur team from Rhodesia which played at Karen in 1962, Dave Thomas and Peter Thompson in 1963, Sam Snead in 1964, and Lionel Platts and John Sharkey in 1965 among other golfers. Resultantly, there was an increase in member enrolment.¹⁰⁹ It appears that the visibility occasioned by Karen Club golfers and the repute of the golf course drew the attention of international teams and professional golfers to the advantage of the club.

The growth in member numbers was also complemented by the implementation of policies to attract foreign capital and boost economic growth by the independent government. Correspondingly, Nairobi was transformed into a regional hub and attracted an influx of expatriates employed by multinational corporations, embassies, the United Nations and so forth.¹¹⁰ The transformation of Nairobi into an expatriate hub not only accounts for the growth in membership at Karen Club but also explains the association of the club with expatriates. Probably the newcomers were driven by the need to be assimilated into the new society and the desire to establish social networks.¹¹¹ The expanding membership called for a re-evaluation of the club's operations. The influx of members led to overcrowding of facilities due to the high turnout of members particularly, golfers. Consequently, an EGM was convened in June 1965 and the Main Committee was sanctioned to implement new measures that would help alleviate the problem.¹¹² As a result, a waiting list for full and lady members was initiated and an attempt was made to encourage Gymkhana members to join the club even though the club had not heavily invested in non-golfing facilities. Following this initiative, Snooker

¹⁰³ Ogot and Ochieng', eds., *Decolonization and Independence*, XVII.

¹⁰⁴ Scott and Ayton, eds., *60th Anniversary*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Karen Country Club, *Karen Past*, 37.

¹⁰⁶ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 12.

¹⁰⁷ Karen Country Club, *Karen Past*, 40.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹¹⁰ Robert M. Maxon, "Social and Cultural Changes," In B.A. Ogot and W.R. Ochieng', eds., *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya* (London: James Currey, 1995), 113.

¹¹¹ Beaverstock, "Servicing British Expatriate," 724-725.

¹¹² Scott and Ayton, eds., *60th Anniversary*, 10.

tournaments, rubber and duplicate bridge evenings became regular features of the club.¹¹³ The fact that Karen Club was determined to promote Gymkhana activities even with limited facilities to cater for Gymkhana members is an indication that this offered an immediate temporary solution to overcrowding.

There were long-term plans to expand Karen Club's facilities. A special Development Sub-committee was initiated in January 1966 and at the AGM that year, it was authorised to formulate an initiative that would allow for the construction of a swimming pool. The outcome was the introduction of a swimming levy to help with financing the project. This enabled the club to sign a deal for a bank loan in November 1967.¹¹⁴ The loan was also to cater for some alterations to the clubhouse which included the replacement of the old veranda bar with a new one and translocation of the library which was established in 1963 by Eileen Stratchan who was a committed member of the club¹¹⁵ to a different site to pave way for an additional billiard table. This project was done by 1968.¹¹⁶ The sourcing of funds by the Karen Club shows that the club not only relied on internal sources for funding its projects but also looked outward if need be. It is also indicative of the urgency to provide more leisure and recreational facilities for the club's patrons by the management.

Likewise, to match the expansion of the club's facilities some measures were undertaken. The subscription fee was raised for men and women full members, a new category of senior members was introduced and the subscription fee was pegged at the 1965 rate but worked out on a basis of one's age and years of membership.¹¹⁷ The initiation of a swimming levy, increase in subscription fee and introduction of a new category of members were strategies by Karen Club to raise capital to invest in more facilities. Given that the club was a membership club, it relied heavily on members' financial commitment to carry out its development plans. Although the introduction of new sources of revenue helped to alleviate the financial constraints, towards the end of the 1960s, Karen Club experienced further financial challenges after the government through the vice president and minister in charge of gambling, Daniel Toroitich arap Moi banned the licencing of fruit machines in January 1968.¹¹⁸ Fruit machines, grew in popularity in colonial Kenya such that by the 1950s and 1960s they had become common in social places such as clubs and bars in many towns.¹¹⁹ Despite their popularity, their operation was shrouded by controversies such that the Committee on Betting, Gambling and Lotteries initiated by the government in 1952 recommended that their importation and usage be banned. The rationale was that gambling machines were inclined to favour the owners financially at the expense of the consumer, and were an enticement to the masses.¹²⁰

The 1968 ban on fruit machines affected Karen Club's financial stability such that there was a heavy reliance on bank overdrafts. The gaming machines were a major revenue earner for the club. It is estimated that up to 1968 when they were banned by the government, the club had netted more than £49,088.¹²¹ To redeem its monetary situation, an EGM in May 1968 increased the entrance fees for full members by almost doubling the existing amount.¹²² The implementation of a government policy on gaming machines seems to have destabilised the club's finances and threatened its survival.

Despite the financial setback, there were gains in membership and recreational activities. Gymkhana activities started to gain prominence in the formerly golf-dominated club such that by 1968, out of the 668 members of

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 24

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 39.

¹¹⁸ "Betting Board to Issue Licences Only on Directive," *Daily Nation*, September 17, 1968, 3.

¹¹⁹ Mbasi F. Mutuku, "The Regulatory Regime Governing the Casino Industry in Kenya: A Need for Reform," (Master Thesis, University of Nairobi, 2013), 8-10.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 10.

¹²² Ibid.

different categories, Gymkhana members stood at 24 men and 18 ladies.¹²³ By 1976 Gymkhana members had risen to 378. Unlike golfing members, women Gymkhana members were double those of their male counterparts.¹²⁴ The increase in Gymkhana members not only indicates the shift of the Karen Club to a country club, but also the gradual feminization of the club. The 1970s were characterised by mixed fortunes for the club. The 1970s ushered in an era of prosperity for the club. This period was also referred to as the Gymkhana years as other activities besides golf were at their peak. The House and Entertainment Committee introduced an array of leisure activities such as film shows, fashion shows, dances, bridge evenings and so forth. These events culminated in increased bar revenue and membership numbers. For instance, in 1970 there were a total of 550 members of which 483 were golfing and 67 were Gymkhana members.¹²⁵ By 1972, the total number of members had risen to 1,000.¹²⁶ The expansion of the Gymkhana section indicates that the club was increasingly exhibiting the characteristics of a country club. The activities provided for its members are also reflective of the social life of the upper strata of society; individuals who could afford leisure activities.

The club's prosperity in the 1970s coincided with Kenya's economic prosperity of the late 1960s that extended to the 1970s. The country had regained its foothold after overcoming the challenges experienced in post-independence such as the political differences among the ruling elites and the political assassination of Tom Mboya, a prominent Luo politician, and the political instability that accompanied it. Hence, the economy was experiencing rapid growth and an increase in foreign investments in Kenya.¹²⁷ Kenya's economic vibrancy accounts for the expanding member numbers and improved member spending that stimulated the growth of the club. A vibrant economy improves the monetary position of individuals and enhances spending ability. Among the newcomers to the club were African elites.

African elites began to join the club in the early 70s.¹²⁸ These elites comprised individuals who had inherited economic and political power from Europeans at Kenya's independence. They included corporate executives, professionals and ruling elites such as Dr Chris Obura (dental surgeon), Phillip Ndegwa (economist) and Richard Kemoli (economist). Black elites appropriated clubs after they had achieved education and wealth commensurate to that of Europeans as a means to gain 'respectability.'¹²⁹ The hegemony of African elites in political and economic spheres in the 'new' Kenya called for an upgrade of their social status and prestige. Moreover, the assimilation of Africans from the upper strata of society also shows that the club integrated Africans who seemed to have attained genteel characteristics. The expansion of membership informed the club's decision to pursue further infrastructural extensions.

A referendum in 1972 prioritised the expansion of the dining room and a new house for the secretary as the old one was to be transformed into a Committee room, cardboard room and a library.¹³⁰ However, these plans were shelved as they proved too expensive for the club at the time. Instead, the secretary's house was renovated, an extension to the veranda roof over the dining room was carried out and huge windows were placed at the front of the dining hall facing the golf course. The men's locker room was also completed in 1973.¹³¹ The inability to afford major infrastructural projects by Karen Club shows although there was an increase in subscriptions and activities, the club's financial status was not sound enough to cater for the grand expansion of facilities. Furthermore, external economic challenges denied the club an opportunity to undertake major projects. Kenya experienced an economic downturn occasioned by the Arab-Israel War in

¹²³ Karen Country Club, *Karen Past*, 39.

¹²⁴ Scott and Ayton, *60th Anniversary*, 10.

¹²⁵ Karen Country Club, "Karen Country Club."

¹²⁶ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 49.

¹²⁷ Hornsby, *Kenya: A History*, 182-184.

¹²⁸ Interview with Tom Mulwa, August 26, 2019.

¹²⁹ Connan, "Race for Distinction," 184-186.

¹³⁰ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 10-12.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

October 1973 that led to a drastic rise in oil prices globally by 1974.¹³² Besides, the country was grappling with a drought that debilitated the economy.¹³³ As a result, the government took adverse measures to cushion the economy. Some of the interventions included an increase in the prices of goods in 1974 and other protectionist actions which led to inflation.¹³⁴ Equally, the Main Committee matched the inflation by increasing the entry and subscription fees in 1970, 1974 and 1975, and also the catering charges.¹³⁵ Both internal and external economic challenges impacted the club compelling the Main Committee to implement interventions that would aid in supplementing the club's budget.

Economic-oriented challenges did not deter Karen Club's drive for diversification of facilities. John Waterfall; a squash enthusiast persistently campaigned to have squash facilities created. His proposal to have the project funded independently from the main development funds, supported by donations and a loan by Remi Martin finally succeeded and was accepted in an EGM in 1974. Shortly afterwards, two squash courts and a fairway watering scheme were created by 1975.¹³⁶ The addition of squash courts also diversified the facilities available to members. That the club accepted other independent sources to fund club projects indicates that there was a realization that internal sources of funding could not be entirely relied on if the club was to achieve its plans to expand its facilities. Nevertheless, overstretched facilities continued to be a persistent problem for the club.

The government-initiated policies in the 1970s to encourage foreign investments in the country. Hence, Nairobi became popular as a regional centre for many multinational companies.¹³⁷ Resultantly, Karen Club grappled with increased numbers and a high turnover by 1975. For instance, the number of new members stood at 313, while those who resigned was 171.¹³⁸ The inconsistency in membership coincided with the transformation of Kenya into a haven for the expatriate community. Expatriates tended to be on short-term contracts, which means they were inclined to join the club for short periods before departing from the country. The entry of new members overstrained the club's facilities as congestion occurred. To control the numbers, a waiting list of applicants was initiated by the Main Committee. There was also an emphasis on further expansions of facilities to match the growing membership. The club budgeted a total of Ksh.230, 000 in the 1976/77 financial year.¹³⁹ The plan was to construct a new staff residence to make room for a squash court balcony, a cold room, the sixth tennis court and an additional changing room. However, the club could only afford to finance the cold room. An inferno razed the clubhouse before other projects could be undertaken. A fire razed the clubhouse on March 5, 1977. An electric fault at the club secretary's house was suspected to have caused the fire.¹⁴⁰ The damage was extensive such that only the extension with the billiard room, library, the small swimming pool changing room and a few items survived. The fire not only deterred further expansions of the club but also destroyed the club's progression which had taken many years to achieve.

Karen Country Club After the Fire

Karen Club initiated strategies to ensure that there was continuity. A Recovery Committee of nine was established to stir the club forward. Its members included the chairman Eric Cecil, Remi Martin, Judy Lindgren, Tom Preston, Jack Block, John Wairagu, Walter Greenhut, Tony Parfitt, and Bill Hocken. The committee was also sanctioned to establish a building fund complete with its bank account. The purpose was to separate the proceeds towards the fund from those from other sources of the club's revenue.¹⁴¹ The selection of a committee meant that the club was ready to overcome the setback caused by the fire. In subsequent

¹³² Hornsby, *Kenya: A History*, 239-240.

¹³³ Miller and Yeager, *Kenya: The Quest to Prosper*, 51.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 55.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹³⁷ Maxon, "Social and Cultural Changes," 113.

¹³⁸ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 25.

¹³⁹ Karen Country Club, *Karen Past*, 55.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 25.

member meetings, it was agreed that a new clubhouse is constructed immediately. The estimated cost for both actual and associated works was £250,000. The Finance Sub-committee of the Recovery Committee proposed that £105,000 be raised from entrance fees, fundraising ventures, and £50,000 insurance claim from the old clubhouse. The difference of £100,000 was to be realised through a bank loan.¹⁴² Further deliberations on the building proposal and its financing were carried out in an EGM held on July 1, 1977. The members realised that it was not an easy task to raise the money hence reviewed the cost and revised it to £210,000.¹⁴³ Fundraising was proposed as a means to source much-needed money.

Various activities and events were organized to raise money for the construction of a new clubhouse. For instance, a book, *Karen Past and Future* was published. The book contained some literature on the club and advertisements by various companies who in exchange contributed towards the funds. Also, the club led by the Entertainment Committee initiated an entertainment programme and other enterprises to raise funds. Fundraising ventures inclusive of donations amounted to Ksh. 210,000 by 1977/78 and in the last quarter of 1978, Ksh. 105,000 was raised.¹⁴⁴ Through organized events and activities Karen Club was able to raise money towards constructing a new and bigger clubhouse. In essence, the club depended on internal and external sources to finance its new clubhouse. The fundraising exertions culminated in the construction of a new clubhouse that began in December 1977.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, some management problems emerged during this period.

Management tasks proved daunting particularly with the destruction of the club's records¹⁴⁶ compelling the club's first African chairman; Chris Obura to appoint a sub-committee of Eric Westwell, Peter Leech, Eliud Njoroge and Stuart Eastwood to review the club's Articles of Association, Rules and By-laws and make recommendations on changes on some of the existing contentious issues and the management structure. The outcome was that the sub-committee proposed that the Main Committee be substituted by a board of eight directors. This was endorsed in an EGM held in September 1978.¹⁴⁷ Henceforth, the board would concentrate on issues related to asset and finance management, and policy. Whereas different committees would supervise the various activities in the club. The reassessment of the constitution under the leadership of an African chairman reveals that the club was beginning to experience a transition with the inclusion of Africans. A departure from the colonial structure of management.

Notwithstanding all the uncertainties encountered during the vexing period after the fire, Karen Club was able to emerge with a new clubhouse nearly two years afterwards. Mwai Kibaki the Vice President of Kenya graced its official inauguration on March 3, 1979.¹⁴⁸ The new clubhouse improved the financial position of the club as many curious visitors thronged the club. At the time, a chit system was non-existent and anyone could walk in for a drink and pay in cash. Also, no deposit was required of applicants leading to an upsurge of temporary members. This led to a rise in bar and catering sales by almost 100 per cent by June 1979 in comparison to the previous year.¹⁴⁹ There was also an influx of new members in 1980, such that a waiting list was initiated in October.¹⁵⁰ But the gains failed to yield much in monetary terms and several measures were introduced to sustain the club's operations. They included increases in entrance fees in 1980, and 1981, and also the subscription fee. Moreover, a chit system was introduced in 1981 to enhance accountability which

¹⁴² Scott and Ayton, *60th Anniversary*, 13.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Scott and Ayton, *60th Anniversary*, 12.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.,13.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.,12.

¹⁴⁸ Mwai, ed., *Karen Turns 80*, 11.

¹⁴⁹ Scott and Ayton, eds., *60th Anniversary*, 14.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.,15.

translated into an increase in revenue collection by 15 per cent.¹⁵¹ Inflation occasioned by Kenya's dismal economic performance contributed to the club's financial status.

The political happenings in the late 1970s and early 1980s impacted the country's economy. Kenya was adjusting from Jomo Kenyatta's to Daniel Arap Moi's presidency. Besides, the country experienced a drought in 1979-1980 leading to a shortage of staple foods such as maize and wheat.¹⁵² Additionally, the Iranian war of 1979 led to fuel shortages and an upsurge in prices.¹⁵³ These events caused an increase in the cost of living as inflation ensued in the country as the purchasing value of money declined.¹⁵⁴ Karen Club was not spared from inflation. This accounts for the club's failure to register growth financially even with the increase in membership and member spending.

Monetary challenges did not quell the club's desire to expand its facilities. Backed by a credit facility by Barclays, Karen Club's board was convinced that the club was ready for further infrastructural expansion. Bids from the various sections of the club amounted to £250,000. But in an EGM in September 1980, members felt that it was imprudent to assume more financial commitments while the loan taken for the new clubhouse was still pending and was to be cleared in 1983.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, the proposed developments were not income-generating. Instead, a development plan that totalled £150,000 was proposed to cater for projects deemed necessary. They included servants' quarters, improvements to the clubhouse and 10 residential facilities at £30,000.¹⁵⁶ This amount was revised to £120,000 in 1981's AGM. The idea of investing in residential quarters was shelved as the majority of members felt that it was not a priority at the time.¹⁵⁷ But these proposals failed to materialize after a global recession caused by fuel shortages and skyrocketing fuel prices from 1979 deepened.

The worldwide recession led to an exodus of club members; particularly the expatriates such that by 1982, 150 members had left, among them the big spenders prompting a decline in revenue.¹⁵⁸ Helen Bledsoe observed that globally, clubs tend to succumb to the effects of economic depression as people's spending on leisure activity becomes less of a priority.¹⁵⁹ This seems to be the case with Karen Club. The deficit in finances shows how deeply the club was affected by the economic depression. The club had to prioritise its projects caused of dwindling finances. Apart from the economic slide in the early 1980s, there were strikes and notifications of strikes from different quarters of the country's citizenry such as bank workers, doctors and university students. There was also uncertainty concerning nationwide food supply and economic mismanagement.¹⁶⁰ To make matters worse, a coup attempt in Kenya on August 1, 1982, further compromised the fiscal situation of the club as inflation worsened.¹⁶¹ The coup d'état was initiated by non-commissioned Air force officers largely drawn from the Luo community who were disgruntled by the government's management of the country. They blamed nepotism, tribalism, corruption and mismanagement of resources for ailing the economy and country.¹⁶² The financial problems at Karen Club during the period are a reflection of how external happenings in the wider society affect the development and growth of clubs. That clubs are an

¹⁵¹ Ibid.,14.

¹⁵² Hornsby, *Kenya: A History*, 346-347.

¹⁵³ Hornsby, *Kenya: A History*, 356.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 42.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Tom Mulwa, August 26, 2019.

¹⁵⁸ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 42.

¹⁵⁹ Helen Bledsoe, Oregon Places: "... to Foster the Tennis Interests of This City..." The Early Years of Portland's Irvington Tennis Club, *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 101, no.1 (2000): 87, accessed October 12, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20615027>.

¹⁶⁰ Miller and Yeager, *Kenya: The Quest for Prosperity*, 101.

¹⁶¹ Scott and Ayton, eds., *60th Anniversary*, 15.

¹⁶² PRC Broadcast, in Peter Anyang' Nyong'o, "Struggles for Political Power and Class Contradictions in Kenya," *Contemporary Maxism*, no.7 (1983).

extension of society. Due to the inflation and loss of members particularly after the curfew, Karen Club had to re-evaluate its operations to survive.

Among the measures put in place were an increment in subscription fees and a withdrawal of the waiting list that was earlier created to keep in check the number of incoming members to pave way for more members. Moreover, the initially proposed investment of £120,000 for physical expansion and adjustments was reduced to £50,000 to cater for the creation of the staff quarters which was completed in 1983.¹⁶³ The Honourable Treasurer at the time maintained that “When the worldwide recession recedes, the club will again be able to consider improvements to its facilities, but for the present, I submit that the task is to maintain what we have.”¹⁶⁴ While it remains unclear how the coup attempt directly impacted other clubs in Kenya. The economic damage to the country was estimated at Kenya shillings 500 million.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, the economic decline persisted for three years.¹⁶⁶ The search for avenues to increase the Karen Club’s cash flow and the reduction of its spending is a clear indication of the extent the economic downturn had on the Karen Club.

During the 1980s, campaigns to improve the golf course gained momentum, particularly during Tim Noad’s tenure as the club’s captain in 1986.¹⁶⁷ The idea of self-sustaining initiatives for the golf course was floated and yielded donations such as flagsticks, benches, tee markers and a water bowser. There was further stress on the upgrading of the golf course during Ken Joy’s captaincy in 1987. Emphasis was on modern machinery for course maintenance, new tees to improve the course to professional standards, watering scheme, and replanting of greens among other needs. To this end, a Golf Course Development Fund was initiated with a budget proposal of Ksh.1.25 million.¹⁶⁸ This was to be realised through cash and fundraising initiatives. The formation of an independent fund to finance improvements of the golf course shows that the club recognized the need to explore other avenues aside from the traditional means heavily dependent on internal sources. Instead, the club would henceforth look outwards to finance its golf-related projects. Over time, the golf course experienced some improvements and minor changes from the original layout. The course was gradually lengthened to achieve championship status. Also, in 1992 the golf course was upgraded to the American Professional Golf Association (PGA) standards through the conversion of the greens into the sand green. Sand green was preferred since it has the advantage of good drainage as compared to greens.¹⁶⁹ PGA golf courses are favoured by clubs and professionals since they are accommodative of golfers of varying skills and offer a challenging experience. They are also ideal for big tournaments. Following the improvement of the greens, the club hosted some of the most prestigious golf tournaments in the country such as the Barclays Kenya Open which is a European Challenge Tour from 2013 to 2016.¹⁷⁰ The club’s concentration on improving its golf course demonstrates its centrality as an income-generating avenue and visibility for the club.

A residential project was undertaken in 2013. The facility included six units of two-bedroomed cottages and 12 apartment suites.¹⁷¹ The development was informed by the club’s need to expand its income-generating avenues, encourage more visitors to venture into the club, inspire more people to join the club, and enhance

¹⁶³ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, 42.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Kamau Mutunga, “Moment of Bravado that Changed Kenya,” *Nation*, July 31, 2012. <https://nation.africa/kenya/life-and-style/moment-of-bravado-that-changed-kenya-822390>(accessed April 30, 2020).

¹⁶⁶ U.S. Department of Commerce, “Foreign Economic Trends and Their Implications for the United States,” (Washington D.C., January 1983), 3.

¹⁶⁷ White and White, *Karen Country Club*, Index Section.

¹⁶⁸ Scott and Ayton, eds., *60th Anniversary*, 19

¹⁶⁹ Mwai, ed., *Karen Turns 80*, 24.

¹⁷⁰ Julius Jumah, “Kenya Open in Massive Boost as Barclays Pumps in Ksh 220 Million,” *Citizen Digital*, February 12, 2019, <https://citizentv.co.ke/sports/kenya-open-in-massive-boost-as-barclays-pumps-in-ksh-220-million-232175/> (accessed December 12, 2019).

¹⁷¹ Mwai, ed., *Karen Turns 80*, 24.

more publicity and visibility of the club.¹⁷² The club's investment in real estate was driven by the desire to achieve economic stability. Furthermore, in contemporary times real estate became a lucrative sector attracting interest from different quarters. The sector was propelled by the growing middle class. This group invested in the sector backed by their disposable income.¹⁷³ Hence, Karen Club just like other investors seems to have recognized the economic potential in real estate and the convenience an accommodation facility would offer to golfers and other guests. It is also indicative of changing times which necessitated the club to diversify its sources of revenue to enable it to finance its operations to survive. It can be concluded that Karen Club's development and growth did not happen in isolation. It was influenced and dictated by events in the broader society. The club was a product of internally driven factors such as the need for more facilities to cater to the needs of its membership and accommodate increasing numbers, the desire to achieve financial constancy and so on. Equally, external forces dictated the club's trajectory by impacting development positively or negatively. They included historical events such as the Great Depression, WWII, the Mau Mau uprising, changes in the economy and so forth.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the history of the Karen Country Club, from 1937-2017. The findings of this research were based on the premise that the Karen Country Club perpetuated and sustained racial distinction within the racial boundaries that were officially abolished in the post-colonial era. In the post-independent period, the club continued to sustain economic seclusion. Emphasis was placed on the origin, development and growth of the club. This research acknowledged the human agency in the historical trajectory of the club and in particular the contribution of the socially, economically and politically dominating classes in defining the history of the Karen Club in both colonial and post-colonial periods.

Evidence gathered demonstrated that although Karen Country Club was established as a space for leisure for its patrons, it is embedded within persons and personalised developments, incongruities and nuances of the cultures, times, ambitions, and historical and social contexts in which it developed from. Therefore, its history echoes the political, economic and societal subtleties of the country. For instance, the Second World War, natural calamities, social trends, political developments, economic booms and downturns and so forth that were determinants in defining the growth and development of the Karen Club positively or negatively. At times they inspired growth or otherwise. Historically, the club echoed the societal intricacies reflected in the membership, practices and lifestyle.

Underlying the foundation of the Karen Club as a leisure space was the politicization of race; a characteristic of colonialism that pervaded the society. The club admitted Europeans only to the exclusion of Asians and Africans. Hence, contributed to the naturalization of colonial racial classification through its racial exclusionary practices. In this case, it mirrored racial unity to the 'outsiders' and racial segregation to the colonized.

Furthermore, the Karen Country Club was a reflection of class distinction entrenched in colonial society. This was exhibited by its founders and members who were drawn from the *crème de la crème* of the White community. They comprised the political, the titled, professional and business classes. This means that were part of the 'movers' and 'shakers' of the colonial society in Kenya. Karen Club's membership concurs with Dominique Connan's observation that urban clubs reflected the class structure of European society and the outsiders' exclusion based on profession, education and earnings.¹⁷⁴ Hence, the establishment symbolized racial unity to the colonized and class segregation within European society. However, there was also a

¹⁷² Interview with Susan Mulwa, June 19, 2018.

¹⁷³ "How to Predict the Real Estate Market," *Business Daily*, September 15, 2019, businessdailyafrica.com/bd/lifestyle/personal-finance/how-to-predict-the-real-estate-market-2264502 (accessed October 20, 2020).

¹⁷⁴ Connan, "Race for Distinction," 182.

departure from the common practice of European clubs in Kenya which tended to deny women membership, particularly in urban clubs. For instance, in the case of the Mombasa Club which excluded females from joining the club.¹⁷⁵ Karen Club assimilated women as founders and members. This was probably inspired by monetary and social reasons.

It was further established that the first Africans were assimilated into the club in the early 1970s. These pioneer members were drawn from the business and professional classes that inherited social, economic and political powers from the colonialists at independence. Their appropriation of the club was motivated by the desire for respectability to match their positions of influence. Nevertheless, it is unclear why they took long to join the club despite the introduction of racial desegregation policies at Kenya's independence.

The study of the origin and development of the Karen Country Club illustrates that clubs are an outcome of both internal and peripheral forces. It also emphasizes the centrality of social, political and economic dynamics in society in influencing the origin and development of social clubs. Thus, peripheral forces within the broader society play a significant role in the historical trajectories of clubs. From the Mau Mau political upheavals and the fight for liberation, the legal end of racism and discrimination to the "Big Wars" to environmental catastrophes and so on. Clubs' development still bends to these ever-constant changing variables.

From the study of the history of the Karen Club, it can be concluded that its existence during the colonial period was symbolic of the social, economic and political dominance enjoyed by the Europeans within the racial precincts. In post-colonial times, African elites who had become the dominating power in Kenya were assimilated into the club as a means to gain respectability, and have continued to shape its history in the period under study. The findings of this study are useful in providing an understanding of human agency in institutions; although institutions have histories, these accounts are incomplete without evaluating the individual agency in these organizations at the intersection of the wider society. The individual agency works within the collective agency which provides the structures and strictures.

¹⁷⁵ Frankl, "The Early Years, 73.