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### Witches as Political Criminals: Prosecution and Deportation in Colonial Kenya

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# WITCHES AS POLITICAL CRIMINALS: PROSECUTION AND DEPORTATION IN COLONIAL KENYA

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The passage of the Witchcraft Ordinance of 1909 placed Kenyan superstitions, beliefs, and practices regarding witchcraft under the jurisdiction of Britain's legal apparatus within the East Africa Protectorate. The Ordinance, as written, was implemented with the intention of both protecting Kenyans from attacks on their property or person through supernatural means and exposing those who fraudulently claimed to be in possession of supernatural powers. However, in practice, the application of witchcraft charges was inconsistent and often politicized by a provision that allowed chiefs and other Kenyan participants in colonial administration to practice freely and maintain order using the specter of supernatural force. Witchcraft prosecutions were frequently brought against ritual leaders, referred to as 'laibons' who sanctioned coming of age ceremonies and helped landless young men establish families through the acquisition of wealth, often measured by cattle. These laibons were frequent targets of witchcraft prosecutions (and orders of deportation if their guilt could not be proven in court) because their status as ritual leaders offered them opportunities to acquire wealth and prestige outside of a system of colonially sanctioned patronage. By examining court documents located in the Kenya National Archives in Nairobi and Administrative dispatches housed in The National Archive of London, this thesis will examine how colonial legal authorities, and Kenyans whose wealth was tied to colonial patronage, charged and deported supernatural leaders in order to eliminate rivals to the elites created by the colonial administrative and economic system. The success of administration officials, and elites such as colonially appointed chiefs, in bringing forth witchcraft accusations will be contrasted with the difficulties facing ordinary, non-elite plaintiffs, who often have their claims of theft or injury due to witchcraft dismissed as superstition.