

**ECONOMIC CHANGE IN SOUTH NYANZA, KENYA, 1880 TO 1945**

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This Thesis is submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Johannesburg, June 2009.

## **Abstract**

This thesis is concerned with the process of economic change in South Nyanza between 1880 and 1945. By economic change I mean the way commodity production in South Nyanza was transformed during the pre-colonial and colonial period. The study commences from 1880 to enable an analysis of the process of change during the pre-colonial era so as to provide a background to understand the changes that occurred during the colonial period. The study ends in 1945 to incorporate an analysis of the changes that took place during the Second World War. The study demonstrates that economic change took place during the pre-colonial and colonial era. During the pre-colonial period, changes were necessitated by the outbreak of cattle epidemics that decimated livestock in the area. This forced the households in South Nyanza to shift to crop production as a primary economic activity. The shift was also facilitated when some households moved from the lakeshores to high grounds, which were more favourable to agricultural production. When South Nyanza was colonised by Britain in 1903, the pre-capitalist economy of the area was integrated into colonial capitalism. This was a system of production of goods and services for market exchange in order to make a profit. This introduced new changes in the economic, social and political relations among the households in South Nyanza. The establishment of colonial rule in South Nyanza was marked further by the process of change, which was already in progress. The colonial administration in South Nyanza introduced into the area new cash crops that the households in the area could produce to generate cash to meet the new colonial demands. The integration or rejection of the cash crops into the local economy was determined by

their cash value and palatability. To promote effective agricultural production in the area, the administration introduced new agricultural implements into South Nyanza. The adoptability of these implements by the people of South Nyanza was determined by their effectiveness and affordability. In addition, the establishment of colonial rule in South Nyanza was also marked by the introduction of a new economic system, migrant wage labour. During the first two decades of colonial rule, the households in South Nyanza were reluctant to engage in migrant wage labour because they were able to meet their colonial demands such as taxation from agricultural and livestock produce. But as the colonial demands increased, the people of South Nyanza were increasingly engaging in migrant wage labour. This was further enhanced by the establishment of infrastructure in South Nyanza that linked the area to the main centers of economic activities.

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It is submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree in any other university.

Timothy Ayieko Onduru

23 day of June 2009

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My interest in South Nyanza was initially stimulated by the stereotypes I used to hear mentioned about the people of South Nyanza. The stereotypes included claims such as the households in South Nyanza were not as “developed” as the rest of the Luo. The stereotypes were mainly propagated by non-South Nyanza Luo. Some scholars also alleged that before colonial rule, no documentary records existed on South Nyanza. The colonial district administrators also propagated these stereotypes. These stereotypes impressed upon me to undertake a study of South Nyanza to investigate how the households in South Nyanza responded to colonialism.

The completion of this thesis came to fruition as a result of the support and assistance of a number of institutions and individuals. Foremost, I am most grateful to my supervisor Professor Philip Bonner for his exemplary guidance throughout the write up of this thesis. Professor Bonner provided constructive suggestions that shaped this study to its final conclusion. Professor Bonner identified for me some of the relevant sources which I utilised in this study. I was humbled by his patience and intellectual insight during the course of the write up. I do not have enough words with which to express my gratitude to Professor Bonner.

I am also grateful to the University of the Witwatersrand that granted me postgraduate merit award that went towards meeting part of financial expenses for a duration of three

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This thesis is in honour of my late father, Gideon Onduru Mbeche, who passed away in July 1989. It was his love for education that I dedicate this thesis to him. He provided equal educational opportunities to all his sons and daughters without favour or discrimination.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background to the study**

This study is concerned with the analysis of agrarian change in South Nyanza between 1880 and 1945. The pre-colonial period provides a critical background for an analysis of the process of change that took place in the area during the colonial period. Most case studies of Nyanza's colonial history have emphasised one aspect, the process of economic change. The present study of South Nyanza goes beyond this limitation and focuses on the effects of the process of change on the gender, generational and political structure in the area during the period under review.

Most of these studies of Nyanza have relied on oral traditions and archival records as primary sources in assessing the process of change. These studies have scarcely utilised the rich pre-colonial documentation in analysing the process of change during the pre-colonial and the colonial period. Evidence from South Nyanza, however, shows that the area, and Nyanza in general, is rich in documentary records of the pre-colonial period. Such pre-colonial records include those by European missionaries who were based at the coast such as those by Reverend Wakefield and Archdeacon Farler.<sup>1</sup> Records of other

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<sup>1</sup>Wakefield, T. (Reverend), 'Routes of Native Caravans from the Coast to the Interior of Eastern Africa, Chiefly from the Information given by Sadi Bin Ahedi, a Native of a District near Gazi, in Udigo, a little North of Zanzibar', *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 40 (1870), pp. 303-338.

missionaries and explorers who visited the interior of East Africa include those of Krapf, Ludwig and New.<sup>2</sup>

The present study attempts to fill this gap by utilising the limited information of pre-colonial South Nyanza contained in these documentary records for the reconstruction of the pre-colonial history of the area. In a study such as this, it is significant to have a background of the pre-colonial history of the area in order to assess the historical process of change during the colonial period. This evidence provides crucial primary information of the economy of South Nyanza during pre-colonial times. In addition to these pre-colonial primary sources, this study of South Nyanza also utilises other primary sources such as oral information gathered from the field, as well as archival sources, which were accessed at Kenya National Archives in Nairobi. The archival records utilised in the

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Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country and the Victoria Nyanza', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, New Monthly Series, vol. IV, 1882, pp. 737-744.

\_\_\_\_\_, 'The Usambara Country in East Africa', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, vol. I, 1879, pp. 81-97.

<sup>2</sup> Krapf, J. L. Travels and Missionary Labour in East Africa, Truner and Co. Peternoster Row, Londo, 1860.

Ludwig, V. H. Discoveries of Lake Rudolf and Stefanie, vol. 1, Longmans, Green, and Co., London, New York, 1894.

Thomson, J. Through Masai Land, London, 1885.

New, C. Life, Wanderings, and Labour in East Africa, Frank Cass and Co. Ltd, London, First edition, 1873, second, 1874, Third, 1971.



study include district and Provincial Annual Reports on agriculture, marketing, trade and general administration of the district. Archival reports on missionary activities in the district and the province in general are also utilised in the study.

South Nyanza, during the colonial period formed part of South Kavirondo District (originally called Ugaya District). In the context used here, the area refers to the geopolitical region that embraces the following districts: Rachuonyo, Homa Bay, Rongo, Migori and Suba districts. The region is predominantly occupied by the Nilotic Luo.

The main economic activities in which the households in South Nyanza were engaged during the pre-colonial period were agricultural production, cattle keeping, fishing and trade. In addition, such households were also involved in subsidiary economic activities such as hunting, gathering and handicrafts. Agricultural production was the primary economic activity in South Nyanza by the 1870s. In the distant past, the primary economic activity of the households in South Nyanza was cattle keeping. Trade was however also an important component of the economy of the households in South Nyanza. The households in South Nyanza were involved in both internal and external trade with the neighbouring communities as well as with the Arabs and Swahili traders from the East African coast.

South Nyanza was not organised into a single political unit, but was composed of numerous independent chieftaincies. This meant that the area was in a vulnerable position. The households were subjected to frequent internal clan wars, which involved

different chieftaincies. These wars revolved around the issues of land and cattle raids. In addition, the Arabs and Swahili slave traders from the coast frequently raided the households in South Nyanza.

South Nyanza was located in a hostile environment, infested with tsetse flies. The toll it took in cattle (via nagana) as well as in human beings (via sleeping sickness) caused enormous loss of life in the area. In addition, in the area located along Lake Victoria, malaria was (and still is) a major killer disease. These were the major diseases in South Nyanza during the pre-colonial era. Therefore, before the area was colonised by Britain in 1903, South Nyanza was in a state of flux. The establishment of colonial rule in South Nyanza brought order and stability to the area as internal and inter ethnic wars, as well as slave raids were finally brought to an end and the households lived a settled life under a new political dispensation.

### **Aims of the Study**

Based on the above brief background, the present study aims to analyse the process of change that occurred in South Nyanza during pre-colonial and colonial times. The bulk of this thesis centres on the colonial period. During the pre-colonial era, the study investigates changes that occurred in the economy of South Nyanza, what brought about the changes, the response of the people to the changes and their impact on the gender, generational and political structures in the area. The aim of analysing the pre-colonial

economy is to provide a background to understanding the process of change that occurred in South Nyanza during the colonial period.

During the colonial era, the thesis focuses on the role that the colonial administrators (the colonial state) and Christian missionaries played in enhancing the process of change. The study examines the response of the households in South Nyanza to the changes that were promoted by colonial capitalism. This thesis probes whether the people were coerced or voluntarily engaged in colonial capitalism. As the study demonstrates, initially, the households in South Nyanza were coerced to engage in the colonial economy. But as the colonial demands soared, the households voluntarily engaged in the colonial economy.

South Nyanza was the last region to be colonised in 1903, after the rest of the Nyanza Province had been conquered in 1900. The study investigates whether there was a correlation between late conquest and entry into the colonial economy. Case studies on Nyanza such as those by Hay, Francis and Maxon have shown that people immediately joined the colonial economy when the area was colonised in 1900.<sup>3</sup> As this thesis reveals, there was no correlation between conquest and entry into the colonial economy in the case of South Nyanza. Several underlying factors precluded the households in South Nyanza from immediately engaging in the colonial economy when the area was colonised in 1903. Foremost was the lack of infrastructure that connected South Nyanza to the

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<sup>3</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland, Kowe, 1890-1945', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1972; Francis, E. 'Migration and Changing Division of Labour', *Africa*, vol. 65, 1995; Maxon, R. M. *Going Their Separate Ways: Agrarian Transformation in Kenya, 1930-1950*, Associated University Presses, Cranbury, London, Ontario, 2003.

centres of economic activity. Secondly, the area was peripheral to the centres of economic development, for instance, Kisumu.

South Nyanza was sparsely populated, possessed plenty of livestock and was rich in agricultural produce. This thesis investigates whether these factors hampered or enhanced engagement in the colonial economy. Studies on Central Nyanza, North Nyanza and Central Province demonstrate that due to population pressure, these areas immediately joined the colonial economy when the areas were colonised.<sup>4</sup> This study reveals that low population density in South Nyanza, large scale cattle keeping and wealth derived from agricultural proceeds initially acted as deterrents to most households in South Nyanza engaging in colonial migrant wage labour. As this thesis shows, lack of population pressure on land meant that households in South Nyanza were able to engage in cattle keeping and agricultural production the proceeds of which they used to meet colonial demands during the first two decades of colonial rule.

South Nyanza was peripheral to the major centres of the colonial economy, notably Kisumu, and lacked infrastructure linking it to Kisumu. This study examines how this factor impacted on the engagement of households in the colonial economy. Studies conducted on Central Nyanza show that its proximity to Kisumu and the railway line provided opportunities to households in Central Nyanza immediately to engage in the

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<sup>4</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Onduru, T. A. 'Some Aspects of Economic Change in Kano, Kenya, 1850-1963', M.A. Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1992; Francis, E. 'Migration and Changing Division of Labour', *Africa*, vol.; Tignor, R. L. The Colonial Transformation of Kenya: Kamba, Kikuyu and Maasai from 1900 to 1939, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1976.

colonial economy.<sup>5</sup> As this study demonstrates, the location of South Nyanza far from Kisumu slowed such a process. The households in South Nyanza were unable immediately to engage in migrant wage labour because they were disconnected from the existing colonial opportunities in Kisumu and elsewhere in the country.

The study also investigates whether the process of change was either a pre-colonial or a colonial phenomenon. As this thesis reveals, the process of change in South Nyanza was a continuous process both during the pre-colonial and colonial period. During the pre-colonial period, economic change was principally facilitated by natural calamities such as cattle epidemics. During the colonial era, the process of change was enhanced by the introduction of new crops as well as new agricultural implements into South Nyanza.

This thesis also probes the impact of the process of change on the gender, generational and political structure of the households in South Nyanza. The study investigates the impacts during the pre-colonial and colonial period. It demonstrates that the process of change had a myriad of effects on the gender, generational and political structure of the households in South Nyanza. For instance, during the colonial period, youths who engaged in the colonial economy became independent from the control of elders, in contrast to the pre-colonial period when the youths remained under the control of the elders. By investigating the impact of the process of change, this thesis assesses the process of change on the households and the economy of South Nyanza during the pre-colonial and colonial period.

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<sup>5</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Onduru, T. A. 'Some Aspects of Economic Change'; Francis, E. 'Migration and Changing Division of Labour', Africa.

## **Rationale**

One of the critical aspects of Kenya's history during the colonial era was the process of agrarian transformation in rural areas where the vast majority of Kenyans lived and still live. It is therefore in the rural areas that the real impact of colonialism must ultimately be assessed, and yet this micro-economic dimension of Kenyan history has not been adequately studied in some areas of Kenya by historians and other scholars. Most studies by economic historians have tended to focus on larger units such as province or the country as a whole. This then is one rationale of the present study of South Nyanza.

In addition, none of the previous case studies carried out on the process of change in Nyanza Province such as those by Fearn, Hay, Pala, Butterman and Francis have focused on the impact of the process of change on the gender, generational and political structures.<sup>6</sup> These studies principally focused on agrarian transformation during the colonial period. They looked mainly at the new crops and agricultural implements that were added to the economies of their respective areas of study. This study of South Nyanza is therefore a departure from the previous case studies.

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<sup>6</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy: A Study of Economic Development of the Nyanza Province of Kenya, 1903-1953, University Press, London, 1961; Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Pala, A. O. 'Changes in Economy and Ideology: A Study of the Joluo of Kenya (with special reference to women)', Ph. D. Thesis, Harvard University, 1977; Butterman, J. M. 'Social Formation in Change; Karachuonyo and Kanyamkago', Ph. D. thesis, Syracuse University, 1979; Francis, E. 'Migration and Changing Division of Labour', Africa.

Regional studies such as the present one are significant in the sense that they take cognisance of the diversity of the country. Findings from this study will provide useful insights for comparative purposes with other case studies already carried out on Nyanza as well as other regions within Kenya. This study of South Nyanza is therefore a significant source of information for scholars who are interested in micro-economic studies of rural Kenya.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study is guided by articulation as a conceptual framework in analysing the process of change in South Nyanza during the colonial period. 'Articulation' is the most distinct and critical concept to emerge from the Marxist critique of dependency theory in the so called 'modes of production controversy'.<sup>7</sup> Some elements of dependency theory are also utilised in this analysis, namely, the issue of transfer of surplus from Third World countries by international capital. This forms an important issue for dependency theorists. This transfer takes place through persistent negative terms of trade, which obtains in international markets to the detriment of local producers. As dependency theorists have observed, the relationship between Third World countries and developed countries is one of exploitation. The exploitation takes place through trade since the terms of trade are set by the developed countries in a manner entirely advantageous to them. The whole import-export relationship between Africa and its trading partners is one of unequal exchange

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<sup>7</sup> Berman, B. 'Structure and Process in Bureaucratic States of Colonial Africa', in Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa: Book One: State and Class, James Currey, London, Heinemann (Kenya) Nairobi, Ohio University Press, Athens, 1992.

and exploitation.<sup>8</sup> The other element, which is a common theme in all dependency writing is a rapid penetration of pre-capitalist relations of production and their incorporation into the world capitalist economy, which condemns them into subordinate positions in the international system. Studies carried out on Kenya's colonial economy based on dependency and articulation perspectives have revealed that African wealth, both in the form of labour and agricultural produce, were transferred from the African sector to European and partially to the Asian sectors, which is another way of describing the essence of colonialism.<sup>9</sup> This process ranged from cattle raids, forced labour, regressive taxation and the restructuring of local economies. This resulted in the incorporation of the indigenous economies into unequal relations with colonial capitalism as well as with the international world economy.

The notion of articulation of a number of modes of production, which were dominated by the capitalist mode aimed at explaining underdevelopment and the persistence of pre-capitalist forms of production in Third World countries. The key question was: How does capitalism become dominant in regions such as Africa without replicating itself in each instance? After about a century of colonial rule and independent national existence in

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<sup>8</sup> Rodney, W. How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, Harvard University Press, Washington, D.C., 1981; Siddle, D. and Swindell, K. Rural Change in Tropical Africa: From Colonies to Nation States, Basil Blackwell Ltd. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990.

<sup>9</sup> Brett, E. A. Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa, Heinemann, London, 1973; Atieno-Odhiambo, E. S. 'The Rise and Decline of the Kenyan Peasant, 1888-1922', The Paradox of Collaboration and Other Essays, East Africa Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1974; Leys, C. Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism, East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi, 1975; Leys, C. The Rise and Fall of Underdevelopment Theory, East Africa Educational Publishers, Nairobi, Indiana, 1996.



Africa 'the relations of production in which the peasantry are involved are necessarily posed in relation to the development of capital'; in analysing the persistence of the peasantry 'the passive notion of survival is dropped and the question changes to that of *reproduction* of the peasantry and its utility to imperialism'.<sup>10</sup>

The reproduction of the peasantry and pre-capitalist forms of production are thus seen as necessary and functional for capital. The reproduction rather than expropriation of the peasantry in Africa represents an ongoing process of primitive accumulation that is an intrinsic part of capital's development.<sup>11</sup> In Rey's model of articulation, the subordinated mode of production continues to exist for a considerable duration of time, maintaining some degree of autonomy in its transactions with the dominant capitalist mode, and capital may contribute to the rise of a new non-capitalist modes.<sup>12</sup> The existence of subordinate and dominated pre-capitalist modes are noted to be crucial for the continued expanded reproduction of capital in metropolitan centers of development.

Articulation is defined as the linkage of two societies, neither exemplifying a mode of production in its 'pure' form, but each nonetheless dominated by a different developmental dynamics.<sup>13</sup> As Bernstein pointed out:

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<sup>10</sup> Cooper, F. 'Africa and the World Economy', *African Studies Review*, Vol. 24, Nos. 1-3, 1981, pp. 1-86; Berman, B. 'Structure and Process in a Bureaucratic Society', in Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. *Unhappy Valley*.

<sup>11</sup> Meillassoux, C. L. *Anthropologie Economique des Gouro de Cote'd Ivoir*, Paris, Mouton, 1964, cited in Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'.

<sup>12</sup> Rey, P. P. *Les Alliance des Classes*, Paris, 1973, cited in Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'.

<sup>13</sup> Berman, B. 'Structure and Process in Bureaucratic Society', *Unhappy Valley*.

A dominant capitalism subjects the elements of other modes of production to the needs and logic of its own functioning and integrates them, more or less, in the mechanisms of its reproduction... there is no question that the 'autonomy' of the pre-capitalist modes of relation of production are preserved, nor any doubt that the law of motion governing the articulation is determined by capital.<sup>14</sup>

The key issue to be addressed then is the nature and form of penetration of peasant production; and the critical moment of this process is the annihilation of the cycle of simple reproduction of the indigenous domestic economy via monetization of at least some aspects of material production. The initial break in the self-sufficiency of pre-capitalist production in Africa was achieved either peacefully through the merchant capital ('market incentives') or through the colonial state by the use of forced labour, taxation or the compulsory production of cash crops. Thus the peasantry was forced to supply its labour power or agricultural commodities. This meant that the indigenous productive systems were subjected to powerful forces of transformation. Evidence from Kenya clearly demonstrates the transformation of indigenous economies.<sup>15</sup> The preservation of domestic production was prompted by the fact that neither the wages of migrant labour nor the prices received for market commodities were sufficient for the reproduction of the worker and his family. As a result, the reproductive gap was

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<sup>14</sup> Bernstein, H. 'Capital and Peasantry in the Epoch of Imperialism', Economic Research Bureau, University of Dar-es -Salaam, Occasional Paper 7 (2), 1977.

<sup>15</sup> Brett, E. A. Colonialism and Underdevelopment; Tignor, R. L. The Colonial Transformation of Kenya; Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways.

displaced onto the continued production of use value by domestic pre-capitalist forms and relations of production. Conversely, the partial continuity of the domestic sphere of production allowed capitalist mines and plantations to hold cash crop prices at exceptionally low prices. Thus articulation resulted in subjugation and exploitation of peasant labour. While pre-capitalist forms appear to persist, their significance and continued existence is subject to transformation by capital. Domestic production is therefore no longer an autonomous mode of the reproduction of labour power within capitalism.<sup>16</sup>

The above formulation of articulation as a conceptual framework is relevant in the analyses of the process of change during the colonial period since it focuses our attention on the extraction of African labour and commodities and the simultaneous persistence of pre-capitalist production as the critical feature of the process. But critics of articulation have argued that such a formulation remains incomplete and misleading. Berman has pointed out that its structuralist origins are manifest in a rigid and teleological determinism.<sup>17</sup> Articulation is seen as a static and self-reproducing relationship that, once established, continuously and unproblematically, serves the 'needs' of metropolitan capital. Indigenous African societies are treated as essentially passive receptors of external forces, acted upon but having no active effect on the process; or as Banaji notes: 'modes of production entirely deprived of their own laws of motion, vegetating on

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<sup>16</sup> Siddle, D. and Swindell, K. Rural Change in Tropical Africa.

<sup>17</sup> Berman, B. 'Structure and Process in Bureaucratic States', Unhappy Valley.

the periphery of an industrialising Europe like a vast reserve of labour power periodically called into action by the spasmodic expansion of metropolitan capital'.<sup>18</sup>

Crush's criticism of articulation has noted that, 'extravagant claims have been made for its utility, but very little has actually been demonstrated.'<sup>19</sup> He points out that much of the problem stems from the structuralist origin of 'articulation' reflected in the abstract emptiness of the concepts, especially that of 'mode of production', the ahistorical and teleological character of its functionalist mode of explanation, and the economic isolation of its focus that prevents any effective treatment of class struggle or the state.

Articulation has also been criticised on the basis that what are being articulated are 'modes of production'. But the concept of a mode of production on the theoretical level is an abstract and a formal specification of relations that provide an essential tool for the analysis of historical experience, but does not necessarily have any concrete existence in its 'pure' form. Reliance on an abstract formal concept of mode of production results in a tendency to identify the existence of a mode by the presence or absence of a particular form of labour such as the patriarchal peasant farm or wage labour.<sup>20</sup> But as Banaji points out, these are 'simple categories' or simple abstractions in Marxist terms that can exist within different historical societies dominated by the 'laws of motion' and developmental tendencies of different modes of production and that take their particular character from

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<sup>18</sup> Banaji, J. 'Modes of Production in Materialist Conception of History', *Capitalism and Class*, (3) 1977.

<sup>19</sup> Crush, J. 'The Southern Africa Regional Formation: A Geographical Perspective', *Tijdschrift Voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 73 (4), 1982, cited in Berman, B. *Unhappy Valley*.

<sup>20</sup> Berman, B. 'Structure and Process in Bureaucratic States', *Unhappy Valley*.

the manner of their involvement in those wider revelations.<sup>21</sup> Thus, a peasant production in itself cannot constitute a mode as such, but is rather a form of production that can exist and take its particular historical character within the dominant dynamic forces of different societies that determine the conditions of its reproduction or transformation.

Notwithstanding the criticisms levelled against it, we cannot throw away the baby with the bathwater. Articulation is a concept of critical utility for understanding the dynamics of the political economy of colonialism. It becomes very useful in the analyses of the historical process of change during the colonial period. Insofar as it focuses our attention on the particular modalities of the process of accumulation and class formation, the forces and relations of production, and class struggle in the confrontation of capitalist and social structure in Africa, it represents an important step beyond dependency/underdevelopment perspective. As Berman points out, articulation must be understood, however, not as a self-reproducing condition 'serving the interests of capital', but as a complex, conflict ridden, and unstable process through which pre-capitalist indigenous societies were, with considerable difficulty, penetrated and dominated in varying degree by the forces of capitalist imperialism.<sup>22</sup> The primary theoretical contribution of the concept of articulation is in assisting us to explain more appropriately the diverse patterns of the transformation, destruction and preservation of indigenous societies in colonial Africa and for purposes of the present study, it does indeed help in analyses of the processes of change in South Nyanza during the colonial period.

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<sup>21</sup> Banaji, J. 'Modes of Production', Capitalism and Class.

<sup>22</sup> Berman, B. 'Structure and Process of Bureaucratic States', Unhappy Valley.

The conceptual framework of articulation has been used in a number of studies in analysing agrarian transformation in Kenya during colonial rule. Such studies include those of Buttermann, Nganga, Stichter, Maxon among many others.<sup>23</sup> These are discussed in the literature review. Findings from these studies will be vital for the comparative analyses of the process of change in South Nyanza.

The other part of the conceptual framework employed in this study in analysing the process of change during the colonial period is underdevelopment theory. It has been defined as a historical product of the relations between underdeveloped societies and the penetrative capitalist nation-state. As Taylor points out:

Thus the metropolis expropriates economic surplus from its satellites and appropriates it for its own economic development. The satellites remain underdeveloped for lack of access to their own surplus.<sup>24</sup>

A common theme of underdevelopment writing is the rapid penetration of pre-capitalist relations of production and their incorporation into the world capitalist economy, which condemns them to a subordinate position in the international system. The key issue of underdevelopment theory is the transfer of surplus from Third World countries by

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<sup>23</sup> Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation'; Nganga, D. M. 'What is happening to the Kenyan Peasantry?' , Review of African Political Economy, Nos. 18-21, 1980-1981, pp. 7-16; Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya: Capitalism and African Response, 1895-1975, Longman, Nairobi, 1982; Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways.

<sup>24</sup> Taylor, R. G. From Modernization to Modes of Production: A Critique of Sociology of Development and Underdevelopment, Macmillan, London, Basingstock, 1983.

international capital.<sup>25</sup> This transfer takes place through persistently negative terms of trade, which obtains in international markets to the detriment of local producers. As Rodney points out, the causes of underdevelopment can be understood in seeking out the relationship between Africa and developed countries and recognising that it is a relationship of exploitation. The exploitation takes place through trade since the terms of trade are set by the industrialised countries in a manner entirely advantageous to them. The whole import-export relationship between Africa and its trading partners is one of unequal exchange and exploitation, argues Rodney.<sup>26</sup>

Studies of Kenya's colonial economy based on the underdevelopment perspective share a common argument that African wealth both in the form of labour and agricultural produce, was transferred from the African sector to the European and partially to the Asian sectors.<sup>27</sup> This process ranged from cattle raids, forced labour, regressive taxation and restructuring of local economies. This resulted in the incorporation of indigenous economies into unequal relations with colonial capitalism as well as the international world economy. All these studies reflect what was taking place in the country at a macro level. In addition some case studies such as those by Hay and Butterman, show what was happening at the micro-level.<sup>28</sup> The present study of South Nyanza therefore tests some

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<sup>25</sup> Siddle D. Swindell, K. Rural Change in Tropical Africa.

<sup>26</sup> Rodney, W. How Europe Underdeveloped Africa.

<sup>27</sup> Brett, E. A. Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa; Leys, C. Underdevelopment in Kenya; Ng'ang'a, D. M. 'What is Happening to the Kenyan Peasantry?', Review of African Political Economy, pp. 7-16; Nyong'o, P. A. 'The Development of a Middle Peasantry in Nyanza', Review of African Political Economy, Nos 18-21, 1980-81, pp. 108-120; Leys, C. The Rise and Fall of Underdevelopment Theory; Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya.

<sup>28</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'.

of the findings presented within the wider conceptual framework of underdevelopment theory as used in the analyses of Kenya's colonial economy.

Underdevelopment theory ascribes to colonialism, as an agent of capitalism, an unrelieved exploitation. Colonial territories proved to be net exporters rather than receivers of capital. Through the agency of the colonial state, surplus was extracted from the local economies and transferred to the European and metropolitan sectors.<sup>29</sup> This process of transfer from the African sector to the European settlers, Asian and metropolitan sectors is evident in the studies of Kenya's colonial economy. However, as Clarke notes "Many of the details remain obscure and contradictory not only for Kenya, but for many applications of underdevelopment theory in history."<sup>30</sup> Evidence from studies of Kenya demonstrate that administrators from Provincial Commissioners to chiefs played a critical role in making sure Africans engaged in colonial capitalism. As Ogot points out, in Nyanza Province, for instance, John Ainsworth, Provincial Commissioner, 1912-1916, played a crucial role in promoting cultivation of cash crops, particularly cotton.<sup>31</sup>

Underdevelopment theory in general, and its application to Africa in particular, has come under strong fire from both Marxist and non-Marxists alike. Underdevelopment theory laid great emphasis on the relations of exchange and this particular issue forms an

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<sup>29</sup> Leys, C. Underdevelopment in Kenya; Rodney, W. How Europe underdeveloped Africa.

<sup>30</sup> Clarke, J. 'Some Problems in the Conceptualization of Non-Capitalist Relations of Production', Critique of Anthropology, 2, 8, 1977, p. 62; Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'.

<sup>31</sup> Ogot, B. A. 'British Administration in Central Nyanza District of Kenya, 1900-1960', Journal of African History, vol. 4, No. 2, 1963.



important element in Brenner's critique of Frank.<sup>32</sup> Brenner agrees that capitalism is a system in which production for profit via exchange is dominant, but this does not mean the opposite holds; true production for the market does not necessarily in itself signal the existence of capitalism, argues Brenner. Leys, in his criticism of underdevelopment theory, argues that the theory does not provide any explanation of why more capital did not get invested and accumulated in the Third World in the past, or why it should not now take advantage of cheap labour and soak up the vast pools of unemployed people in the Third World today. Leys points out that the real trouble with the theory is that concepts which primarily 'sensitize', do not belong to a coherent theoretical system, based on a consistent method of analysis; they are ideological rather than scientific.<sup>33</sup>

Leys also points out that underdevelopment theory tends to be economicist in the sense that social classes, the state, politics and ideology figure as derivatives of economic forces, and often get very little attention at all. Masses, for instance, tend to appear as categories resulting from the structural evolution of underdevelopment; thus landlords are technically backward, domestic bourgeoisie are weak and comprador in outlook, wage labour forces are small and highly differentiated. Again, Kitching's criticism of underdevelopment theory contends that in order to develop the dependency/underdevelopment position, one has to know what would have happened if circumstances had been other than what they were. What would have been the form and speed of say

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<sup>32</sup> Brenner, R. 'The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism', New Left Review, 1977, 04 pp. 29-92; Frank, A. G. Sociology of Development and Underdevelopment of Sociology, Pluto, London, 1971.

<sup>33</sup> Leys, C. The Rise and Fall of Underdevelopment Theory.

Africa's development if it had not been conquered by European powers? Kitching argues that once this realm of possibilities emerge which are contingent upon the assumptions one makes, one cannot have a re-run of history to test out different scenarios. He notes that there are clear indications that the issue of taxes and the failure of the colonial government to protect indigenous industries and land rights were some of the arguments which African nationalists advanced while demanding independence, but when independence was achieved, new sets of problems had to be identified, and it was under these conditions that theorists of dependency and neo-colonialism emerged.<sup>34</sup>

Some critics of underdevelopment theory have pointed out that rather than being aggressively exploitative, capitalism in colonial situations was not exploitative enough. As is evident in Marx's own work, he considered capitalism as a progressive force that would finally lead to its own demise into communism.<sup>35</sup> However, some critics of underdevelopment theory have pointed out that within the colonial situation, the pre-capitalist relations of production were deliberately maintained, the better to appropriate the surplus from existing system of production. Capitalism, far from destroying previous forms of production, is seen in fact as having created new bastard forms of production that condemn the producers engaged in them to stagnate at the mercy of dominating capital.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Kitching, G. Development and Underdevelopment in Historical Perspectives, Methuen, London, 1982.

<sup>35</sup> Marx, K. 'The British Rule in India' (ed.), Feuer, L. S. Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy, Garden City, New York, 1959.

<sup>36</sup> Clarke, J. 'Some Problems of Conceptualization of Non-Capitalist Relations of Production', Critique of Anthropology, p. 21; Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya.

Despite the criticism levelled against underdevelopment theory, it is still relevant in this study since it provides insights into the integration of the pre-capitalist economy into the world capitalist economy and the unequal trade relations between Africa (the Third World countries) and industrialised Western countries and how African labour was extracted from rural areas to work on European farms and mines, in which the colonial state was used to facilitate the extraction process. It also helps to understand how the introduction of cash crop production ended the old seclusion of the traditional forms of production, which consequently integrated the latter into the global market economy. The pre-capitalist African economies were now transformed into an export-oriented economy.

The third part of the conceptual framework utilised in this study in analysing the process of change during the pre-colonial era is mode of production. South Nyanza was mostly composed of people related by descent (maximal lineages). They were organised on the basis of kinship and seniority. Most studies on modes of production on Marxist economic anthropology have relied on Meillassoux's work The Economic Anthropology of the Gouro<sup>37</sup> as a key reference. In this seminal work, Meillassoux found out that the Gouro society was characterised by lineages. A 'mode of production' is generally taken to comprise two elements; the forces of production (land, labour, tools, and raw materials) and the social relations of production (that is the patterns of co-operation) involving patterns of worker co-operation in production and of the people involved in the exploitation of these forces, together with the sharing of the product.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Meillassoux, C. L. *Anthropologie Economique des Gouro de Cote'd Ivoir*, Paris, Mouton, 1964.

<sup>38</sup> Siddle, D. and Swindell. K. Rural Change in Tropical Africa; Taylor, J. M. From Modernization to Modes of Production, p. 126.

In most pre-colonial African societies, as was the case in South Nyanza and Kenya in general, lineage relations of production were a common feature in which the conditions of the real appropriation was formed by family units which belonged to a specific lineage.<sup>39</sup> Bonner has pointed out that the lineage mode of production was widely distributed across the continent of Africa.<sup>40</sup> As Lonsdale has correctly asserted, in most pre-colonial Kenyan societies, the basic unit of production and consumption was the extended family.<sup>41</sup> But no family could survive in isolation. Each needed the cooperation of others in seasonal chores of agricultural production and in herding. The same was true of pre-colonial South Nyanza as is revealed in chapter two of this study.

The elders however, controlled the surplus labour produced in these units with seniority furnishing the qualifications for office. Elders controlled the product of labour, whether of agriculture or prestige.<sup>42</sup> Meillassoux did note the control of elders over juniors, which he attributed to the fact that it derived from elders controlling the means of reproducing the relations of production through their supplying the bridewealth, which obtained wives

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<sup>39</sup> Southall, A. Lineage Formation Among the Luo, Oxford University Press, London, New York, Toronto, 1952; Kitching, G. Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petit Bourgeoisie, 1905-1970, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1980; Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya; Ellis, F. Peasant Economics: Farm Households and Agrarian Development, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

<sup>40</sup> Bonner, P. 'Class, the Mode of Production and the State in Pre-colonial Swaziland', in Marks, S. and Atmore, A. (eds.), Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa, Longman, London, 1980, p. 81.

<sup>41</sup> Lonsdale, J. 'The Conquest State of Kenya, 1895-1905', in Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. Unhappy Valley.

<sup>42</sup> Ellis, F. Peasant Economies.

for juniors.<sup>43</sup> Wives in this arrangement, being the critical producers of the agricultural product, were the 'capital' necessary to establish the basic social unit, the household. Meillassoux considered the division of labour between the sexes to be complementary and therefore not exploitative.

By examining the relations of distribution of the product then, and the reproduction of the relations of production over time, this study attempts to analyse the process of change in South Nyanza during pre-colonial and colonial times. It is an analysis of relations between the elders and juniors, men and women. Criticism has been levelled by Molyneux at the conclusion that the division of labour between the sexes was essentially complementary, and therefore no exploitation was involved.<sup>44</sup> Recent research on gender relations has demonstrated that men exploited women in most African pre-colonial communities, including Kenya; women shouldered the greater burden of food production during the pre-colonial period.<sup>45</sup> The exploitation was not only confined to women, but also extended to men. As Lonsdale has pointed out, the organisation of the work was less egalitarian than its ideology.<sup>46</sup> It was focused on big men with large families who could exploit more than their families alone, among them impoverished dependent workers,

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<sup>43</sup> Meillassoux, C. L. *Anthropologie Economique*, cited in Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'.

<sup>44</sup> Molyneux, M. 'Androcentrism in Marxist Anthropology', *Critique of Anthropology*, 3:9 and 10, 1977, pp. 55-82.

<sup>45</sup> Achola, P. O. Towards Strategies for Strengthening the Position of Women in Food Production: An Overview and Proposals on Africa, In straw, Santo Domingo, 1985; Synder, M C. and Tadesse, M. Africa women and Development: a History, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, Zed Books, London, New Jersey, 1995.

<sup>46</sup> Lonsdale, J. 'The Conquest State of Kenya', Unhappy Valley.

immigrant families grateful for protection, marriage alliances with neighbouring settlements or herding sections, and mutual defence agreements with other big men. All these findings find echoes in this study of South Nyanza.<sup>47</sup> This research reveals that in South Nyanza, women bore the greater burden of food production during the pre-colonial and the colonial period.

Even though modes of production are widely used in analysing agrarian change in pre-colonial Africa, they have come under criticism from a number of scholars. Cooper in his 'Africa and the World Economy' has noted that pre-capitalist modes of production are very difficult to specify.<sup>48</sup> He points out that if every way of catching an antelope or growing a banana defines a mode of production, then the concept blends into the empiricism that Marxists scorn. He asserts that the lineage mode of production is being applied to Africa just as non-Marxist anthropologists have cast doubt on the category of lineage. Cooper points out that the subordination of women is explained as necessary to reproduction, but this does not explain how or why women acquiesced to their roles, while much evidence suggests that their actual roles in both production and reproduction were far more complex than the dichotomy between the two implies.

Kitching, in his criticism of modes of production, has argued for the dismantling of 'grand theories' into lower level concepts, which have therefore a greater generality and

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<sup>47</sup> Southall, A. Lineage Formation Among the Luo; Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 'Luo Tribes and Clans', The Position of Women in Primitive Societies and Other Essays in Social Anthropology, Faber and Faber, London, 1965.

<sup>48</sup> Cooper, F. 'Africa and the World Economy', The African Studies Review, pp. 1-86.

specificity.<sup>49</sup> For example, Kitching disclaims the usefulness of mode of production analyses, articulation of modes and class theory in African situations and favours lower order concepts such as mode of appropriation of nature, division of labour and circulation (of commodities and money), which are more applicable to any historical situations where commodity production occurs. In tropical Africa, Kitching argues, production relations are varied and flexible and categories such as ‘pre-capitalist’, ‘peasant’ and ‘proletarian’ need handling with care.

Despite these criticisms, the conceptual framework of modes of production is significant to this study of South Nyanza because it provides procedural order for the analysis of the pre-colonial economy of South Nyanza. The social organisation of the households in South Nyanza, which was based on kinship, was crucial to the production and distributive processes. Even though the debate on mode of production has not been settled, the questions of exploitation and accumulation cycle are useful in the analysis of the pre-colonial economy of South Nyanza. Other significant dimensions are the relations between the elders and juniors, men and women and rulers and subjects are also important in the analysis of exploitation and redistribution, as well as in the process of change during the pre-colonial period.

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<sup>49</sup> Kitching, G. Class and Economic Change in Kenya.

## **Research Methodology**

This thesis utilises sources such as archival information, anthropological data, travellers' records, missionary reports and oral traditions as primary sources. During my field research at the Kenya National Archives in Nairobi from December 2003 to March 2004, I scanned the records on South Nyanza and Nyanza Province covering the colonial period. I also revisited the archives for more data collection in December 2005 to January 2006. These contained detailed records on the type of new crops introduced into South Nyanza and Nyanza in general by the colonial state that were being cultivated, new agricultural implements, livestock keeping and trade. Colonial administrators, European travellers and missionaries recorded the information. I analysed the response of the households in South Nyanza to the introduction of new cash crops, migrant wage labour and colonial capitalism in general. Missionary records on South Nyanza reveal that apart from spreading the gospel, they were also involved in promoting modern agricultural production and Western education among their converts.

This study also employs oral traditions as a source. Oral tradition is essential as a means of reconstructing the past. Oral traditions are quite distinct from other historical sources. They consist of information existing in memory. It is in memory most of the time, and only now and then are those parts recalled when the needs of the moment require. As Vansina points out, this information forms a vast pool; one that encompasses the whole of



inherited culture for culture is what is in the mind.<sup>50</sup> Oral traditions are varied. Vansina divides African oral traditions into five categories. First, there are learning formulas, rituals, slogans and titles. Next, are lists of place names and personal names. Then come official and private poetry-historical, religious or personal. Last, are legal and other commentaries. Not all these categories of oral tradition can be found in all African societies. Official poetry and historical stories, for instance, arise only with a relatively high degree of political organisation. But most societies preserve a considerable range of oral evidence. In South Nyanza, as elsewhere a clear distinction can be drawn between personal oral histories, eyewitness accounts, which are relatively easy to evaluate, and oral traditions-which are handed down by word of mouth to later generations. This study of South Nyanza utilised the two during field oral interviews.

The interviews were conducted based on prepared questionnaires, which were compiled after archival and library research on the process of economic change during the pre-colonial and colonial era, but leaving room for asking informal questions. Since I come from the area and I am fluent in the local language, *Dholuo*, the interviews were done in *Dholuo*. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed into English. On an average, two to three respondents were interviewed per day.

Interviewees were identified based on the following criteria:

- (1) Those who engaged in migrant wage labour at any time during the colonial era, either in government, private sector or on white settler farms.

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<sup>50</sup> Vansina, J. Oral Traditions: A Study in Historical Methodology, Trans.H. M. Wright, Chicago, Aldine, 1965.

- (2) Those who worked as colonial administrators, for instance, chiefs, and agricultural assistants. These were agents of the colonial government at local levels and were therefore responsible for implementing government policies in their respective jurisdictions. These officials were the ones who facilitated the cultivation of new cash crops and were influential in promoting change in South Nyanza. Chiefs were also responsible for tax collection. These officials were very useful in providing valuable information on the process of change that occurred in South Nyanza during the colonial period.
- (3) Those who were involved in agricultural production during the colonial period. These were useful respondents because they are familiar with the changes that were facilitated by colonial capitalism in the agricultural sector.
- (4) Those who worked closely with the Christian missionaries, for instance converts. They provided useful information on the role Christian missionaries played as agents of change in the areas where they established a presence. Pastors and some Christian converts also played a crucial role as agents of change as was directed by the Christian missionaries.
- (5) Those who engaged in any kind of trade during the colonial period. These included traders such as shopkeepers, cattle traders and tailors. They provided important information on trade during the colonial period.

There were limitations encountered during oral interviews. For instance, there were distortions and variations of information in personal recollections, posing many of the problems, which arise in dealing with more formal oral traditions. The other difficulty, in

an attempt to analyse economic change at local level, stems from the diversity of historical experience. For instance, the introduction of white maize in South Nyanza is attributed to a number of different agents: the European agricultural officials, the Christian missionaries, South Nyanza pioneer Christian converts who acquired white maize seed from mission stations, local traders or returning migrant labourers who acquired new seed through their external contacts. The other limitation encountered while collecting data from oral evidence was that interviewees were not able to provide a specific date when an event occurred. This forced me to estimate the date the event could have taken place. The fact that I come from the area also had its own limitations. Local people who carry out research in the areas where they come from are sometimes perceived by interviewees to be spies for the government. I experienced such instances and had to assure them that I was not an agent of the government. This assurance mostly permitted them to open up for the interview.

Other sources also utilized to write this thesis include books, journals and theses. These documentary sources were mainly scanned during library research at the various libraries at the University of the Witwatersrand and also libraries in Kenya. This research relied heavily on primary sources for purposes of originality.

### **Literature Review**

This study is concerned with the process of economic change in a Kenyan rural area, South Nyanza. From the 1970s, scholarly works have been produced on Kenya's political

economy. The studies are located within the related conceptual frameworks of articulation, underdevelopment and dependency. These studies reflect the diversity of opinions and lack of consensus within these perspectives. They seek to provide insights on Kenya's political and economic development by providing a link between colonial transformation and current development strategies. These analyses of various aspects of Kenya's political economy are very important in understanding the process of agrarian transformation from pre-colonial to post independence Kenya. Thus, this thesis draws a great deal from the rich debates on Kenya's political economy in analysing the process of change in South Nyanza during the pre-colonial and colonial period. Of immediate importance to the present research are some general studies that have been undertaken on Kenya's agrarian transformation, which are significant to this study of South Nyanza.

Two seminal works, Brett's Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa and Leys' Underdevelopment in Kenya provide the contours of underdevelopment and dependency debates on Kenyan agrarian transformation.<sup>51</sup> Brett, focusing on the impact of colonial rule on Kenya, notes how colonialism catalysed Kenya's integration into the world capitalist economy while fostering economic measures that resulted in unbalanced development. The British had designed Kenya's economic policy to be complementary to, not competitive with, the metropolitan economy. This, as Brett points out, implied an emphasis on the export of primary products coupled with the import of British industrial goods. This resulted in an unbalanced pattern of development that never produced the

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<sup>51</sup> Brett, E. A. Colonialism and Underdevelopment; Leys, C. Underdevelopment in Kenya.

secondary and tertiary economic activities necessary to sustain local industrialisation. The colonial state, moreover, directly and indirectly discouraged local industrial initiatives.

Brett also notes that in addition, the dominance of the white settler community along with the state's control further exacerbated the structural imbalances. Brett saw a weak indigenous capitalist system and the failure of industrialisation as the most important shortcomings. Thus, the wide range of restrictions on African agriculture coupled with the colonial state's oligopolisation of manufacturing and marketing under European and Asian control inhibited the emergence of indigenous "social forces... able to create a political basis strong enough to enable them to change the terms of which these cumulative unequal exchanges that now take place." What emerges from the Kenyan agrarian debates from the 1980s however, largely repudiates the observations made by Brett. Studies such as those by Njonjo, Ng'ang'a, Nyong'o and Kitching demonstrate that capitalist accumulation was already emerging among some Kenyans during the colonial period; these were people who were engaged in migrant wage labour and off farm production.<sup>52</sup> But this will be discussed in more detail later.

Leys, in a more detailed, though rather different paradigmatic application of the theoretical frameworks of underdevelopment and dependency discussed Kenyan transformation in the post independence period. The key argument in Leys's work on

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<sup>52</sup> Njonjo, A. 'The Kenyan Peasantry', Review of African Political Economy, 20, 1980, pp. 27-40; Ng'ang'a, D. M. 'What is Happening to the Kenyan Peasantry?', Review of African Political Economy, pp. 7-16; Nyong'o, P. A. 'What 'the friends of the Peasants', Are and how they pose the question of Peasantry', Review of African Political Economy, Nos. 18-21, 1980-1981, pp. 17-26; Kitching, G. Class and Economic Change in Kenya.

colonial Kenya is that the impact of colonialism upon Kenya was the exploitation and suppression of the bulk of its African population.

Other studies of the 1970s include those of Wolff, Van Zwanenberg and Tignor.<sup>53</sup> The key issue tackled in these studies is that the linkage that took place between Kenya and Britain contributed to the underdevelopment of the former due to unequal trade relations. The studies are all based on the conceptual framework of underdevelopment theory. In analysing the process of change from 1895 when Kenya was colonised to 1930, Wolff notes that the British officials totally transformed the pre-existing patterns of economic behaviour, creating very different basic economic structures. He points out that the transformation took place through land alienation, and the introduction of new cash crops which forced Africans whose lands were alienated to become squatters on European farms.

Wolff asserts that the transformation of the African population into migrant wage labour force passed through three distinct stages: the first stage covering the first twenty years, 1888 to 1914, involved several experiments. The second phase coincided with mobilisation for war and actual hostilities in the East African theatre in World War I. The third stage, which took place from 1919 to the Great Depression and saw the establishment of a regular labour supply. It is crucial to note that these observations by Wolff are generalised and did not apply uniformly throughout the country. Studies such

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<sup>53</sup> Wolff, D. Britain and Kenya, 1870-1930: The Economics of Colonialism, Transafrica Publishers, Nairobi, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1974; Van Zwanenberg, R. M. A. Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, 1919-1939, East Africa Literature Bureau, Nairobi, Kampala, Dar es Salaam, 1975; Tignor, R. L. The Colonial Transformation of Kenya.

as those by Tignor, Stichter, and Maxon have shown that the introduction of the African population to migrant wage labour force varied from region to region.<sup>54</sup> Evidence from Kowe, Kano, Koguta, and Vihiga has shown that households in those areas entered migrant wage labour by the first decade of colonial rule.<sup>55</sup> As this study will show the households in South Nyanza started engaging in large-scale migrant wage labour from the latter part of the second decade of colonial rule. It attempts to delineate the factors that led the households in South Nyanza to enter migrant wage labour late, unlike other parts of Nyanza that immediately entered migrant labour during the first decade of colonial rule.

Van Zwanenberg in his work tackles the debate on the nature of colonial accumulation.<sup>56</sup> This is a central theme in his study and also central to Kenya's colonial history. He rightly argues that by 1919 it had been agreed by both the imperial and colonial authority to develop exports through European estate plantations rather than African peasant production. Van Zwanenberg points out that capital had to be generated within the system, and that this could only be achieved by extracting surplus from the product of African labour. His assertion that primitive colonial accumulation was the process of struggle which involved taking a larger proportion of the resources from the general community and transferring it to the European sector is supported by similar studies such as those by Wolff, Tignor and Stichter who all agree with Van Zwanenberg's argument

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<sup>54</sup> Tignor, R. L. The Colonial Transformation of Kenya; Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya; Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways.

<sup>55</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Onduru, T. A. 'Some Aspects of Economic Change'; Francis, E. 'Migration and Changing Division of Labour'; Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways.

<sup>56</sup> Van Zwanenberg, R. M. A. Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya.

that colonialism extracted surplus from the African sector in the form of labour and agricultural products.<sup>57</sup> These findings concur with this study of South Nyanza, which shows that labour and agricultural products were extracted from South Nyanza when the area was colonised.

Van Zwanenberg raises pertinent issues on taxation, which have not received adequate attention by scholars. He rightly points out that in some instances, young boys and old women were being forced to pay taxes. The only case study of Nyanza that has alluded to this is Butterman's.<sup>58</sup> She notes that because the tax was levied on houses, which were the property of women, there is much evidence that women paid the tax. This concurs with the findings of this study.

Van Zwanenberg's study contains some limitations, which need to be pointed out. For instance, the study commences from 1919. That creates a gap in the understanding of the process of change that marked the first two decades of colonial capitalism and African response. Another limitation is the generalisation of facts. For instance, when writing on migrant wage labour, he generalises that all regions were engaging in migrant wage labour at the same time. His study does not take cognisance of regional variations in entry into migrant wage labour.

Tignor, in a detailed comparative study of regional transformation, is concerned with the impact of the linkage between the indigenous economy and colonial capitalism.<sup>59</sup> His

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<sup>57</sup> Wolff, R. D. Britain and Kenya; Tignor, R. L. The Colonial Transformation of Kenya; Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya.

<sup>58</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formations in Change', p. 124.

<sup>59</sup> Tignor, R. L. The Colonial Transformation of Kenya.



main interest was to investigate how the colonial system affected the local population and their response. He poses the following questions: In what ways did Africans now do things differently? In what ways did their lives remain unchanged? Was British colonial rule in Kenya modernising for Africans or a hindrance to modernising change? Why did Africans living in the same geographical zone, gaining exposure to the same colonial agencies, have such radically different colonial experience? Can these differences be explained largely in terms of colonial programs or are they the result of different institutions which African communities brought into the colonial period through which they filtered colonial policies?

He chooses three ethnicities the Kikuyu, Kamba and Maasai as his focus of study because they occupied the central highlands of Kenya, the area that was alienated for white settlers. Tignor rightly admitted that among the three groups, the Kikuyu were affected most by the process of change, through loss of land to white settlers. He noted that most of the Kikuyu who lost land were quickly and dramatically turned into an agricultural proletariat for the white farmers. This is corroborated by evidence from studies such as those by Wolff, Njonjo, and Stichter.<sup>60</sup> The Maasai, he notes, were relocated to other areas from where they continued with their traditional pastoral life. The Kamba lost very little land and, as a result, were not immediately integrated into colonial capitalism.

Tignor does not only attribute the process of change among the African communities to colonial administrators alone, but also to the Christian missionaries who established a presence among the African communities and acted as agents of change by spreading

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<sup>60</sup> Wolff, R. D. Britain and Kenya; Njonjo, A. 'The Kenya Peasantry', Review of African Political Economy, pp. 27-40; Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya.

Christianity, Western education and agricultural production. Evidence from studies such as those by Hay and Buttermann concur with Tignor's findings.<sup>61</sup> Findings from this study also reveal that missionaries who established a presence in South Nyanza played a crucial role in enhancing the process of change in the area. But Tignor's argument, that the colonial administration coerced the Kikuyu to engage in migrant wage labour contrasts with findings elsewhere. Hay, Stichter and Maxon concur that areas which were already experiencing population pressure by the time Kenya was being colonised, such as Central Province (Kikuyu land) and Central and North Nyanza districts, immediately entered the colonial economy without coercion.<sup>62</sup> Given that South Nyanza was not facing the problem of population pressure at the time the area was colonised, this study of South Nyanza investigates the different households' response to colonial capitalism when the area was colonised.

Tignor's assertion that the presence of powerful collaborating chiefs among the Kikuyu contributed to their early entry into wage labouring and schooling may be partly true; there were however also other critical factors that equally played a significant role. Evidence from other studies such as those by Nyong'o, Njonjo and Stichter have shown that the proximity of the Kikuyu to the major labour market, Nairobi, was crucial to their early entry into wage labour, unlike the Kamba and the Maasai, who were more remote from Nairobi. Conversely, the Kikuyu's early entry into schooling is ascribed to missionaries who established a presence among the Kikuyu, unlike the Kamba and

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<sup>61</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'.

<sup>62</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya; Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways.

Maasai, because of the Kikuyu proximity to Nairobi.<sup>63</sup> Evidence from this study reveals that some chiefs in South Nyanza played a positive role in facilitating the engagement of the households in the area in migrant wage labour as well as in schooling. These are analysed in detail in chapters four and five.

Towards the end of the 1970s, the terms of the debate shifted. The shift was prompted by the emergence of new historical evidence and the qualitative changes of Kenya's economy in the latter half of the 1970s. Following Warren's 'Imperialism and Capitalist Industrialization'<sup>64</sup> studies, the possibilities were raised of the emergence of an independent indigenous bourgeoisie capable of accumulating capital and extending its bargaining skills vis-à-vis foreign capital in the periphery of the global capitalist economy. These studies influenced Leys<sup>65</sup> to reorient his conceptual stance on the nature of Kenya's national bourgeoisie under conditions of dependent capitalism.

Cowen's study of the historical patterns of indigenous accumulation in wattle production in the Central Province of Kenya was particularly influential in inducing Leys to rethink his early seminal work. Cowen's work, which was backed by hard evidence, revealed that there was an indigenous class of capitalist accumulators among the Kikuyu long before

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<sup>63</sup> Njonjo, A. 'The Kenya Peasantry: A Re-Assessment', Review of African Political Economy, pp. 27-40; Nyong'o, P. A. 'The Peasant Question in Kenya', Review of African Political Economy, Nos. 18-21, 1980-1981; Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya.

<sup>64</sup> Warren, B. 'Imperialism and Capitalist Industrialization', New Left Review, No. 18, 1973, pp. 3-45. \_\_\_\_\_, Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism, New Left Books, London, 1980.

<sup>65</sup> Leys C. 'Capitalist Accumulation, Class Formation, and Dependency: The Significance of the Kenyan Case', in Miliband, R. and Savile, J. (ed.), Socialist Register, pp.241-266, Merlin Press, London, 1978. \_\_\_\_\_, 'Accumulation, Class Formation and Dependency: Kenya', in Fransman, M. (ed.), Industry and Accumulation in Africa, Heinemann, London, 1982, pp. 170-192.

the agrarian reforms of the 1950s took place.<sup>66</sup> Cowen noted that by the 1940s this class of indigenous accumulators had not only established forms of commodity production based on the direct employment of wage labour, but were also already competing with the European and Asian merchant capitalists. Indeed, notwithstanding the constraints that the colonial economy imposed in the form of settler monopolies and the intervention of foreign capital, this class reproduced itself over the years as “an independent social force” whose propensity for accumulation did not fit the object of expanded colonial production.

From the late 1970s, the weight of research on the Kenyan agrarian debate shifted to the analysis of internal process of change under colonialism, especially class formation and changing forms of production and labour. The Kenyan agrarian debates of the late 1970s and early 1980s were now based on the peasantry and indigenous class formations. Atieno-Odhiambo and Ng’ang’a were basically concerned with the issues of the Kenyan peasantry.<sup>67</sup> The critical question that Atieno-Odhiambo raises is: what is the Kenyan peasantry? His definition of a peasant centres on the importance to the peasant of family labour. Along these lines, he defines peasants as “those whose ultimate security and subsistence lie in their having certain rights in land and in labour of family members on the land, but who are involved, through rights and obligations, in a wider economic system which includes the engagement of non peasants.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Cowen, M. ‘Commodity Production in Kenya’s Central Province’, in Heyer, J. R. P. and Williams, G. (eds.), Rural Development in Tropical Africa, Macmillan Press, London, Basingstock, 1981.

<sup>67</sup> Atieno-Odhiambo, E. S. ‘The Rise and Decline of the Kenyan Peasant’, The Paradox of Collaboration; Ng’ang’a, D. M. ‘What is Happening to the Kenyan Peasantry?’, Review of African Political Economy, pp. 7-16.

<sup>68</sup> Atieno-Odhiambo, E. S. ‘The Rise and Decline of the Kenyan Peasant’, The Paradox of Collaboration, p. 27.

The other key issue that he deals with is the creation of an African peasantry, which, as he argues, was primarily the result of the interaction between the international capitalist settler economic system and the traditional socio-economic systems within the context of territorially defined colonial systems. He remarks that the logic of capitalist exploitation upset the rural economic equilibrium and therefore created both the rural peasant and urban proletariat. What he ignores, however, is what classes of people existed among Kenyan rural societies before the creation of rural peasants and urban proletariat? This research demonstrates that class differentiation existed among the households in South Nyanza during pre-colonial times. Wealth was defined by the number of livestock an individual had.

There are some shortcomings in Atieno-Odhiambo's work that need to be pointed out. One criticism is that he argues that the extent to which a peasant could respond to cash cropping depended on the ability of the traditional system to incorporate the new crops without threatening the security of minimal subsistence production. He cites the example of cotton failure in Nyanza Province because cultivation in Luoland had been essentially a woman's job and since men engaged in migrant wage labour, there was simply not enough labour forthcoming to cultivate both subsistence and cash crops. But his argument was based on the grounds that the absence of men contributed to the failure of cotton due to the shortage of labour, then how would one account for the increase in production of other agricultural commodities, the absence of men notwithstanding? Studies such as those by Fearn, Hay, Kanogo and Maxon have shown that there was an increase in

agricultural production during the colonial period.<sup>69</sup> Evidence from this study also reveals that there was increase in agricultural production from the second decade of colonial rule. As has already been alluded to, the failure of cotton was due to low price and other related factors discussed in detail in chapters four and five of this thesis. What also emerges from this study of South Nyanza is that men became more engaged in agricultural production during the colonial period because they needed cash to meet colonial demands such as taxation and the purchasing of imported Western goods; they also needed cash to pay for bridewealth.

Ng'ang'a, who also wrote on the peasantry was concerned with the debate on the peasant question in Kenya.<sup>70</sup> He poses the questions, what happens when peasants either accumulate or become impoverished: do they cease to become peasants? Ng'ang'a's key concern is to ask - what has been happening to Kenyan peasantry and what is happening to it? In an attempt to respond to these questions, he starts by looking at the process of accumulation among Kikuyu peasants, focusing on the process of social differentiation within the peasantry. Central to his analyses is the process of change in the pre-capitalist Kikuyu society, the beginning of capitalist production among the Kikuyu in the pre-colonial era, and finally the rise and formation of rural classes among the households in Kikuyuland during colonial times.

In his analysis of the process of change during pre-colonial times, Ng'ang'a critiques scholars who have perceived Kenyan pre-colonial society as a homogeneous. He points

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<sup>69</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy; Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways.

<sup>70</sup> Ng'ang'a, D. M. 'What is Happening to the Kenyan Peasantry?', Review of African Political Economy, pp. 7-16.

out that the main question that should be asked is whether these ‘traditional’ African societies were differentiated. If they were, what were their agencies? He persuasively argues that differentiation took place through accumulation of livestock, agricultural produce and trade. He notes that, those who emerged as a class of accumulators were mainly warriors, raiders, traders and elephant hunters. He observes that this class of accumulators ceased to exist with the emergence of a new class of petty bourgeoisie who had received some kind of missionary education. Ng’ang’a’s findings did not apply to all parts of the country. Evidence from this study of South Nyanza does not corroborate Ng’ang’a’s findings. What emerges from this research reveals that some pre-colonial indigenous accumulators who took advantage of colonialism were appointed as colonial administrators, for instance, chiefs, clerks and court interpreters, and therefore continued to accumulate during the colonial period. This concurs with Njonjo’s findings on Central Kenya.<sup>71</sup>

Ng’anga’s study, though carried out on a different region, Central Province, provides useful comparative insights in the analysis of the process of change in South Nyanza, a different geographical zone. Ng’ang’a’s argument, that during the colonial rule, a class of indigenous capitalist accumulators emerged in Central Province, is supported by studies such as those of Njonjo, Cowen, Nyong’o, Kitching and Kanogo.<sup>72</sup> Nyong’o’s study on Nyanza for example, contends that while a class of indigenous capitalist accumulators

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<sup>71</sup> Njonjo, A. L. ‘The Kenya Peasantry’, A Review of African Political Economy, pp. 27-40.

<sup>72</sup> Cowen, M, ‘Capital and Household Production: The Case of Wattle in Kenya’s Central Province, 1903-1964’, Ph.D. Dissertation, Cambridge University, 1979; Njonjo, A. ‘The Kenya Peasantry’, A Review of African Political Economy; pp. 27-40; Nyong’o, P. A. ‘What ‘the friends of Peasants’ Are and how they pose the Question of Peasantry’, Review of African Political Economy, pp. 17-26; Kitching, G. Class and Economic Change in Kenya.

existed in Central Province, the same did not happen in Nyanza because cotton which was intended to be the region's cash crop had failed and because Nyanza acted more as a labour reserve for the rest of the country.<sup>73</sup> These observations by Nyong'o are confirmed by findings from South Nyanza. This study reveals that African capitalist accumulators did not emerge in South Nyanza as happened in Central Province. As this thesis demonstrates, cotton, that was intended to be the principal cash crop in South Nyanza and Nyanza more widely, was a failure. This forced most households in South Nyanza to engage in migrant wage labour. The area therefore, like the rest of the Province, became a labour reservoir.

Kitching, writing on the impact of colonial capitalism, particularly about how it forced Africans to engage in colonial economy, is concerned with the patterns of class formation within society.<sup>74</sup> He rightly points out that the late twenties and the thirties were the crucial time when the essential parameters of socio-economic differentiation among households were laid down in the most densely populated, agriculturally developed and commercialised areas of Kenya. His findings concur with other studies such as those by Njonjo, Ng'ang'a and Nyong'o.<sup>75</sup> Evidence from South Nyanza demonstrates that the same was also being experienced in the area, particularly from the thirties.

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<sup>73</sup> Nyong'o, P. A. 'The Development of a middle Peasantry in Nyanza', The Review of African Political Economy, pp. 108-120.

<sup>74</sup> Kitching, G. Class and Economic Change in Kenya.

<sup>75</sup> Njonjo, A. 'The Kenyan Peasantry: A Re-Assessment', Review of African Political Economy, pp. 27-40; Ngang'a, D. M. 'What is happening to the Kenyan Peasantry?', Review of African Political Economy, pp. 7-16; Nyong'o, P. A. 'The Peasant Question in Kenya', Review of African Political Economy.



In his assessment of pre-colonial patterns of work, Kitching points out that most small-scale societies were similar, much like others elsewhere in Africa. He notes that where pastoralism was combined with shifting cultivation, men were responsible for the clearing of forests and bush and for the initial turning of earth. Once cleared, women planted, weeded and harvested food crops and unmarried youths were generally engaged in hunting, stock raiding and in inter or intra ethnic fighting. This is in agreement with studies of Nyanza such as those by Hay, Butterman and Maxon.<sup>76</sup> Evidence from South Nyanza also concurs with Kitching's findings on the gendered division of labour in pre-colonial South Nyanza.

Kitching is right in his assertion that young men in the pre-colonial era were engaged in non-productive activities such as fighting, hunting and stock raiding. He argues that the establishment of colonial rule halted such activities and rendered young men's labour free and as a result they engaged in the colonial economy as migrant wage labourers or in agricultural production. This is supported by other studies such as those by Hay, Butterman, Stichter and Maxon.<sup>77</sup>

Kitching's study is significant to this study of South Nyanza because it contains important information on agrarian change during the pre-colonial and colonial era. The study by Kitching however has some limitations that should be pointed out. His analyses of agrarian change during the pre-colonial period are wanting. The section contains many generalisations because he assumes that economic activities were uniform in all societies,

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<sup>76</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Butterman, J. m. 'Luo Social Fomation in Change'; Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways.

<sup>77</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'; Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya; Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways.

an assumption that is false. He does not take into account regional variations in economic activities. Kitching also presents the pre-colonial economy as being static. One other limitation is his analysis of the process of change in Nyanza during colonial rule. He over relies on Hay's study of Kowe as a representative of what was happening in the whole Province.<sup>78</sup> But that was not the case because Hay's study is on a small location in Nyanza Province. Evidence from South Nyanza demonstrates that within Nyanza Province, there are regional variations, which Kitching should have taken into account.

While these scholarly discourses on the peasantry and class formation were being addressed in Kenya, similar debates were also going on in other parts of Africa. In South Africa, Bundy wrote on the rise and fall of the African peasantry.<sup>79</sup> Bundy disputes the argument that had been advanced by Houghton who argued that African culture was a stumbling block to positive and new incentives to ideas.<sup>80</sup> Bundy observes that Africans were rational in response to new market opportunities and responded according to their economic needs. In response to the second question, Bundy explains it from the accumulative perspective, which explains the system of white farming.

The major limitation in Bundy's work is that he fails to explain why there were variations in African response to market opportunities. As this study of South Nyanza demonstrates, there were regional variations in responses to the colonial economy. This thesis reveals

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<sup>78</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'.

<sup>79</sup> Bundy, C. 'The Emergence and Decline of the South African Peasantry', Journal of African Affairs, Vol. 71, Nos. 285, 1972, pp. 29-34.

\_\_\_\_\_, The Rise and fall of the South African Peasantry, Heinemann, Ibadan-Nairobi-Lusaka, 1979.

<sup>80</sup> Houghton, D. H. and Dagut, J. Source Material on South African Economy, 1860-1970, Oxford University Press, Johannesburg, London, New York, 1972.

that even within South Nyanza, there were internal variations. It is further shown that in areas that were closer to administrative centers such as Kisii or Kisumu, households engaged in the colonial economy earlier than in areas that were peripheral.

The study by Bundy was advanced further by Beinart.<sup>81</sup> Beinart's critique of Bundy's work is that Bundy failed to capture the variations of responses to the colonial economy amongst rural Africans. Beinart points out that Bundy had overstressed the centrality of the market. Beinart argues that in order to assess African responses to the colonial economy, it is crucial to focus on political, social, economic and cultural factors that influenced their reaction to market forces. He notes that while a small group of wealthier peasants were able to accumulate resources and survive on land, the majority became marginalised.

The key finding that emerges from Beinart's work is the emergence of a class of capitalist accumulators as a result of the linkage between the pre-colonial African economy and the capitalist mode of production. The other crucial point articulated in his study is the regional variations in response to the colonial economy. His findings are significant to this study of South Nyanza because it contains many similarities with the studies of Kenya on the process of change in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For instance, his work concurs with the evidence of studies such as those of Njonjo, Cowen and Ng'ang'a, who as has already been noted, argue that there was an emergence of indigenous capitalist

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<sup>81</sup> Beinart, W. The Political Economy of Pondoland, 1860-1930, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982.

accumulators in the Central Province of Kenya during colonial rule.<sup>82</sup> Beinart's work is also significant to this thesis because it provides comparative insights on the process of change in rural South Africa.

In a related study of migrant wage labour in South Africa, Delius, writing on the case study of the Pedi, provides crucial insights on the process of change in a rural area.<sup>83</sup> In the study, Delius's main concern is the underdevelopment of the rural areas as a result of being linked to the capitalist economy. He notes that an understanding of the process through which African societies became exporters of labour and increasingly dependant on goods and cash secured in this fashion, is critical to the understanding of the wider process of the underdevelopment of rural areas, which accompanied the emergence of the dominant capitalist mode of production in Africa. He points out that, while there had been a depressingly uniform 'slow decline into rural stagnation' of the areas from which migrant labour has been drawn, the early stages of engagement of African societies in labour migration present a diverse picture, both in terms of the effect on society and the chronology of participation. These observations by Delius concur with the similar labour studies on Kenya in the 1980s such as those by Kitching and Stichter.<sup>84</sup> Delius's study is significant to the present study because it looks at the process of change during pre-colonial and colonial times. The study employs underdevelopment as a conceptual framework in analysing the process of change during the colonial period. As Delius

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<sup>82</sup> Cowen, M. 'Capital and Household Production' 1979; Njonjo, A. 'The Kenya Peasantry', Review of African Political Economy, pp. 27-40; Nganga, D. M. 'What is Happening to the Kenyan Peasantry', Review of African Political Economy, pp. 7-16.

<sup>83</sup> Delius, P. 'Migrant Labour and the Pedi', in Marks, S. and Atmore, A. Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa.

<sup>84</sup> Kitching, G. Class and Economic Change in Kenya; Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya.

demonstrates, the linkage contributed to the underdevelopment of the Pedi due to extraction of labour from the Pedi rural area.

Stichter and Kanogo, writing on migrant wage labour, have argued that the establishment of colonial rule in Kenyan rural areas brought to an end pre-colonial activities, such as wars and stock raiding that subsequently rendered young men free to engage in new colonial opportunities like migrant wage labour, cash crop production and trade.<sup>85</sup> These studies are concerned with how colonial labour and agrarian demands transformed pre-colonial economies of Kenyan societies, and how Africans responded creatively to the new colonial opportunities and constraints. The core issue tackled by these studies is the crucial role the colonial state played in promoting the penetration of capitalism and the growth of capitalist social relations of production. The studies underscore the fundamental role the colonial state played as a direct agent of imperialism. These studies point out that through the appropriation of African land, oppressive taxation, forced labour and the creation of marketing and financial institutions, which were biased against Africans, Africans were marginalised by the colonial economy. What also emerges in these studies is that regionally, the rate at which Africans entered the labour market varied considerably. It was never uniform, as earlier studies on agrarian transformation such as those by Wolff and Van Zwanenberg had indicated.<sup>86</sup>

Recent studies such as those by Berman and Maxon<sup>87</sup> have tackled the role the colonial state played in bringing about agrarian transformation in African rural areas. What

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<sup>85</sup> Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya; Kanogo, T. Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, James Currey, London, Heinemann, Nairobi, Ohio University Press, Athens, 1987.

<sup>86</sup> Wolff, R. D. Britain and Kenya; Van Zwanenberg, R. M. A. Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya.

<sup>87</sup> Berman, B. and Lonsdale J. Unhappy Valley; Maxon, R. N. Going Their Separate Ways.

emerges from these studies is that while the state played a critical role in shaping the agrarian transformation in African rural areas, the state's power was not absolute. As Maxon has remarked, whether one considers the "successes" or "failure" of the state initiatives, it was the households of the regions that had the last word.<sup>88</sup> The pertinent issue here is that agrarian transformation in African rural areas took place through voluntary participation by Africans and was not externally imposed. This argument concurs with what emerges from South Nyanza. This thesis, for instance, shows that cotton, which chiefs were forcing the households in South Nyanza to cultivate, was sabotaged in various ways, for example, by planting it late or intercropping it with staple food crops. This also explains why cotton failed as a cash crop in South Nyanza. As this study reveals, it was voluntary action of the households in South Nyanza that contributed to agrarian change in the area.

In addition to the general studies reviewed above, some micro studies have also been undertaken on the process of change in other locations in Nyanza, a Province to which South Nyanza belongs. These studies are of immediate importance to this thesis. The earliest study on the historical process of change in Nyanza Province that any student of agrarian transformation in the Province will always turn to, as a standard reference is Fearn's An African Economy.<sup>89</sup> In this pioneering study, the key issue dealt with is the development of the agrarian economy in Nyanza in the twentieth century. He identifies two stages in relation to market opportunities and the response to them. First, the period 1903 to 1930 were years of slow development, which he calls the static economy,

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<sup>88</sup> Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways, p. 272.

<sup>89</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy.

distinguished by the failure to establish cotton as an export crop. Second, from 1930 onwards, despite the world depression of the early thirties, the Nyanzan economy grew. He points out that this was facilitated by an expansion of the market opportunities for the sale of surplus foodstuffs grown by the households in the Province.

The question that Fearn raises is: by what standard should change be measured in an African economy where economic judgment and status values may differ greatly from those advanced Western countries? In response to the question, Fearn points out that he selected as a standard of measurement the extent to which the Nyanzan economy had responded to an introduced cash economy. He argues that the fact that cash was introduced and that there had been some response, varying in extent in the two periods of static and stimulated economy, is one reason for this standard of measurement.

Fearn was also concerned with the issue of comparison between Nyanzan economy and Buganda in the neighbouring country, Uganda. There, the question he poses is: why did the Baganda embrace cotton cultivation more rapidly and with greater enthusiasm than the Nyanza people? Was this due to the fact that the Baganda were a more 'advanced people?' or because of the method of introduction? He then ascribed the success of cotton cultivation in Buganda to the Baganda pre-colonial system of chieftaincy. He argued that when cotton was introduced into Buganda, the British administrators used the Baganda chiefs to introduce cotton among their subjects, and that the Baganda readily accepted cotton cultivation because they were used to taking instructions from their chiefs, in contrast to Nyanza where there were no strong and respected pre-colonial institutions of

chieftaincy. As a result, the households in Nyanza could not readily accept orders from the colonial chiefs whose authorities they questioned. Fearn's answer is not entirely convincing. How is it, for example, that the households in Nyanza embraced the cultivation of other crops such as maize and groundnuts, which were also introduced into the area by the same colonial chiefs? Evidence from studies on Nyanza reveals that the failure of cotton as a cash crop was not due to ineffective promotion by the chiefs, but to low prices, to its being labour intensive and to its interference with the agricultural cycle of the staple food crops.<sup>90</sup>

Fearn's study is relevant to this thesis because he focuses on the agrarian transformation in Nyanza during the colonial period. The significant issue to which Fearn draws our attention is the role of the state and state agents as facilitators of the agrarian transformation in African rural areas. However, Fearn's work contains some limitations. He sees the pre-colonial economy of Nyanza to have been static. As this thesis reveals, the pre-colonial economy of South Nyanza and Nyanza more generally was dynamic, marked by a number of changes. Chapter two discusses the pre-colonial economy of South Nyanza and demonstrates that the economy was not static. The second related limitation in Fearn's work is that he does not analyse how the linkage between the pre-colonial economy of Nyanza and the colonial economy impacted on the former. He does not explain whether the transformation was partial or complete. Finally, Fearn does not

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<sup>90</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'; Nyong'o, P. A. 'The Development of a Middle Peasantry in Nyanza', Review of African Political Economy pp. 108-120.



assess the impact of the transformation on the gender, generational and the political structure of households in Nyanza.

Hay and Butterman also carried out detailed studies of the process of change in Nyanza and both emphasised the dynamic nature of African economy during pre-colonial and colonial times.<sup>91</sup> In her detailed study of Kowe, Hay is basically concerned to rebut the negative view that was held by historians, economists and administrators that had portrayed the Luo of Nyanza as being conservative to change. She cites Fearn<sup>92</sup> who had presented economic change in Nyanza during colonial period as the product of European and Asian activities. Fearn had argued that the economic progress had been slow in Nyanza because the Luo clung to traditional practices. In another stereotyped assessment of the Luo, Hay quotes Huxley who wrote: “of all the major Kenyan people’s... The Luo have put up the stiffest resistance to the forward march of progress in the agricultural fields”.<sup>93</sup>

Hay’s concern in her study was to disprove the view that the Luo peasants were conservatives. She did this by showing that far reaching changes occurred in the agricultural system in Kowe during the pre-colonial and colonial period. In an attempt to capture that dynamic dimension, her study proceeded from these assumptions:

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<sup>91</sup> Hay, J. M. ‘Economic Change in Luoland’; Butterman, J. M. ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’.

<sup>92</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy.

<sup>93</sup> Huxley, E. A New Earth, William Morrow, New York, 1960.

- (i) That economic change was an on going feature of the Luo society (and most African societies) both before and during colonial rule.
- (ii) That it would be possible to identify generalized patterns of economic change at the local level, and that the patterns observed an inner logic of dynamisms of their own which reflected the historical process at work in the community and were not simply a response to the initiatives of the colonial government.
- (iii) That a great deal of information on economic change could be gathered from oral traditions, which could also be used to supplement and correct the evidence of administrative records.

Another issue that Hay tackles is the problem of generalisations. She notes that European travellers, settlers and colonial administrators criticised African people they came into contact with as lazy, superstitious, and improvident. She also claims that such generalised perceptions have not entirely disappeared from Western scholarship about Africa. Hay points out that these generalisations were based on certain assumptions about the nature of African traditional societies. Crucial to such assumptions were the stereotypical Western perceptions of the pre-colonial African society as being static, and as a closed economy and limited to subsistence life. This pattern of the economy and society was assumed to be the “zero point of culture change,” the traditional economy which changed minimally before European colonial rule. Hay aimed at disproving such generalisations by showing that the pre-colonial economy of Kowe was dynamic, marked by a number of changes. Findings of this study concur with Hay’s. This study demonstrates that

remarkable changes occurred in the economy of the households in South Nyanza during the pre-colonial period. Chapter two discusses these in detail.

The theoretical framework employed in Hay's study is innovation. She defines innovation as any idea, action, or thing that is new because it differs qualitatively from existing economic norms, such as a man's decision to help in the weeding, the act of engaging in long-distance cattle trade, or using the ox-drawn plough. As such, innovation is the essence of economic change.<sup>94</sup> For instance, in pre-colonial Kowe, one significant innovation that enhanced change was the adoption of a new type of hoe, *nya-yimbo*, which Hay argues was more effective in agricultural production than the wooden hoe, *rahaya*, that was in general use. During colonial period, Hay notes that new innovations were also adopted by the households in Kowe, such as the incorporation of new cash crops like maize, groundnuts and cotton as well as new agricultural implements such as iron hoes (*jembes*) and ox-drawn ploughs into the economy, which facilitated further change in the economy.

Hay also discusses the participation of the people of Central Nyanza including the people of Kowe in the Second World War, 1939-1945, and the impact of the war on Central Nyanza. She notes that the people of Central Nyanza were required, as during World War 1, to contribute foodstuffs, cattle, money, labour and above all, their own men, in the service of the European war. The crucial point she highlights is that when it became apparent to the local population that conditions of the military service were far better than

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<sup>94</sup> Hay J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', pp. 53-54.

they had been in 1914, a number of people volunteered to serve in the military. As a result, by 1943, the administration discontinued forced military recruitment in Central Kavirondo, as enough men came out to participate in the war. One of the critical effects of the war, as Hay points out, is that increased crop production took place, particularly of maize and sorghum, to feed the troops in the Middle East. The volume of maize exported from Nyanza increased from 246, 767 bags of 200 lbs in 1937 to 640, 550 bags in 1945. Butterman also supports these observations.<sup>95</sup> Evidence from this study also shows that in South Nyanza, as elsewhere in the Province, there was increased agricultural production during the war.

Hay also points out that by 1945 Central Kavirondo District had provided more than 20,000 men for the King's African Rifles and the Pioneers. She notes that the three Kavirondo Districts (South, Central and North) provided half the total men needed for the labour corps. Evidence from this study shows that South Nyanza contributed 9,000 men to the military service. What also emerges from this study of South Nyanza is that civil and military conscription accelerated the tendency to remove labour from the rural areas. Moreover the family allowances and take-home pay of the servicemen pumped cash into the rural areas, which made prices of commodities escalate because there was an excess supply of money in the area.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'.

<sup>96</sup> Kenya National Archives, hereafter referred to KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA, 1942, p. 4.

Hay's work is significant to this study of South Nyanza because it is also concerned with the process of change in a rural Kenya. The key point that emerges in her study is that the pre-colonial economy of Kowe was never static but dynamic as during the colonial period. The other crucial argument that emerges in Hay's work is that economic changes in Kowe during the colonial period were due to the initiatives of the people and not a response to the government policy. What can be seen from her study is that the linkage (articulation) of the pre-colonial economy of Kowe with the colonial economy led to the transformation of the economy of Kowe. However this is only by implication since her study does not address itself to Kenya's agrarian debates of the 1970s, the underdevelopment /dependency perspectives. This may well explain why she ends up employing innovation as a conceptual framework. As has already been noted, the paradigmatic application of underdevelopment or dependency perspectives to Kenya first appeared in Leys's seminal work, Underdevelopment in Kenya.<sup>97</sup> The other limitation in Hay's work is over reliance on oral traditions as a primary source. While there is no gainsaying the relevance of oral traditions as an historical source, their inherent limitations should not be lost sight of. They become more relevant if they can be crosschecked with other documentary sources to verify their authenticity. Her pre-colonial information is mostly based on oral sources. While it is true that written sources on the Luo were scarce before colonial rule, evidence from this study of South Nyanza reveals the rich pre-colonial missionary records on the Luo and other neighbouring communities which were compiled by the missionaries based at the coast from the reports provided by the Arabs and Swahili slave traders who went into the interior to trade. They

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<sup>97</sup> Leys, C. Underdevelopment in Kenya.

provide vital information on what was happening in the interior before the establishment of colonial rule. This study has relied heavily on these missionary reports in writing chapter two of this thesis. These reports provide useful information on South Nyanza and Nyanza more generally during the pre-colonial period.

Butterman's<sup>98</sup> scope of study is defined by one broad question: What happened to the pre-colonial social formation when they were linked to the world capitalist system through the apparatus of the colonial state? In response to this question, she notes that the linkage strained and distorted the original Luo social organisation. She argues that in the process of linking the local economies to the world capitalist order, discrete elements of the social formation were maintained, while others were suppressed, or transformed. According to Butterman, households and homesteads, the primary units in agricultural production were preserved. At the same time the larger social units of segment and the maximal lineage were transformed by the coercive power of the colonial state to serve as conduits of transfer of surplus out of the local economies into the settler, imperial and international sectors. One problem of Butterman's analysis is the notion that the linkage, an idea disputed by other studies, never affected the household and homestead. In this regard, Stichter's analysis appears to be more balanced, when she notes:

The pre-capitalist economy was neither 'preserved' under the impact of world capitalism. It was a recast in an entirely new form, that of exporter of labour. Lineage relations of production were modified in varying ways, either in the

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<sup>98</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Lou Social Formation in Change'.

direction of capitalist exchange or in the direction of intensified exploitation of 'traditional' obligations in the service of the (forced) labour market.<sup>99</sup>

This study of South Nyanza shows that both the households and the homesteads were equally affected by the impact of colonial capitalism.

Butterman uses the concept of modes of production in analysing pre-colonial economies of Karachuonyo and Kanyamkago. She supports the use of mode of production because it analyses the relations between the elders and juniors. She points out that an examination of the relations of distribution of the product, then, and the reproduction of the relations of production over time, form one focus in the analysis of pre-capitalist societies. It is an analysis of the relations between elders and juniors.<sup>100</sup> In her analysis of the process of change during colonial period, she identifies three available approaches. The first is one shared by colonial administrators and historians who regarded colonialism as an agent through which African societies were redeemed from being static and transformed into modernised entities, a process that is considered progress. Butterman points out that in the writing of Kenya's agrarian history, such a perspective was taken by Fearn.<sup>101</sup> The second position is that of underdevelopment theory, which tends to ascribe to colonialism, as an agent of capitalism, an unrelieved exploitation. A surplus was created off local economies and transferred to the settler and metropolitan sectors through the

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<sup>99</sup> Sticher, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya, p. 28.

<sup>100</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 13.

<sup>101</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy.

agency of the colonial state.<sup>102</sup> The third position is that recent variants of underdevelopment have pointed out that rather than being aggressively exploitative, capitalism in colonial situations was not exploitative enough. As is well known, Marx considered capitalism a progressive force in the sense that it would ultimately lead to its own demise into communism. From this point of view he could defend the British presence in India.<sup>103</sup> In her assessment of the effect of colonialism on the local economy, Butterman has pointed out that surplus was creamed off local economies and transferred to the settler and metropolitan sector through the agency of the colonial state. She argues that in Kenya, the creation of the landless proletariat was to be avoided at all cost, and therefore the administrators in Kenya defended traditional land holding patterns. This thesis reveals that in South Nyanza there was no land alienation for the white settlers. Land was only taken from some households to build schools, mission stations, health, and government institutions.

Finally, Butterman argues that sheer distance from the centers - the peripheral positions of the two locations of Karachuonyo and Kanyamkago in the scheme of the colonial economy-also played a critical role in the marginalisation of the two locations.<sup>104</sup> In a nutshell, she concludes that it was not only unequal exchange of trade that prevailed between the local people and the colonial state that caused the two locations to be marginalised, but their being located far from the economic centre, Kisumu, equally contributed. Evidence from South Nyanza corroborates Butterman's finding that the

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<sup>102</sup> Rodney, W. How Europe Underdeveloped Africa.

<sup>103</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', pp. 19-20.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. p. 19.



peripheral location of an area plays a pertinent role in its marginalisation. What emerges from this study demonstrates that South Nyanza, being far from the centre of economic hub, Kisumu, and due to inadequate infrastructure during the first two decades of colonial rule, was hindered in its immediate integration into the colonial economy, unlike Central and North Nyanza districts.

Butterman's study is significant to the present research because she also employs the conceptual framework of underdevelopment as one of the theories in analysing agrarian transformation in the rural locations of Karachuonyo and Kanyamkago. The core issue that arises from her work is that the unequal exchange of trade between the colonial state and the households led to underdevelopment of the areas. The other critical issue that is highlighted in her study is that the colonial state played a significant role in facilitating the transfer of surplus from African rural areas to the settler and metropolitan sectors. One shortcoming in the study is that like Hay she does not tell us how the process of change during the pre-colonial era impacted on the gender, generational and political structures.

Ndege, writing on the struggles for the market in western Kenya, is concerned with three basic issues: firstly, the study considers how the activities of different interests, namely, the British metropolitan firms and their local branches in Kenya, the colonial office in London, the colonial state in Kenya, the European settlers, Indian traders and Africans influenced the development of commodity production and trade in western Kenya during

the 1930s.<sup>105</sup> He argues that these different interests operated within a system of capitalism that linked their activities through the market. He points out that this resulted in struggles for the control of the market. Secondly, the study is concerned with the relationship among the different interests that struggled for the market in Kenya's colonial economy. Ndege argues that the relationships were both economic and political as the struggles involved the making choices between alternative courses of action, bargaining with others, the use of ideology and power to influence the action of other interests, and the establishment of organisations and institutions which were aimed at furthering the interests of the different participants. Finally, Ndege's study highlights the unpredictable environment within which the participants operated during the 1930s. He remarks that the world economy was experiencing a slump. He further notes that in western Kenya there were climatic variations that caused too much rain or drought. In addition, he notes that there were also infestations by locusts and other crop pests, which disrupted agricultural production in the area. The study therefore examines how the different participants coped with the challenges of the time.

The theoretical framework that Ndege utilises in his study is a political economy approach, which, as he quotes Jean Ensminger: "combines the individual actor approach of economics, anthropology's appreciation of institutional constraints, incentives and ideology, and attention to power associated with Marxist analyses."<sup>106</sup> The second

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<sup>105</sup> Ndege, P. O. 'Struggles For Market: The Political Economy of Commodity Production and Trade in Western Kenya, 1929-1939, Ph.D. Dissertation, West Virginia University, 1993.

<sup>106</sup> Ensminger, J. The Making of a Market: The Institutional Transformation of an African Society, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 1.

conceptual framework that he employs in the study is institutional approach. This perspective, as he explains, considers the influence of ideology, institutions, organization and power on struggles for the market and how these in turn determined the development of commodity production and trade in western Kenya. He points out that this perspective determined the choices made by the different actors in the economy.

Ndege argues that institutions and organisations are an important focus of analysis because they provide the framework within which choices and actions regarding production and trade were undertaken. He observes that they were the locus of struggles and politics. On the political economy perspective utilised in the study, Ndege states that it treats ideology, institutions and power as interlinked and not as completely autonomous entities. Each influenced the other and the way the different interests struggled for the control of the market. The struggles concerned the allocation of resources in production, the determination of the types, quantity and value of commodities, the ideas and the rules governing production and trade and access to state power.

Ndege's study area, western Kenya, is currently composed of three Provinces; namely, Nyanza, Western and a section of Rift Valley. This is a vast area with diverse geographical features. The ethnic composition of the area is diverse too. The ethnic groups found in this region include the Luo, Abagusii, Abakuria, Luhyia, Teso, Bagisu, Nandi and Kipsigis. The response of the households to colonialism varied from region to region; there was no uniformity in response to colonialism. Even within a region, there

were variations in response to colonialism. The study does not show regional variations in response to the struggle for the control of the market.

Gender studies were in vogue from the late 1980s. Gender is a social construct that asserts that the expectations and responsibilities of men and women are not always biologically determined.<sup>107</sup> There are some general works on Kenya that have focused on women studies, more so on the process of change during pre-colonial and colonial times. These include works such as those by Achola and Kanogo.<sup>108</sup> The key issue addressed in these studies is that African women's engagement in economic life was deeply rooted in all communities in Kenya as well as the rest of the continent. These studies argue that in pre-colonial African societies, the gender division of labour allocated responsibilities for cultivation to women, who could barter or sell their excess produce, while men primarily engaged in livestock keeping and hunting. These observations concur with findings from South Nyanza. Evidence of this study indicates that in pre-colonial South Nyanza, women were more involved in agricultural production than men. This research shows that men were basically engaged in livestock keeping, hunting, fishing in the lake and also in wars. Achola points out that in most parts of Africa, women were the backbone of rural farming during pre-colonial times. The studies note that as the international market economy encroached more rapidly on Africa during the colonial rule, a major setback for women arose from male migration from the rural areas to towns, plantations and mines

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<sup>107</sup> Synder, M.C. and Tadesse, M. African Women and Development.

<sup>108</sup> Achola, P.O. Towards Strategies for Strengthening the Position of Women; Kanogo, T. African Women in Colonial Kenya 1900-1950, James Currey, Oxford, East African Educational Books, Nairobi, Ohio University Press, Athens, 2005.

seeking wage labour. The studies observe that men's migration left women on the farms doing both men's and women's work.

One major limitation in the studies is that they fail to inform us why women became more involved in agricultural production than men during the pre-colonial period. The other limitation in the studies is that since they are macro studies, they tend to generalise their findings. As has already been alluded to, women became more engaged in agricultural production because as communities shifted to crop production as a primary economic activity, women whose labour was previously free became involved in crop production. The other limitation is that these studies only focus on agriculture as the activity in which women became involved during the colonial period. Evidence from South Nyanza shows that women also became more involved in trade than before since a number of markets and trading centers were set up by the colonial state within reach. This study also reveals that with the establishment of Christianity in South Nyanza, a number of women converted to Christianity. This contributed to major change in their lives. They became aware of their rights, which they now demanded. These rights included the rights to be dressed, education and the right of freedom to choose a husband.

In addition to these general gender studies, other gender studies carried out on Nyanza include such as those by Pala and Francis, focused on how the position of women had been transformed during pre-colonial and colonial times.<sup>109</sup> Pala utilises the concept of 'position' of women as a theoretical guide to the study. She defines the concept of

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<sup>109</sup> Pala, A. O. 'Changes in Economy and Ideology'; Francis, E. 'Migration and Changing Division of Labour: Gender Relations and Economic Change in Koguta, Western Kenya', Ph.D. Thesis, Oxford University, 1995.

'position' of women as women's access to the means of production in the course of different historical phases of society's development. Her focus of study is the impact of the process of social transformation on women among the Luo from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial period. Her key argument is that change was a continuous process in the history of women among the Luo. She asserts that the division of labour between men and women was well defined from the pre-colonial to post colonial era. Pala positively points out that a major structural change that occurred in Luo socio-economic organisation before colonial rule was when the predominant economic activity shifted from cattle keeping to crop production, which led to a more sedentary way of life. She notes that during the colonial period, men's productive activities came to acquire monetarised value quite rapidly and almost completely, while women preponderated in the partial or non-monetarised sphere of production. She correctly points out that during the colonial period, women's productive efforts, whether they generated cash or not, tended to be absorbed by the household's food needs.

The study by Pala contains some limitations that should be pointed out. For instance, Pala does not tell us how the role of women changed during the pre-colonial period when the economy of the Luo shifted from cattle keeping to crop production as a primary economic activity. She also highlights how women became more engaged in food production during the colonial period, but she does not explain the circumstances under which women's role shifted during the colonial period to become more engaged in food production. Evidence from South Nyanza shows that as men went on migrant wage labour more of the burden of agricultural production fell on women than ever before. The

other limitation in Pala's study is that her sources are mainly secondary, books and a few journals. There is a glaring lack of primary sources such as archival, oral traditions as well as missionary records. Her study is too generalised, narrative and does not have a single piece of statistical data to back up her argument of the process of change.

Francis, who also focussed on gender relations among households in Koguta, has pointed out that an important advance in the understanding of agrarian change in Africa has been the growing comprehension that the transformation of regions through their incorporation into the international economy has rested on changes in key domestic relationships. She rightly argues that economic change during the colonial period impacted on the division of labour between men and women as well as rights over resources. Francis notes that the introduction of migrant wage labour by the colonial administration rested on reorganisation of household forms, division of labour and domestic responsibilities.<sup>110</sup>

Francis's analysis of agrarian transformation during the pre-colonial period concurs with findings of this study of South Nyanza. She correctly argues that the Luo communities were in a state of a flux in the years immediately before the arrival of the British in the 1890s, with many communities shifting from cattle keeping to crop production as a primary economic activity. She attributes the shift in the economy to the movement of some Luo communities from the drier areas around Lake Victoria to higher grounds, which were more suitable for crop production. She rightly points out that there appears to have

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<sup>110</sup> Francis, E. 'Migration and Changing Divisions of Labour.'

been a concomitant increase in male involvement in agricultural production, but, on the whole, she notes, women undertook the bulk of agricultural and domestic work.

Francis's observation that in the 1930s agriculture was on a spiral decline in Koguta as a result of an ever-increasing migrant wage labour is not supported by studies such as those by Hay, Onduru and Maxon, have all shown that areas such as Central Nyanza (to which Koguta belonged) and North Nyanza (now Western Province) which had high population density, agriculture declined due to scarcity and over use of land not due to large scale migrant labour as Francis suggests.<sup>111</sup> This study of South Nyanza investigates how agricultural production, livestock keeping, and population density influenced the engagement of the households on migrant wage labour. Evidence from this study reveals that South Nyanza, which was less densely populated and rich in agricultural produce and livestock, the households were initially reluctant to take part in migrant wage labour since they could meet their colonial needs from agricultural and livestock proceeds. Francis has rightly observed that, as more and more men from Koguta went out on migrant wage labour, women bore greater agricultural responsibilities than before.

Francis's study is pertinent to this study of South Nyanza because it is concerned with the process of change during pre-colonial and colonial times and more particularly on gender relations. The study also analyses the impact of the linkage of the pre-colonial economy of Koguta with the colonial capitalism.

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<sup>111</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Onduru, T. A. 'Some Aspects of Economic Change'; Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways.



## **Chapters Presentation**

### **Chapter Two**

This chapter examines the pre-colonial economy of South Nyanza. The chapter argues that the main economic change that occurred in the pre-colonial South Nyanza was a shift from pastoralism to crop production as a primary economic activity. The shift was result of the outbreak of cattle epidemics such as rinderpest. The chapter also discusses the social and political organisation of the households in South Nyanza during pre-colonial times. The chapter concludes that the pre-colonial economy of South Nyanza was not static but dynamic.

### **Chapter Three**

The chapter analyses the establishment of colonial rule in South Nyanza from 1903 to 1914 and the response of the households in the area to colonial capitalism. The chapter argues that the households in South Nyanza were incorporated into colonial capitalism when the colonial state introduced taxation, which the households were required to pay in cash. This forced the households to engage in migrant wage labour, cash crop production, livestock production or trade in order to generate cash to meet colonial demands. The chapter also examines the introduction of the new cash crops and agricultural implements into South Nyanza. The chapter concludes that the establishment of colonial rule in South Nyanza contributed further to the process of economic change in the area.

## **Chapter Four**

This chapter assesses the agrarian transformation in South Nyanza from 1915 to 1930. The chapter argues that up to the 1920s, the households in South Nyanza were still experimenting with new crops and agricultural implements in their agricultural cycle. The chapter discusses in detail why cotton failed as a cash crop in South Nyanza and Nyanza Province in general. The chapter also examines the construction of infrastructure in South Nyanza and how it facilitated the integration of the area into colonial capitalism. The chapter demonstrates that up to the 1920s, Indians dominated trade in the area.

## **Chapter Five**

Chapter five continues to examine the agrarian transformation from the 1930 to 1945. During the period under consideration, the chapter demonstrates that Africans gradually displaced Indian dominance in trade at the trading centers in South Nyanza and Nyanza in general. The chapter concludes that the period from 1930 to 1945 was marked by increased agricultural production in the area.

## **Chapter Six**

The chapter examines migrant wage labour engagement by the households in South Nyanza from 1920 to 1945. The chapter argues that 1922 marked a turning point in wage engagement by the households in South Nyanza. The households in South Nyanza were already engaging on migrant wage labour all over the Protectorate, but were still not going out on a large scale those those in Central and North Kavirondo Districts. The chapter argues that the establishment of infrastructure in South Nyanza was crucial in

enhancing the incorporation of the households in the area on migrant wage labour. The chapter also argues that the establishment of centres of economic activities within the reach of households in South Nyanza facilitated their engagement in migrant wage labour. The chapter concludes that from the 1930s, migrant wage labour had become a way of life for most households in South Nyanza.

### **Chapter Seven**

This chapter is a summary and conclusion of the thesis. The conclusion arrived at is that economic change was a continuous process in South Nyanza during both pre-colonial and colonial times.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **PRE-COLONIAL SOUTH NYANZA, 1880 TO 1902**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The first section of this chapter outlines the migration and settlement of the Luo in South Nyanza and briefly outlines the geographical setting of the area. The bulk of the chapter examines the pre-colonial organisation of South Nyanza, namely, social, economic and political. The chapter examines both internal and external dynamics that promoted the process of change in pre-colonial South Nyanza. The chapter demonstrates that ecological factors, the outbreak of natural catastrophes and trade played a critical role in prompting economic change in pre-colonial South Nyanza. The chapter also seeks to analyse how these changes impacted on the gender, generational and political structures of the households in South Nyanza during pre-colonial times. The chapter provides a base line for the rest of the chapters because it offers a background in the understanding of the process of change that occurred when the area was colonised and incorporated into the colonial economy.

#### **The peopling of South Nyanza**

The people of South Nyanza are a section of the Luo, a River-Lake Nilotic speaking people who originated from the Bahr-el-Ghazel region, in the present republic of Sudan.

The River-Lake Nilotic speakers, the Luo, in the course of their migration southwards, appear initially to have migrated into the areas that more or less resembled the hot or flat lands of the Sudan from where they originated.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the East African Bantu speakers whose economy was agriculturally oriented, and who therefore occupied high grounds with adequate rainfall where they practised hoe agriculture, the River-Lake Nilotic speakers showed preference for short grass-land or savannah woodland areas suitable for a mixed economy of seed culture and livestock keeping.<sup>2</sup> Ogot estimated that the Luo arrived in Nyanza Province between 1490 and 1600 A.D. The pre-Luo settlers of the province were Bantu, the highland Nilotic and plains Nilotic speakers. The encounter between the Luo and early occupants of Nyanza led to some of the latter occupants being assimilated by the Luo, while others migrated to the areas they currently occupy.

The Luo who settled in South Nyanza had crossed Winam Gulf from Uyoma probably between A.D. 1730 and A.D. 1760. The Luo occupation of South Nyanza did not take place all at once; it occurred over a period of time.<sup>3</sup> They occupied South Nyanza from diverse places and arrived at different times. The pre-Luo settlers of South Nyanza were Bantu and plains Nilotic speakers. Many were forced to migrate to distant parts; the Luo assimilated those who opted to remain. Later, other Bantu groups who migrated from Buganda, the Abasuba, settled on Rusinga and Mfangano islands, while some settled on

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<sup>1</sup> Ogot, B. A. History of the Southern Luo: Migration and Settlement, East African Publishing House Nairobi, 1967, pp. 135-153.

<sup>2</sup> Hobley, C. W. 'Anthropological Studies in Kavirondo and Nandi', The Journal of Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, vol. 33, 1903, p. 326.

<sup>3</sup> Ogot, B. A. History of the Southern Luo, p. 192; Ochieng, W. R. An Outline History of Nyanza Province up to 1914, East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1974, p. 29.

the mainland. The interaction between them and the Luo led to them being assimilated by the Luo and they are today Luoised.

### **Geographical Setting**

South Nyanza is located in the South Western Kenya along Lake Victoria. It covers an area of 7,778 square kilometres (5,714 sq. km land area and 2,046 sq. km water). It borders Nyamira, Kisii and Nyando districts to the east. To the south it borders Gucha and Kuria districts, and the republic of Tanzania. To the west it borders the republic of Uganda. South Nyanza is made up of five districts: Rachuonyo, Homa-Bay, Migori, Suba, and Rongo districts. Rainfall varies from 700 to 800 mm near the lakeshore to 1,500 mm in the higher eastern areas of the region. During the “long rains” that occur between March and July, the region receives about 40% of the annual total rainfall and about 28% in the “short rains” that fall between October and December.<sup>4</sup> During the long rains, large rivers such as Sondu (Miriu), Riana and Kuja burst their banks particularly in the lower regions near the lake causing flooding in the areas.<sup>5</sup>

South Nyanza is divided into two main relief regions:

(1) Lakeshore (Lowlands):

These range from 1,163 to 1,219 metres above sea level. The zone is bounded by an extensive boomerang-shaped shoreline measuring approximately 260 km in length

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<sup>4</sup> South Nyanza Development Plan, 1984-1988, Ministry of Planning and National Development, Nairobi, Kenya, pp. 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Ominde, S. H. Land and Population Movements in Kenya, Heinemann, London, Nairobi, Ibadan, 1968, p.16.

and by an escarpment-like terrain inland. To the south of Karungu Bay, lakeshore lowland contains other numerous dry riverbeds apart from Kuja River.

(2) Inland Plateau:

This begins at the 1,219 metres contour. The plateau consists of an undulating surface formed by sub-aerial erosion. In the central area of the region, is a gently rolling plateau with well-drained slopes in most parts. On the extreme northern section of the plateau are the residuals of the Gwasssi and Gembe hills and further east the Homa mountain massif. These hill complexes resulted from volcanic eruptions, other earth movements and later phases of erosion.

South Nyanza is divided into three main ecological zones:

(a) The Lakeshore Savannah Areas

These areas correspond largely with the lakeshore lowland relief region receiving 700 to 800 mm of rainfall annually. These areas mainly contain heavy black cotton soils. The main staple crops grown in the area include sorghum millet, maize and groundnuts. The main economic activity in the area is the fishing industry. This activity is one of the pillars of the economy of the households in the areas around the lake. The traditional fishing economy relies on a wide range of fish species; and commercial fishing depends on the species of *tilapia esculenta* and *tilapia variabilis*. The former is commonly found in the shallow areas of the

lake, while the latter is found predominantly in the areas off the shores.<sup>6</sup> The Nile perch is also a known commercial fish that generates 6 billion shillings annually from exports.<sup>7</sup> Lastly but not least is the *omena* (of a sardine size).<sup>8</sup>

#### (b) High Rainfall Savannah Belt

In between the lakeshore savannah areas and the fertile Star Grass areas is the High Rainfall Savannah region. The areas below 1,350 metres contour line receive an annual rainfall between 1,400 mm and 1,500 mm. This zone mainly occurs in the central parts of the region. The hot conditions, which prevail, added to the pockets of black cotton soils on the upland areas, make this zone suitable for the cultivation of a wide variety of crops as well as livestock keeping. Agricultural activity of this intervening region centres on the production of staple food crops such as sorghum millet, varying in importance in accordance to the altitude and the rainfall pattern. In addition, maize and groundnuts are also cultivated in this region. Cassava is also popular as a famine relief staple food. Banana is a favourite and is commonly cultivated on the wetter fringes of the region.<sup>9</sup> The productivity of the area guarantees adequate agricultural produce to the people. The high rainfall savannah belt is also suitable for livestock keeping. People rear cattle, goats and sheep. But livestock keeping is still threatened by the

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<sup>6</sup> Ominde S. H. Land and Population Movements, p.31.

<sup>7</sup> Daily Nation on line, 17-9-2008.

<sup>8</sup> Odaga, A. B. Dholuo-English Dictionary, Lake Publishers and Enterprises Ltd, Kisumu, 2005, p. 266; Fearn, H. An African Economy, p. 85.

<sup>9</sup> Ominde, S. H. Land and Population Movements, p. 32.



presence of tsetse fly, which causes trypanosomiasis in cattle, particularly in the Lambwe valley area.

(c) Star Grass Belt

These areas are of special importance because they are part of the limited lands of high potential on which the agricultural economy of the country is based. This belt is found at approximately 1,350 to 1,800 metres above sea level. It enjoys two distinct rainfall seasons, the “long” and “short” rainfalls. This supports two crop seasons, and receives over 1,300 mm rainfall in total. The rich variety of soils can and do support both cash and subsistence crops. The staple crops cultivated in this region include finger millet, sorghum, sweet potatoes bananas and sesame. Maize has become the most important cereal though formerly finger millet and sorghum were the leading cereals. The cash crops grown in this region include tea, coffee and sugar cane. The latter is the leading cash crop in the area.<sup>10</sup>

## **Soils**

The region has a variety of soils, which are highly localised. The lakeshore lowlands, are characterised by comparatively dry conditions, and have rich alluvial deposits at the mouth of major rivers such as Kuja, Awach and Sondu. These pockets of black cotton soil offer prospects for cultivation of a wide variety of crops, the only limiting factor being the irregularity of rain water supply. The slopes of hills in the plateau consist mostly of brown clay soil and pockets of greyzems and gleysols. In the upper savannah belt (inland plateau), where between 1000 and 1,300 of rainfall is received annually,

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<sup>10</sup> South Nyanza District Development Plan, 1989-1993, Ministry of Planning and National Development, Nairobi, Kenya, p.6; Ominde, S. H. Land and Population Movement, pp. 33-35.

planasols are dominant, especially on poorly drained areas. The well-drained upland region is dominated by brown clay soils.

### **Natural Resources**

The most important natural resource in South Nyanza is its population. Currently the total population of South Nyanza is about three million. Out of its population, there is a total labour force of over one million. The second most crucial natural resource is agricultural land.<sup>11</sup> The region, especially the middle and lower zones is still sparsely populated, thereby attracting a number of immigrants from the neighbouring regions. Another major natural resource is the large water mass of Lake Victoria with its abundant fish life, which the people of South Nyanza have relied on for fish supply. There are also numerous rivers in the region.

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<sup>11</sup> South Nyanza District Development Plan, 1989-1993, p. 6.

A MAP OF KENYA, SHOWING STUDY AREA, SOUTH NYANZA.

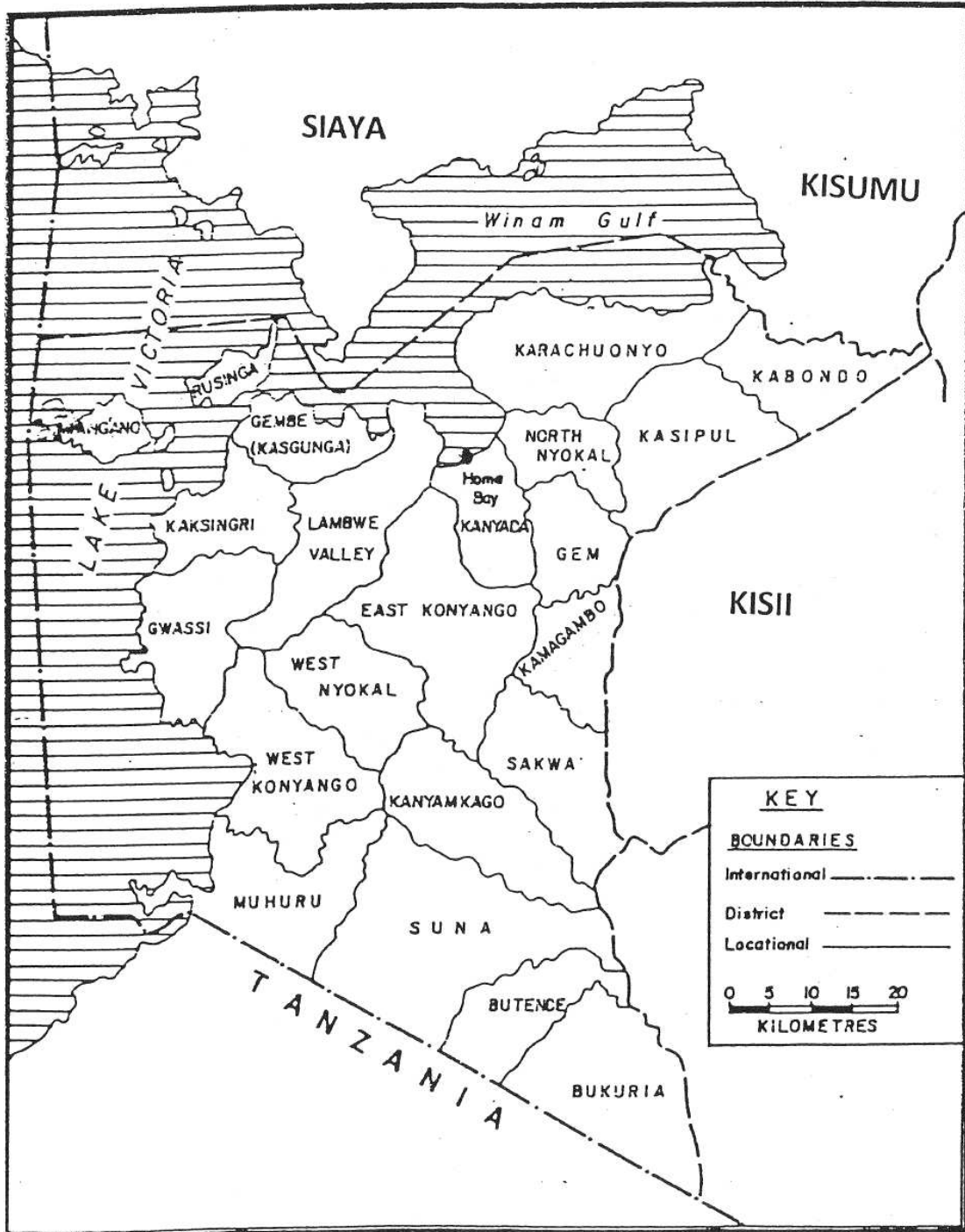


Key:

The study area.

A MAP OF THE STUDY AREA, SOUTH NYANZA.

## LOCATIONS IN SOUTH NYANZA



The foregoing section has examined the settlement of South Nyanza and the ecology of the area. With this geographical background, the chapter now proceeds to examine the main subject matter of the chapter, pre-colonial South Nyanza.

## **PRE-COLONIAL SOUTH NYANZA**

In pre-colonial South Nyanza, the daily lives of the households were organised in three basic spheres: social, economic and political. Our analysis of change will therefore focus on these three components. First, this chapter examines social organisation.

### **Social Organisation**

In pre-colonial South Nyanza, the household was the primary unit of social organisation. It was made up of a wife and her children, who constituted the basic unit of production, with the occasional assistance of the husband. The household formed part of the larger homestead that consisted of several households, depending on the number of wives a man had.<sup>12</sup> The wife, according to tradition, was the legal owner of the house (wuon ot), although the husband undertook the actual building and purchase of the building material. But the homestead belonged to the husband and he was referred to as the owner of the homestead (wuon dala).<sup>13</sup> Each wife was allocated a parcel or parcels of land by her husband or her grandfather (her husband's father) to cultivate. She was also allocated

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<sup>12</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 24; Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with: Timothy Toro, Naman Singa.

some livestock, which was attached to her in theory, but which in reality belonged to her husband. All the livestock in the homestead belonged to the owner of the homestead; no one could dispose of one without his consent.

In pre-colonial South Nyanza, the homestead (dala) was headed by a married man, who was known as wuon dala. But in cases where the husband (wuon dala) died, then a close kinsman was supposed to inherit the widow, even though the homestead still belonged to the deceased including the children he produced with the widow. The homestead could consist of one house belonging to the wife if the man was monogamous. But if the man was polygamous then it consisted of houses equivalent to the total number of wives in the homestead. The construction of houses in the homestead was carried out according to a specific pattern reflecting the seniority of wives. In the homestead, there were also houses for single or married boys. Their houses were likewise built in a pattern showing their seniority according to the order of birth and their mothers' seniority. Thus a homestead normally consisted of a number of married men, their wives and children. The practice of many people congregating in a homestead appears to have been influenced by security reasons. The more people who lived in a homestead the better they could defend themselves, when attacked by an enemy.<sup>14</sup> It is pertinent to note that during the pre-colonial period, South Nyanza, like other neighbouring regions, was in a state of flux. Slave raids, cattle raids as well as raids to acquire more land were common. Large numbers of people in a homestead were therefore vital as a survival strategy. But what used to happen under normal circumstances, when a homestead head had grown up boys

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<sup>14</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 32; Interview with: Nyakore Adel, Lucas Adhiambo.

or girls who were about to marry or be married, then such a man was required to move from his father's homestead and build his own.

In pre-colonial South Nyanza, as was the case in Luoland more generally, laws and rules governed relations within the homestead. These rules and laws were largely determined by seniority. For instance, the oldest surviving male was the head of the homestead and the final authority within the homestead. But if he was incompetent or incapacitated, then he was disqualified from his position and the second most senior man took his place. Wives within the homestead were also similarly ranked according to seniority. It was normal for the senior wives to control the labour of junior wives. For instance, junior wives provided labour on the farms of the senior wives.

As Butterman has remarked, the relations between households revealed the inherent tension between patterns of cooperation and competition in social organization. This point is also expressed in works such as those of Southall and Ocholla-Ayayo, who observed that the word for co-wife which in Dholuo (a Luo language) is nyieke, could be translated into English as “jealousy”.<sup>15</sup> As one respondent noted: “competition between or among households within the homestead became common during the allocation of resources belonging to a homestead. Such resources included land, livestock and bridewealth.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Southall, A. Lineage Formation Among the Luo, p. 15; Ocholla-Ayayo, A. B. C. Traditional Ideology and Ethnics Among Southern Luo, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1976, p. 120.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with: Rose Anyango.

After the homestead, the next significant units of social organisation were (are) (dholuo: anyuola; “birth group”) and (dholuo: joka kwaro; “people of one grandfather/ancestor”).<sup>17</sup> The former (anyuola), as Southall noted, could well suggest a uterine principle of grouping. However, every anyuola was (is) a patrilineal descent group, and whether it took its name from a man or woman depended on the genealogical incidence of co-wives and uterine brothers and the circumstances which call into action the agnatic groups derived from them.<sup>18</sup> Joka kwaro, as Southall pointed out, refers to all those lineages that were corporate landholding units. They carried general social functions. Each managed its political, jural, economic, ritual and other affairs through a council of elders representing its major segments and recognised one of its number as a leader. Organised on a territorial basis, they were units of primary settlement or multiples of them, responsible for the acquisition, apportionment, and use of land.<sup>19</sup> These units, as Butterman noted, were fluid insofar as they spanned a generational depth of two or four generations.<sup>20</sup> These two units, under normal circumstances occupied one territorial area. But due to migrations, which were a common feature in the area, some units could occupy different territorial areas. Those units that settled in the same territorial area were usually characterised by close bonds, which enabled them to cooperate during periods of crisis such as wars, death and sacrifices. The close affinity that existed between these two units meant that they settled their internal disputes internally presided over by their

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<sup>17</sup> Butterman, J. M. ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’, p. 84.

<sup>18</sup> Southall A. Lineage Formation Among the Luo, pp. 28-29.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> Butterman, J. M. ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’, p. 29.



elders. In cases where they could not, they could seek arbitration at the next level of lineage hierarchy.

The next unit of segmentation after anyuola and jokakwaro was dhoot (sing), dhouidi (pl.), a major segment. In pre-colonial South Nyanza and Luo more generally, this major segment was usually named after a wife of an ancestral male. Much as the anyuola and jokakwaro normally occupied same territorial area, so did the dhoot, and the area they occupied was referred to as gweng. After dhoot, the next unit of segmentation was the maximal lineage. This segment was generally characterised by competition between or amongst various components. For instance, if one segment had over expanded and possessed a large population, then such a segment could break away from the other major segments and establish an independent maximal lineage. Southall has observed:

No lineages were regarded by the Luo as really permanent; it was only in relation to a particular transitory situation that they may for convenience be taken as a given...The whole series was reflective and impermanent because, as it moved forward in time, was always tending to add new units to itself at one end as old ones dropped off at the other.<sup>21</sup>

As Southall has noted, the maximal lineage was the largest social unit of cooperation on matters relating to hunting and raiding. One interviewee recalled that the maximal

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<sup>21</sup> Southall, A. Lineage Formation Among the Luo, pp. 8-9.

lineages were separated from each other by thim.<sup>22</sup> The thim was a no man's land; it was a forested area, inhabited by wild animals. As Evans-Pritchard observed, such stretches of country were found between tribe and tribe (for example, between maximal lineages) but not between segments of a tribe (lineage), even if the segments were different clans, for instance between Alego and Gem but not between the Joseje, the Jokakan, and the Jokaruoth, in the Alego tribe. The thim was sometimes extensive, as broad as ten miles.<sup>23</sup> The thim, which was sometimes called bungu, or lek (pastureland) was the focus of competition between the maximal lineages that bordered it, since the area was rich in wild game, readily available for the hunt as well as an area suitable for grazing livestock. Hunts were often indistinguishable from raids. If a maximal lineage went out full force in a hunting expedition, any livestock encountered that belonged to a rival maximal lineage was regarded as game.

In pre-colonial South Nyanza, as indeed in Luoland generally, upon the death of a man, on the burial day, there was a cultural practice called tero buru, which may be described as a demonstration. On the burial day, the men of the deceased maximal lineage, armed with spears and shields, took their cattle to the no man's land (thim) between them and their rival. The rival lineage, having been aware of the impending funeral demonstration (tero buru) by the rival lineage, also armed and took their cattle to the no man's land. Under normal circumstances youths of the two camps were armed with smaller war weapons, and went to the front line to meet their counterparts where they performed a mock war. This was a form of training the youth for future war fighting techniques. There

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with: Stanslau Nyangweso.

<sup>23</sup> Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 'Luo Tribes and Clans', The Position of Women in Primitive Societies, p. 21.

were occasions during such mock fights when a youth could be hurt, and this sometimes caused the adults join to the fight, which might escalate into a serious conflict involving the two lineages. The primary purpose of funeral demonstrations (tero buru) was to assert and demonstrate the military prowess of the maximal lineage at a critical moment when a member of the lineage died. They wanted to show that despite losing one of their members, they were still a power to reckon with.

The competitions that marked relations between maximal lineages were basically a reflection of a desire to acquire more land. Listening to most interviewees talk of the idealised past, the majority of their stories are dominated with tales of how they defeated the rival maximal lineage and conquered their land.<sup>24</sup> Land was crucial to a maximal lineage because it guaranteed its survival since a lineage without a specific territory was very vulnerable to assimilation by other lineages. That explains why lineages had constantly to defend their territorial areas at all cost. The conquest and maintenance of territory was mainly achieved through advanced military fighting and defence techniques and the strong leadership of jobilo, diviners.<sup>25</sup> The name jobilo is derived from the word bilo, which loosely translated means to taste. Jabilo (sing.), jobilo (pl.). A jabilo would literally mean one who “tasted” the soil of a conquered territory to establish its value, that is, its good and malign qualities. The suffix bilo means medicine. Jabilo therefore means a medicine man or a diviner.

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<sup>24</sup> Interviews with: Timothy Toro, Stanslau Nyangweso.

<sup>25</sup> Buttermann, J. M. ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’, pp. 38-39.

In most segmentary lineage organisations, clear procedures were used to allow a person to join a lineage, apart from the automatic direct members of the descent. The most common method among the people of South Nyanza and indeed Luo more widely was to join as a tenant (jadak), jodak (pl.). There were also instances when a group could join as refugees, known locally as jomotur. There were many factors that pushed some people to become refugees in another lineage; for instance, some people could have been driven away from their lineage due to wars, raids or even famine. Butterman has observed that there were also cases of an individual, for instance a young man, joining another lineage and becoming a junior partner in that lineage.<sup>26</sup> Such a person was referred to as misumba (a slave). But Butterman's usage of the concept of misumba here is rather vague. In pre-colonial South Nyanza and the present, the term misumba does not only mean a slave, as Butterman remarked. The term also referred to an unmarried man, who could also be a member of the lineage and not necessarily from another lineage.

Jodak, as has already been noted, were tenants. In most cases they were related to the people they stayed among in another lineage through marriage. The factors that pushed them from their lineage were similar to those driving refugees, such as famine, wars, and constant raids by enemies and by Arabs and Swahili slave traders or any other related misfortunes. Constant wars and raids characterised pre-colonial South Nyanza. These wars and raids forced many families and individuals to leave their lineages and seek refuge in other lineages where they settled as jodak (tenants).<sup>27</sup> As Hay observed, the

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<sup>26</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 41.

<sup>27</sup> Wakefield, T. (Reverend) 'Routes of the Native Caravans from the Coast to the Interior of Eastern Africa', The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, pp. 303-338; Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon) 'Native

status of jadak, (pl. jodak), carried with it rights of usufruct but not of disposal. Jodak (clients) could always be asked by the host to vacate the land they had been allocated and to return to where they had come from. They were always perceived as “second class” citizens in the lineage that hosted them. But as Southall has pointed out, the status and obligations of jodak varied under different circumstances. For instance, within the Karachuonyo maximal lineage, clients (jodak) such as Katolo, Agoro, Muksero and Kasibong were recognised as tenants without apparent obligations. Yet, as Butterman correctly noted, historical evidence from both Karachuonyo and Kanyamkago suggests that tenants were the first to be exploited. This is equally supported by Ayot who noted that during the nineteenth century, among the Abasuba of Rusinga Island, tenants were not permitted to raise their traditional roof spike and their cows and poultry were not allowed to breed with those of the host.<sup>28</sup>

As some respondents noted, it was advantageous to have tenants in a lineage, since in most lineages exogamous marriage was practised. Having tenants therefore meant that intermarriage could take place within the lineage. Given the prevailing insecurity in most parts of South Nyanza, as indeed in Luoland more widely during pre-colonial period, it was dangerous for one to travel far into enemies’ lineages for marriage purposes. It was therefore safer for a person to get married within the lineage to avoid exposing himself to

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Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country’, Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, pp. 737-744; Farler, J. V. P. (Archdeacon) ‘The Usambara Country in East Africa’, Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, pp.81-97; Hay, J. M. ‘Economic Change in Luoland’, p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> Ayot, H. O. ‘A History of the Luo-Abasuba of Western Kenya from 1760-1940’, D.Phil, University of Nairobi, 1973, p. 33.

dangers by going to other lineages.<sup>29</sup> But the advantage was mainly to the host lineage and not to the tenants when it came to payment of bridewealth. For instance, tenants often were not paid full bridewealth for their daughters. Obviously, they were in no position from which to bargain. The rationale behind this exploitation was that tenants were allocated land by the hosts.

Similarly, there were advantages of having misumba (a bachelor or a 'slave') within a lineage. Just like a tenant, a misumba had no rights within the host lineage. They were equally subjected to the exploitation of their labour by their hosts. For instance, a musumba could be called upon by his master to perform any form of labour, including that which was regarded as a woman's work. As Buttermann observed, a misumba could be forced to be married to an "unsaleable" woman of the village. She provides an example in Karachuonyo in which one segment of tenants, the Wagwe, trace their descent from a misumba and a Karachuonyo woman, Gwe, whose name is derived from an intestinal disorder, in which one belches an odorous smell.

Archdeacon Owen, who worked as a missionary among the Luo during the early decades of colonial rule, captured the status of a woman in pre-colonial Luoand when he noted:

The position of women among the Luo was that of great influence, in spite of many things that show that they were not regarded as the equal of men. While they were having nothing in their creation stories which gives the male such pre-eminence as

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<sup>29</sup> Interviews with: Sina Okello, Magadina Migio; Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 42.

is given in the Hebrew account of creation in the second chapter of Genesis, yet even in their stories it is the male which is created first. The origin of the female is surrounded in mystery; none have any clear account of her origin. But it is significant that the name by which the first woman is known to many of the Luo is Aloo. Loo or Lowo is the stem meaning earth or soil, and there are undoubtedly some connections in their minds between the fruitful soil and woman. Although her origin is surrounded in mystery, she is made to carry the responsibility for the fact that the sons of men have got to work. According to the Luo creation story, the first man to be created was one called Podho. To him the creator (called Nyasaye) gave a magic hoe, which worked by itself, requiring no arm to wield it. With the hoe Nyasaye gave Podho a command that he was never to attempt to do any work with it himself. If he could disobey this command then the hoe would lose its virtue and cease to work unaided. This happened before the advent of Aloo (sometimes called Mihaha). When eventually Podho was given Aloo, he gave the hoe over to her care, telling her at the same time the command, which Nyasaye had laid down. For a time all went well. When they wanted any digging to be done all they had to do was to take the hoe out to the site, show it what they wanted it to dig and leave it to do the work. In the evening it was brought again. But one-day curiosity was too much for Aloo. She felt that she must feel what it was like to turn up a few sods. She picked up the hoe and with it turned up a little soil. Then becoming suddenly afraid she dropped the hoe and went home; but did not tell her husband, Podho. However, she was unable to hide what she had done, for in the evening when they went to bring in the hoe, it laid where she had dropped it, and had done no work. Then the voice of

Nyasaye said that, as they were now so clever that they know how to dig for them.

So to this day woman is blamed as the one through whose wrong doing the curse of work came to men.<sup>30</sup>

As Archdeacon Owen correctly observed, the above tradition came into existence reflecting the common tendency of many creation stories to put the blame on the woman, and was possibly invented to keep women in subjection. In pre-colonial South Nyanza, women faced a number of constraints. For instance, within the patrilineage women obtained rights only through belonging either to fathers or husbands, who had control of their labour powers. The other constraint that was faced by junior women was that seniority among women was a mitigating factor to the subordinate position of women. A case in point was that older women had control over the younger women in the homestead. The senior wife in a homestead played the role of a manager of a homestead on behalf of her husband. Older women were in most cases consulted on serious matters to be decided on by men.<sup>31</sup>

The social practice of seniority being critical in the relations among women also applied to men. The principle of seniority also accounted for a basically redistributive pattern among men.<sup>32</sup> As a class, elders (men) appropriated the surplus labour of junior men. Juniors cleared agricultural land for the elders who controlled the distribution of the

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<sup>30</sup> Owen, W. E. (Archdeacon), 'Food Production and Kindred Matters Among the Luo', The Journal of East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society, 11 Nos. 45-50, 1932-33, No. 49-50, pp.235-249.

<sup>31</sup> Odinga O. Not Yet Uhuru: An Autobiography, Heinemann, London, Nairobi, Lusaka, 1974, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 46.



product, or juniors raided cattle from the rival lineages, which were allocated by elders. Historically, this appropriation by the elders may have been common in South Nyanza and Luoland more generally, but it is significant to point out that there were limits to exploitation, at least within expanding migratory lineages. Relations between elders and juniors had rather to be redistributive since an elder who appropriated livestock might find himself without juniors, who in protest might migrate to another lineage and become misumba (slave) in the host lineage.

Lonsdale observed that in most pre-colonial societies, the idiom of cooperation was patrilineal descent through the generations and the kinship of contemporaries, but that the organisation of work was less egalitarian than its ideology. In most cases, rich families who exploited the labour of impoverished families undertook the organisation of work.<sup>33</sup> This was also true of South Nyanza, as has already been noted, the tenants and slaves (misumba) were subjects of exploitation by their hosts.

According to a District Annual Report regarding traditional religious practices of the Luo, there seemed to be an undefined belief in a supreme God, which was thought to be the sun. There was a belief in a soul which was (and is still) called “Nyasae” (correct spelling, Nyasaye), and which was the individual god of each person. The report noted further that after death the soul lived in a tree but came out to converse with those it had left behind in the form of a dream. The soul was reborn in a child; hence children were

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<sup>33</sup> Lonsdale, J. M. ‘The Conquest State of Kenya’, in Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. Unhappy Valley, p. 20.

given the names of ancestors.<sup>34</sup> Findings from this research partly contradict the District Annual Reports account. The concepts of the soul and God were interconnected but also at the same time separate. Households in South Nyanza and indeed in Luoland more generally believed that when someone died, the soul did not go to live in a tree, but it lived everywhere; on the mountains, forest, bush and many other places. The soul, or what could also be called ancestor(s), mediated between the living and the dead. It also mediated between the living and God. It acted as the intercessor between the living and the ancestors and God.

This chapter now focuses on the organisation of the economy, the changes that occurred in the economy and their subsequent impact on households. This issue forms the core of the study.

## **ECONOMIC ORGANISATION**

The economy of households in South Nyanza and the Luo more generally during the pre-colonial era was basically a mixed economy consisting of livestock keeping, crop production, trade and fishing. The people of South Nyanza were at the same time involved in secondary economic pursuits such as hunting, gathering, iron manufacture and handicrafts. Access to the means of production was gained through membership in

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<sup>34</sup> KNA, Central Kavirondo District (Political Record: Historical and Customs) DC/CN/3/1, 1925, P. 17.

the social unit. The distribution of resources was marked by exploitation patterns and the way in which the relations of production were reproduced.<sup>35</sup>

In order to understand the nature of the pre-colonial economy of South Nyanza, it is necessary to start with a consideration of the land tenure system among households in the area. This is because in South Nyanza, as was the case in most pre-colonial African societies, a great deal of value was attached to land.<sup>36</sup> In South Nyanza, as was the case in Luoland more generally, land was owned by the extended family, joka-kwaro, which was composed of grandfather, his wife or wives, his son (s) together with their wives and children.<sup>37</sup>

In pre-colonial South Nyanza, land and human labour were key components in the process of material appropriation. Land, according to Luo customary law, belonged to the community. The family simply held it in trust for the community. This was because whenever a section was under attack, the whole community was expected to defend the land, and not to leave that trust to an individual family. As Odinga observed, the Luo regarded land as their “mother”, and it belonged to the community. He noted that within the ethnic group, clan or sub-clan, the individual laid claim to a shamba (a parcel of land for cultivation), or several, depending on his diligence, but as soon as he left for elsewhere, the land reverted to the community and could be allocated to the nearest

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<sup>35</sup> Butterman, J. M. ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’, p. 51.

<sup>36</sup> Mabogunje, A. L. The Development Process: A Partial Perspective, Hutchison Group (SA), Bergvlei, 1980, pp.73-75.

<sup>37</sup> Interviews with: Ibrahim Ondiek, Naman Singa.

neighbour or given to a new comer joining the community.<sup>38</sup> In a related study of Swaziland Bonner found out that land, the basis of the economic system and the principal of means of production, was controlled by the rulers and could be redistributed by them in a variety of ways.<sup>39</sup>

Beyond that, as Hay rightly observes, land rights allocation was through transmission from father to son. A father, according to Luo customary law, was to apportion parcels of his own land to his sons once they married and had established their own households. But upon the death of the father, the remaining sons who had not been allocated land would obtain land that their mothers used to cultivate. The allocation was to be done by the eldest son in the homestead who acted as the head of the family. But if the sons were still young, the land could be held in trust for them by their uncles (their father's brothers).<sup>40</sup>

It was the responsibility of the extended family to ensure that nobody was destitute. Since land was a key factor of production, every member of the family and society in general enjoyed access to land. The reality on the ground however was that there was no equitable distribution of land. The more influential one was in the society, as for instance in the case of chiefs, clan elders, diviners, grand fathers, and many other related influential people, the more access they had to land. Households in South Nyanza valued

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<sup>38</sup> Odinga O. Not Yet Uhuru, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Bonner, P. 'Class, the Mode of Production and the State in Pre-Colonial Swaziland', in Marks, S. and Atmore, A. (eds.), Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa, p. 92.

<sup>40</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 100.

land because everybody to certain extent depended on land for survival. Food was derived from land (in crop production) and the livestock, which people depended on grazed on land. Basically, all economic activities depended on land. This created a deep attachment among households in South Nyanza and Luo more generally to land.

Within the ethnic group, clan or sub-clan, an individual could cultivate any piece of land that had not been cultivated before. The first person to cultivate such virgin land claimed ownership and would continue cultivating it as long as he wanted. But once such a person left the area, maybe because of committing a crime, such as murder or incest, which according to customs required that the culprit leave his homestead and seek refuge far away, then the piece of land he used to cultivate could be taken by his close relative.<sup>41</sup>

In pre-colonial South Nyanza, land was primarily acquired through conquest. This could be accomplished by an individual, clan or by the maximal lineage. Other means through which an individual could acquire land rights could involve engagement in personal negotiations with a friend(s) or relative(s). The terms and conditions of the land rights acquired through such arrangements depended on the terms of the negotiations. A person who acquired land under such conditions was referred to as jadak (pl. jodak), client or tenant. The status of jadak was always precarious with regard to land rights. He or she could only use the land but could not dispose of it or allow another person access to such land given to him. He/she was always at the mercy of the landlord, the owner of land. Jadak could be called upon at any time to vacate land allocated to him. Under such

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<sup>41</sup> Odinga O. Not Yet Uhuru, pp. 13-14; Interviews with: Nyamkore Adel.

circumstances, its original owner would repossess the land, or if he/she were already dead, then his/her descendants or relatives would be the recipients.

## **Pastoralism**

Most respondents were in agreement that, in the distant past, pastoralism was superior to agriculture in South Nyanza as indeed throughout Luoland.<sup>42</sup> Most previous case studies on Nyanza such as those of Hay and Butterman concur that in the Luo idealised past, pastoralism was the primary economic activity of the Luo who considered it superior to crop production.<sup>43</sup> Ehret observed that traditional oral evidence and comparative Luo economic data suggest that the initial Luo immigrants into the region were greater cattle-keepers than later Luo-speaking populations have turned out to be.<sup>44</sup> He argued that a probable explanation for this is that (between 1600 to 1800) as the Luo population increased, the density of people on land eventually made a heavy dependency on pastoralism impracticable and forced the Luo to turn more completely to cultivation to feed themselves. But Ehret does not provide any concrete evidence that population increase forced the Luo to shift from cattle keeping to crop production between 1600 and 1800. When he talks of traditional evidence and Luo economic data, he neither shows us nor tells us what he means by these two terms. His argument that population increase

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<sup>42</sup> Interviews with: Naftaly Arua, Pius Awiti Adoyo, Timothy Toro.

<sup>43</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 91; Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'.

<sup>44</sup> Ehret, C. 'Aspects of Social and Economic Change in Western Kenya 1500-1800', in Ogot, B. A. (ed.), Kenya Before 1900, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1976, p. 15.

caused the shift from pastoralism to crop production is mere speculation and not based on tangible historical evidence.

Hay in her study of Kowe, has argued that apamo (the great rinderpest epidemic) that occurred in the early 1890s and decimated cattle in Kowe, required both immediate and long-term adjustments in the balance between pastoralism and agriculture as the people of Kowe, as indeed the rest of the Luo shifted from pastoralism to crop production as a primary economic activity. She cites other authorities locating the outbreaks of apamo in 1883, in the mid 1880s and in 1890-1891. Hay observed that the impact of this great rinderpest epidemic left households in Nyanza (the Luo) in a situation where they had painfully to start rebuilding their herds. She concludes that in the long run, apamo, combined with other (above mentioned) factors, prompted a gradual transition from pastoralism to agriculture as the basis of the local economy.<sup>45</sup>

The conclusion arrived at in this study is that by the time rinderpest epidemics broke out in Luoland and in adjacent regions in the 1880s and 90s, the Luo had already shifted from pastoralism to crop production as a primary economic activity. Evidence for this conclusion comes from the work of Reverend Wakefield who, writing in 1870 on the economic activities of the Kavirondo (the Luo), noted that the Kavirondo had cattle, and also plantations (agricultural production).<sup>46</sup> Another missionary, Archdeacon Farler,

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<sup>45</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', pp. 89-90, she cites Mattam, R. W. M. 'A Short History of Rinderpest with Special Reference to Africa', Uganda Journal, 5, 1937, pp. 22-26.

<sup>46</sup> Wakefield, T. (Reverend), 'Routes of the Native Caravans from the Coast to the Interior of Eastern Africa', The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 308.

writing a decade after Reverend Wakerfield on the economic activities of the Wakavirondo (the Luo), remarked that they were agriculturalists and had large plantations.<sup>47</sup> These reports by the two missionaries emphasised agriculture as the principal economic activity of the Luo and not pastoralism. One can then conclude that by 1870, the Luo, and indeed households in South Nyanza had already shifted from pastoralism to crop production as a principal economic activity. This then disproves works by Hay and Butterman who noted that the Luo shifted from pastoralism to crop production by the turn of the nineteenth century as a result of the outbreak of apamo (rinderpest).

The other natural calamity that posed a serious threat to cattle keeping in South Nyanza and some parts of Luoland was (is) the presence of tsetse flies. This was a problem during pre-colonial times. The toll it inflicted in cattle (via nagana) as well as human beings (via sleeping sickness) was quite possibly enormous which may well have forced the people to shift from cattle keeping to crop production as a primary economic activity. Allan noted that the way of life of traditional pastoralists is at best precarious, an alternation of periods of expansion and prosperity and of dearth and disaster. In this, argued Allan, lies the seed of change. The periods of disaster, when the number of animals fall below “the basic” level, strains the food – producing economy, which induces change in the direction of crop production. According to Allan, the pastoralist must take to the hoe, if this alternative is open to him. Once this road has been taken, there is generally no return, for the practice of cultivation allows the population to increase well beyond the limit that a

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<sup>47</sup> Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), ‘Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country’, Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, pp. 737-744.



simple pastoralism can support. Consequently, where conditions are favourable to crop-production, agriculture tends to displace pastoralism, either by conversion of the pastoralists or by encroachment of cultivating people on their grazing lands.<sup>48</sup>

Livestock nevertheless played an important role in the economic life of the people of South Nyanza and the Luo more generally. Livestock was the major form of capital. Cattle were important as the medium of exchange, as a standard of value, and as stores of value. The Luo were greatly attached to cattle. As Hay noted, a man's cattle were taken along with him when he went to war; the sight of this valuable possession was thought to provide extra courage. In this way, Hay observed, cattle could not be raided while he was away.<sup>49</sup> Cattle also accompanied mourners at funerals. This was because they were regarded as part and parcel of the community and therefore were also expected to pay their respects to the dead.<sup>50</sup>

The people of South Nyanza derived essential products from livestock, which included meat, milk and blood. All these formed part of the diet of the people of South Nyanza. But it is important to note that meat was never a common dish among the people of South Nyanza as was the case for most cattle keepers. The people of South Nyanza and the Luo in general valued livestock very highly so that it was rare to find that an animal was slaughtered without a specific reason. Respondents were unanimous that an animal could

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<sup>48</sup> Allan, W. The African Husbandman, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, London, 1965, p. 319.

<sup>49</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 92.

<sup>50</sup> Odede, W. 'Some Luo Customs with Regard to Animals', The Journal of East Africa and Uganda Natural History and Society, 16, 1942, p. 128.

only be slaughtered if it was sick or too old to walk. In addition, an animal might be slaughtered during special occasions, for instance, when an important guest came on a visit, or when offering sacrifices to the ancestors to appease or receive blessings from them.<sup>51</sup>

These observations by interviewees concur with Allan who noted that practically all accounts of pastoral people are agreed on one point, that meat constituted only a small fraction of the regular human diet, the slaughter of large stock being restricted to relatively rare occasions such as periodic festivals, ceremonies and sacrifices, the arrival of a particularly important guest or when they were about to die or a beast died naturally or was killed by a carnivore.<sup>52</sup> Apart from providing food, cattle manure was utilised in plastering houses while urine was used to preserve milk. Other animal products such as skins and hides were used as bedding, shields, sandals and clothing. Clothing (in the form of skins and hides) was mainly donned by the Luo-Abasuba and not the rest of the Luo of South Nyanza and Central Nyanza, who mainly used chieno (a small piece of skin covering the private parts of the body).

Most respondents for this study concurred that one of the significant uses of livestock in pre-colonial South Nyanza and the rest of the Luo, was for acquiring a wife or wives.<sup>53</sup> Emphasising the importance the Luo attached to cattle in relation to bridewealth, Hopley noted:

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<sup>51</sup> Interviews with: Lucas Owaga, Lucas Adhiambo, Rose Anyango.

<sup>52</sup> Allan, W. The African Husbandman, p. 302.

<sup>53</sup> Interviews with: Magadina Micholo, Nicholas Ateng, Rebecca Achola.

As the country settles and the male sex obtains a better chance of survival (not dying at early age), I am hoping that the custom of marriage by purchase, which entirely prevails in this area, will prove an incentive to the younger and male population to turn their attention more to the habit of working steadily for hire, in order to obtain the wherewithal to buy their wives, and I hope I am not too sanguine in making the statement that I fancy signs of this movement are becoming apparent.<sup>54</sup>

One interviewee recalled the importance of cattle keeping in pre-colonial South Nyanza, observed:

Cattle were highly valued by the Luo. They were sign of wealth. One who had a large herd of cattle was much respected in the community. He was regarded as ja-moko (a rich person). One without cattle would have sons who ended up as misumbini (bachelors) because the father could not provide cattle for them to pay bridewealth. A person who had no cattle was never respected in the community. He could not engage in a discussion where jo-moko (the rich cattler owner) assembled.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Hobley, C. W. 'Anthropological Studies in Kavirondo and Nandi', The Journal of Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, p. 354.

<sup>55</sup> Interviews with: Pius Adoyo Owiti.

This concurs with Allan who remarked that ownership of many cattle gave a man prestige, social standing and a position of power. They offered a passage to a political office and to a fortune in love as well, for the possession of cattle attracted women to a man while enabling their possessor to exercise the cardinal virtue of generosity. A man in full sense of manliness is one rich in cattle, observed Allan.<sup>56</sup> Respondents noted that although wealth could also be judged by the amount of agricultural produce one received, livestock was more recognised as a yardstick of wealth and status among the households in pre-colonial South Nyanza and the rest of the Luo. This was because agricultural produce would perish after about a year, while livestock lasted longer and reproduced faster, although, of course, it could also be wiped out by natural epidemics as well as being raided by enemies.<sup>57</sup>

Kjekshus rightly noted that an overemphasis on the social value of cattle, particularly its position as an item of bridewealth, overshadowed the commercial role of cattle and small stock in the pre-colonial economy. Cattle trade took place between cattle keeping communities and areas of agricultural and industrial surpluses. He observed that cattle were one of the major commodities traded by the Maasai in exchange for Chagga spears and grain from Usambara.<sup>58</sup> The observations of Kjekshus also apply to South Nyanza. The people of South Nyanza exchanged livestock for the Abagusii grain, particularly finger millet, and iron products such as spears, axes and arrows.<sup>59</sup> The people of South

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<sup>56</sup> Allan W. *The African Husbandman*, p. 313.

<sup>57</sup> Interviews with: Pius Adoyo Owiti, Naman Singa, Sina Okello.

<sup>58</sup> Kjekshus, H. *Ecology and Control and Economic Development in East African History: The Case of Tanganyika, 1850-1950*, Heinemann, Nairobi, Ibadan, Lusaka, 1977, pp. 118-119.

<sup>59</sup> Ochieng, W. R. 'The Gusii Before 1900', in Ogot, B. A. (ed.), *Kenya Before 1900*, pp.101-102.

Nyanza also exchanged livestock for the Baganda commodities such as iron ornaments, bananas and fish and for the Samia iron hoes.<sup>60</sup> Hobley wrote on the importance of cattle trade among the Luo in 1898:

The great object of a Mkavirondo's life is to obtain cattle, or, failing that, sheep and goats, and all his trading was but a means to this end. The principal local trading was in hoe, cattle and ivory...the price of ivory is quoted in head of cattle, the price of cattle in terms of so many hoes.<sup>61</sup>

Herding livestock was the responsibility of the male members of the homestead. As one respondent stressed “goats, sheep as well as calves were mainly herded by the young boys. This was a form of training for future herding of cattle when the young boys became young adults.”<sup>62</sup> Young as well as adult men herded cattle. They were capable of defending cattle against possible raids by enemies and attacks by wild game such as lions. Most often, adult males on a rotational basis undertook herding so that other male members could be free for some days to pursue other economic activities. There was also a practice in which two homesteads, often of the same family, could organise herding by combining the livestock during herding on a rotational basis; each homestead was to herd for three consecutive days, and then handed over to the other homestead. Herding could be done on any free pasture without any restrictions. Since land was the property of the community, people were free to herd where pasture was available. Hay noted that all the

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<sup>60</sup> Ochieng', W. R. *An Outline History of Nyanza*, pp. 61-67.

<sup>61</sup> Hobley, C. W. 'Kavirondo', *The Geographical Journal*, 12, 1896, pp. 361-372.

<sup>62</sup> Interviews with: Ibrahim Ondiek.

cattle of the homestead were herded together, and during the nineteenth century, the combined herd of several homesteads, with a contingent of herders, was a practical precaution against raids.<sup>63</sup> Most respondents observed that grazing took place mostly in thim (the no man's land). Thim, as has already been alluded to, was a space (mostly forested) between two maximal lineages. Since it was a no man's land, the rival lineage also grazed there. This sometimes led to wars between the two lineages and explains why the herders carried war weapons such as spears and arunge (knobbed sticks) for self-defence against possible raids by the rival lineage or attacks by wild animals. In addition to herding, young and adult men milked cows in the morning and evening. The main duty of women in relation to livestock was to prepare milk products, for instance, puoyo chak (a process of extracting mo "butter" from sour milk placed in a gourd. The gourd was shaken several times placed on the knee until butter was ready). Butter was used as a cooking fat. It could also be deep heated to turn it into clarified butter that could also be used as cooking fat as well as served as cheese with food. Finally it could be eaten directly with stiff porridge.

In pre-colonial South Nyanza and Luoland more widely, one could also acquire livestock through the traditional practice known as riembo or singo (loaning a heifer to someone). This operated on the principle that:

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<sup>63</sup> Hay J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', pp. 91-92.

A takes heifer to B receiving one bull in exchange on the understanding that the first heifer's calf born shall become the property of B and the original cow and any other calves shall be returned to A.<sup>64</sup>

As Butterman rightly observed, if a man had many cattle, he might lend (loan) one to a man who had few or none. The advantages of this system for the owner lay in risk spreading.<sup>65</sup> The one loaned the cow might, at the discretion of the owner, receive a calf after several calves had been born. However, most respondents observed that the most common method of acquiring livestock in pre-colonial South Nyanza and Luoland generally was through bridewealth.<sup>66</sup>

All the livestock in the homestead belonged to the head of the homestead (wuon dala). If a man acquired livestock while he was still residing in his father's homestead, then the animals belonged to the latter. Even when he moved from his father's homestead to establish his own, he could only be given a calf; the rest his father retained. This shows how the elders exploited the juniors during the pre-colonial period.

Interviewees concurred that although livestock keeping was an important economic activity, it had its share of problems. There were years when natural calamities threatened its survival. The occasional outbreak of cattle epidemics in South Nyanza and the rest of

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<sup>64</sup> Onduru, T. A. 'Some Aspects of Economic Change', pp. 45-46.

<sup>65</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', pp. 64-65.

<sup>66</sup> Interviews with: Mzee Agoi, Jadino Alele.

Luoland as well as in adjacent regions came close to decimating livestock in the area.<sup>67</sup> Wright noted that in seeking the key to the vicissitudes of the pastoralists' economy in the 1870s to 1880s, the impact of raids and wars does not suffice. He observed that it appears that pleuroneumonia was killing off large numbers of Maasai and other cattle in the Rift Valley and neighbouring plateaux from the late 1870s and throughout the 1880s. This disease was treated by quarantine measures and efforts to diminish the mobility of stock which might spread infection. Wright noted that it is therefore possible that not only existing herds were diminished, but also that the reservoirs for their replenishment, such as those that the Samburu provided, were not tapped since the disease allegedly came from the northern direction. He argued that the Maasai ideal of dependence upon their cattle could not be maintained in these decades and various strategies were adopted to alleviate the situation, including taking refuge with neighbouring agricultural people, the purchase of food from them, a concentration of sheep breeding and perhaps greater willingness to facilitate ivory trade.<sup>68</sup>

Even though a number of studies on Nyanza have supported the view that the outbreak of pleuroneumonia that decimated Maasai cattle in the Rift Valley in the 1870s spread to Nyanza and specifically South Nyanza, this appears to be incorrect. Both Reverend Wakefield and Archdeacon Farler, who wrote on South Nyanza and some parts of Luoland, Maasai, and adjacent communities, never mentioned the outbreak of cattle

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<sup>67</sup> Interviews with: Nyamkore Adel, Omondi Genga.

<sup>68</sup> Wright, M. 'Societies and Economies in Kenya', in Ogot, B. A. (ed.), Ecology and History in East Africa, Kenya Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1979, p. 183; Thomson, J. Through Masai Land, p. 209; Ludwig, V. H. Discoveries of Lake Rudolf and Stefanie, vol.1, p. 240, vol. 2, p. 284.



epidemics affecting the areas. Their works by contrast confirmed the importance of cattle keeping in the economy of the Luo.<sup>69</sup> What appears to have affected Luoland was the outbreak of pleuroneumonia in the 1880s.

The cattle epidemic that took a major toll on livestock in South Nyanza and the adjacent regions was rinderpest. The epidemic began its great progress through Kenya and East Africa in general in 1889, as Wright noted.<sup>70</sup> By 1892, as he showed, the herds had been decimated. After subsiding, rinderpest broke out in great force once again at the end of the 1890s not for the last time.<sup>71</sup>

Kjekshus noted that the great rinderpest epizootic of the 1890s broke the economic backbone of the most prosperous and advanced communities, undermined established authority and status structures, and altered the political contacts between the peoples.<sup>72</sup> Mattam observed that prior to 1864, rinderpest had been known only in Egypt, and that it spread to the rest of the continent some twenty years later. It entered East Africa via Ethiopia and Sudan. He observed that its arrival was in both instances connected with the Ethiopian warfare:

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<sup>69</sup> Wakefield, T. (Reverend), 'Routes of Native Caravans from the Coast to the Interior of Eastern Africa', The Journal of Royal Geographical Society; Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 744; Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Usambara Country in East Africa', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, pp. 81-97.

<sup>70</sup> Wright, M. 'Societies and Economies', in Ogot, B. A. (ed.), Ecology and History, p. 183.

<sup>71</sup> Mattam, R. W. M. 'A Short History of Rinderpest', Uganda Journal.

<sup>72</sup> Kjekshus, H. ecology and Control and Economic Development in East Africa, pp. 126-127.

The first recorded outbreak occurred in Somalia in 1889 and it is generally said that the disease followed the introduction of cattle from India and from Aden for the provisioning of the Italian army during the first expedition by Abyssinia. Once established, rinderpest spread like a wild fire over the whole of East Africa, reaching Lake Tanganyika towards the end of 1890. In the meanwhile, the Nile Valley as far as Khartoum had been infected by cattle epidemics during the British campaigns of 1884-1885. It was held that the disease was introduced by animals purchased in Russia and other Black Sea ports.<sup>73</sup>

The Kenya Veterinary Services described rinderpest as “an acute contagious virus disease of ruminants and swine, characterised by diarrhoea, nasal and lacrimal discharge and by ulceration of the mucus membrane of the mouth.”<sup>74</sup> The ravages of rinderpest on the Maasai herds were catastrophic and caused severe famine among people who were deprived of their daily food supply: “Abandoned villages were, almost without exception, the only trace I found of the Maasai”, noted Stuhlmann.<sup>75</sup>

The outbreak of rinderpest had far reaching repercussions on the pastoral communities. About 95% of all cattle died. Thus one of the twin pillars of the traditional economy – indeed the only lifeline of many peoples-was suddenly destroyed. People were never directly attacked by the epidemic, but suffered the secondary effects of famine. Kjekshus

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<sup>73</sup> Mattam, R. W. M. ‘A Short History of Rinderpest’, Uganda Journal.

<sup>74</sup> EAAJ, 1939 (5), p. 57.

<sup>75</sup> Stuhlmann, Fr. (1892) ‘*Ruckreise Vom Victoria-Nyansa nach Bagamoyo*’ MDS v. 185-188, cited in Kjekshus, H. Ecology and Control 1850-1950, p. 128.

noted that in areas where mixed farming had been practised, the loss of cattle meant inferior cultivation and smaller yields, and a shift from cattle keeping to agricultural production.<sup>76</sup> However, in the case of South Nyanza and Luo more generally, as has already been noted, the shift from pastoralism to agricultural production had already taken place.

Lord Lugard drew a political conclusion from the devastation caused by the rinderpest he had witnessed:

In some respect...warlike as the pastoral tribes are, their pride has been humbled and our progress facilitated by this awful visitation. The advent of the white-man had also not been so peaceful.<sup>77</sup>

The rinderpest epidemic marked the beginning of a series of natural and man made calamities that struck East Africa and indeed South Nyanza in the next two decades. Smallpox, the sand flea (jiggers), plague, famine, and sleeping sickness all broke out within a few years of the great rinderpest epidemic. Their exceptional toll in lives was probably linked to this initial weakening of the population. One tragedy reinforced the effect of the other and were probably seen by the contemporary African population as the result of European machinations.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Kjekshus, H. Ecology and Control, p. 128.

<sup>77</sup> Lugard, F. D. The Rise of East Africa Empire, vol. 1, Blackwood, Edinburgh, 1893, p. 257.

<sup>78</sup> Kjekshus, H. Ecology and Control, pp. 131-132.

Hay has argued that one effect of the epizootics of the 1880s and 1890s was that people turned increasingly to agriculture and hunting during this period. In a similar study, Buttermann observed that within Karachuonyo, with the lake nearby, people relied to a greater extent than previously on fish for protein. Since the households in South Nyanza and the Luo more generally had shifted from pastoralism to crop production by the 1880s, the outbreak of the epizootics of the 1880s and 1890s had less adverse an effect on the households than Hay and Buttermann would want us to believe.

In assessing the impact of the cattle epidemics of 1883, G. A. S. Northcote, the District Commissioner, South Kavirondo, noted that the cattle plague of 1883 greatly reduced the value of dowry. He observed that before that year, twenty head of cattle, besides goats, and grain was not uncommonly asked for and obtained. Today, he noted (1907), seven head of cattle is a handsome “dot”, and the price has been known to fall as low as one bull and twenty goats, though a heifer and a bull is the usual minimum.<sup>79</sup>

The other threat to cattle keeping in pre-colonial South Nyanza and some parts of East Africa was the presence of tsetse fly. This has become a lesser problem at present due to the development of effective control measures. Historically, however, the presence of tsetse flies has meant the absence of cattle, and even today, cattle are not found in the so-called fly belt. Kjekshus noted that tsetse flies (*genus glossina*), affected man and his domestic animals with parasitic trypanosomes causing fatal disease in both. He observed that seven species occur; the most important being the common tsetse (*glossina*

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<sup>79</sup> Northcote, G. A. S. ‘The Nilotic Kavirondo’, The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, vol. xxxvii, 1907, p. 62.

*morsitans*), Bruce's tsetse (*G. Pallidipes*), *Swynnerton's* tsetse (*G. Swynnertoni*) and the *Waterside* tsetse (*G. Papalis*). Kjekshus observes that all these species had been responsible for epidemics of sleeping sickness in Eastern Africa, and were potential carriers. They all caused trypanosomiasis in domestic animals, so that whenever they were established, man could not keep cattle or other stock.<sup>80</sup>

When Kenya was colonised, the colonial administration had to tackle the problem of sleeping sickness, which was prevalent in some parts of the Protectorate. Writing on the problems of sleeping sickness in East Africa in March 1902, the Secretary of the Royal Society noted:

As your Lordship is aware, a very serious outbreak of the disease known as sleeping sickness or Negro lethargy is reported from Uganda. This disease that appears to attack the coloured races only has long been known in certain districts of West Africa.<sup>81</sup>

Supporting this view, the Commissioner to the East Africa Protectorate, Sir Charles Elliot noted: "the terrible mysterious malady is apparently of African origin and attacks only natives".<sup>82</sup> But, sleeping sickness did not only attack "natives" as Sir Charles Elliot

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<sup>80</sup> Kjekshus, H. *Ecology and Control*, p. 51.

<sup>81</sup> KNA, E.S.A., A 27/16/1902, The Secretary of the Royal Society to the Marques of Lansdowne, 24<sup>th</sup> March, 1902.

<sup>82</sup> KNA, E. S. A. A/27/16/1902.

alleged. It also attacked whites. According to the proceedings of the Church Missionary Society:

The ravages of sleeping sickness in the low-lying districts, and especially on the islands of Lake Victoria, continue unabated. Even Europeans who have worked in the infected districts have been attacked, and it is a matter for deep thankfulness that the society's missionaries have hitherto escaped. The efforts of the Commission that is investigating the disease have not yet resulted in the discovery of any remedial or practical preventive measure.<sup>83</sup>

### **Agricultural Organisation**

As has already been noted, by the 1870s, agricultural production had become the dominant economic activity in South Nyanza. Most studies on Nyanza including those of Hay, Butterman, Ndege, Onduru and Francis have attributed the shift to the outbreak of cattle epidemics of the 1880s and 1890s that have been alluded to. As this research demonstrates, by the 1880s and 1890s, the people of South Nyanza and the Luo more generally had already shifted from pastoralism to crop production. Our possible explanation is that the cattle epidemics of the 1880s and 1890s could also have broken out much earlier, forcing the people of South Nyanza to shift to crop production as a primary economic activity. The other possible factor that could have enhanced the shift, which is not given attention in studies on Nyanza, was the presence of tsetse fly, which

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<sup>83</sup> Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society for the Year 1905 to 1906, p. 74.

not only affected South Nyanza, but also Central Nyanza. This study ascribes the shift from pastoralism to crop production to the presence of the fly, which is still common in the area and forced households in South Nyanza to place more emphasis on crop production. Other factors that contributed to the shift were the occupation of the high grounds, which were favourable for crop production.<sup>84</sup> The adaptation of a new agricultural tool, nya-yimbo (iron blade hoe) also enhanced crop production but did not necessarily cause the shift. This was because, being exorbitant in price, very few people could afford it.

The shift in economy from pastoralism to crop production as a primary economic activity had a variety of impacts on the people of South Nyanza. The immediate effect was that women whose labour was previously under-utilised became involved in crop production. However, the widely held view that women were the ones who were primarily involved in agricultural production was not correct. Documentary evidence shows that both sexes were involved in agricultural work. Archdeacon Farler citing Reverend Wakefield's article, noted that both sexes of WaKavirondo (the Luo) worked on agricultural fields. However, women appear to have undertaken more agricultural work than men.

Hobley writing in the late 1890s indicated that women worked for longer hours when he noted:

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<sup>84</sup> Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways, pp. 24-25.

The principal occupations of the Kavirondo (the Luo) are cultivation, cattle rearing and trading. The cultivation is mainly in the hands of women, but is not, however, that undignified for men to engage in agricultural activity.<sup>85</sup>

Johnston writing in the next decade on agricultural production among the Kavirondo (the Luo) observed:

Among the Kavirondo both the sexes work in the fields and in a state of complete nudity... Ja-Luo (a Luo) lives much by agriculture. They cultivate sorghum, sweet potatoes, peas, eleusine, pumpkins, tobacco and hemp.<sup>86</sup>

Most respondents concurred that women were more engaged in crop production than men.<sup>87</sup> One respondent argued:

It was true that both woman and husband worked on the agricultural farm. But the man would stop work by about 11:00 am leaving the woman to continue working up to about 3:00 pm. The man would leave early to attend to livestock.<sup>88</sup>

Girls and boys, whose labour were equally under-exploited before the shift, also became involved in agricultural activities.

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<sup>85</sup> Hobley, C. W. 'Kavirondo', The Geographical Journal, p. 369.

<sup>86</sup> Johnson, H. The Uganda Protectorate, vol. 2, Hutchinson and Company, London, 1902, p. 787.

<sup>87</sup> Interviews with: Roselida Nyakado, Pius Adoyo Owiti, Timothy Toro, Nyamkore Adel.

<sup>88</sup> Interviews with: Roslida Nyakado.



The shift from pastoralism to crop production had a major impact on the political system in pre-colonial South Nyanza. Before the shift, the ruothi (chiefs) who ruled the various clans enjoyed loose political powers since the migratory pastoral life meant that a chief could lose control of his subjects at any moment. But as people turned to crop production, and a more sedentary life pattern, this presented chiefs with permanent subjects to govern. Chiefs' powers now became more centralised than before.<sup>89</sup>

The shift in the economy led to the increasingly inequitable distribution of land. Influential people such as chiefs, clan elders, diviners, grandparents and others were able to allocate themselves more land than ordinary people. They were able to utilise the labour of their dependants in agricultural production. This meant that they could accumulate more agricultural produce in addition to livestock. This resulted in the emergence of a class of rich people in pre-colonial South Nyanza. There were those who were known as jomoko (the rich) and jochan (the poor).<sup>90</sup>

In pre-colonial South Nyanza, the agricultural implement that was most widely used was rahaya (a wooden hoe). Most respondents concurred that rahaya was the initial agricultural tool that was in use in pre-colonial South Nyanza and Luoland more generally.<sup>91</sup> As Hay has noted, sometimes rahaya was one wooden piece of wood,

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<sup>89</sup> Ogot, B. A. History of the Southern Luo, p. 252; Ochieng, W. R. An Outline History of Nyanza, pp. 48-49.

<sup>90</sup> Interviews with: Benson Mikingo, Enosh Adhaja.

<sup>91</sup> Interviews with: Joshua Pamba, Joseph Nyakwayo.

sometimes an additional wooden “blade” would be attached. A system of shifting cultivation and crop rotation were practised. The main agricultural tool employed in addition to rahaya was a type of machete (beti), which was specifically used to clear the bush from fields before digging commenced.

Most respondents noted that rahaya, being a wooden structure, was not very effective in crop production, particularly in tilling hard grounds. A new imported iron hoe, nya-yimbo that was not as widely spread as rahaya gradually came into use in pre-colonial South Nyanza and the wider Luoland. Neither Hay nor Buttermann inform us as to where the Luo imported nya-yimbo from. This study concurs with Hay on the use of nya-yimbo during pre-colonial times, but it goes further in explaining how it was acquired and what was its broader social impact.<sup>92</sup> Oral testimony from Kano indicates that households in Kano and the rest of the Luo acquired nya-yimbo from the people of Yimbo (a section of the Luo) who bought them from the Samia who manufactured them. The people of Yimbo were the middlemen in the iron hoe trade between the Luo and the Samia (a section of the Luhya) who were neighbours to the Luo of Central Nyanza.<sup>93</sup> Findings from South Nyanza corroborate this oral information. Documentary evidence also confirms these claims. For instance, Johnston who wrote on the Luo before South Nyanza was colonised remarked:

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<sup>92</sup> Hobley, C. W. ‘Kavirondo’, The Geographical Journal, p. 370.

<sup>93</sup> Onduru, T. A. ‘Some Aspects of Economic Change’, p. 36.

The Luo do not smelt iron, but obtain it in pig form the Bantu (the Samia). There are some Luo blacksmiths who forge spears, knives, billhooks and axes, but the Luo obtain hoes from their Bantu neighbour.<sup>94</sup>

Hobley, writing on the Kavirondo, likewise observed: “Samia was the greatest centre of the native ironworkers. They manufactured iron hoes, spears, knives, hatchets, etc”.<sup>95</sup> The iron hoe was nicknamed by the Luo, nya-yimbo (literally meaning a girl from Yimbo), to equate its “beauty” to a girl.

The introduction of iron hoes into South Nyanza, and Luoland more widely, before the imposition of colonial rule expanded agricultural production in the area. Those who could afford them bought them in large numbers because it was more effective in crop production than the wooden implement, rahaya, and they were able to cultivate more farms than previously. However, what this study shows is that the iron hoe (nya-yimbo) did not cause a shift from pastoralism to crop production as studies such as those of Hay and Butterman have suggested.

Rather, the central point to stress is that not everybody in pre-colonial South Nyanza could afford the new iron hoe. The jomoko (the rich), such as chiefs, war leaders, diviners and other related rich people, were the ones who expanded their agricultural production using the iron hoe. The price of the iron hoe was equivalent to a cow or more. The few

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<sup>94</sup> Johnston, H. The Uganda Protectorate, p. 790.

<sup>95</sup> Hobley, C. W. ‘Kavirondo’, The Geographical Journal, p. 370.

rich people who bought them were able to accumulate more wealth through crop production; hence class differentiation.

Most case studies of pre-colonial crops cultivated by the Luo such as those by Hay and Buttermann have relied on oral information to identify them.<sup>96</sup> These mention the following crops as having been cultivated during the pre-colonial period: bel (sorghum), kal (finger millet), oduma or bando (speckled maize), rabuon (sweet potatoes), budho (pumpkin), alote (vegetables), nyim (sesame) and alayo (green gram). This thesis provides documentary evidence on the pre-colonial crops that the people of South Nyanza and the Luo in general cultivated. Reverend Wakefield provides the earliest documentary evidence. Archdeacon Farler, citing the work of Rev. Wakefield noted:

Both sexes work in the field. Millet, beans, bananas, and inexhaustible supplies of sweet potatoes are grown.<sup>97</sup>

Johnston also wrote on pre-colonial crops that the Luo cultivated:

Ja-Luo (a Luo) lives much by agriculture. They cultivate sorghum, sweet potatoes, peas, beans, eleusine, pumpkins, tobacco and hemp.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Hay, J.M 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 95; Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation', pp. 53-54.

<sup>97</sup> Wakefield, T. (Reverend), 'Routes of the Native Caravans from the Coast to the Interior of Eastern Africa', The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society; Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Native Routes from Pangani to the Masai Country', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 734.

<sup>98</sup> Johnston, H. The Uganda Protectorate, p. 787.

All interviewees agreed that the staple crop that was cultivated in South Nyanza and Luoland more widely was bel (sorghum millet). The main dish, kuon or pap (as it is known in South Africa) was prepared from it. Sorghum millet was also used to prepare nyuka (porridge), which was the core component of the daily diet. The crop was also used to brew traditional beer. Informants noted that sorghum millet had medicinal values; it treated running stomachs. The crop, moreover, is resistant to droughts, which probably contributed to its popularity, given that the lake region is prone to drought. Even today, sorghum is still a popular crop and is widely grown in some parts of South Nyanza, particularly the areas along the lakeshore where rainfall is irregular and low. In high ground areas, however, where rainfall is adequate, it is gradually being replaced by white maize as a staple food.

Most studies on Nyanza mention that the Luo cultivated a variety of maize, which was known locally as oduma ma rachich (speckled maize).<sup>99</sup> Again they have used oral information as their source. As this study of South Nyanza shows, documentary evidence such as that by Thomson Through Masai Land<sup>100</sup> mentions maize as one of the crops that was cultivated by the Wa-Kavirondo (the Luo and the Luhyia). But it is pertinent to point out that Thomson mentions maize being grown by the Kabras on his visit there in 1883. This, as we have already noted above, concurs with oral evidence contained in studies such as those by Hay and Butterman who mention that the Luo cultivated speckled maize during the pre-colonial period. Oral evidence from South Nyanza also concurs with

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<sup>99</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 97; Butterman, J. M. Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 53; Onduru, T. A. 'Some Aspects of Economic Change', p. 34.

<sup>100</sup> Thomson, J. Through Masai Land, pp. 478-479.

Thomson's finding that the Luo cultivated speckled maize during the pre-colonial period.<sup>101</sup>

Hay has noted that lists of late nineteenth century crops that the Luo cultivated did not include plantains (bananas) or sweet potatoes.<sup>102</sup> Documentary evidence however shows that the Luo cultivated bananas and sweet potatoes. Reverend Wakefield lists bananas and sweet potatoes as crops cultivated by the Luo. Johnston also lists sweet potatoes but not bananas.<sup>103</sup> Hay is also incorrect to remark that bananas and sweet potatoes are not grown on the lakeshore. It could be true that they were not indigenous to the Luo, but there is no evidence to support the claim.

Studies undertaken on the pre-colonial economy of Nyanza have not conclusively agreed on whether there were two planting seasons a year or one.<sup>104</sup> Again the reason for this is that they relied on oral information as their primary source. During the field research for the present study some respondents argued that there were two planting seasons, while others insisted that there was only one. Documentary evidence shows beyond reasonable doubt that there were two planting seasons in a year. This, Archdeacon Farler, writing in 1882, for example observed: "There are two harvests in a year".<sup>105</sup> It may be possible to

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<sup>101</sup> Oral Interviews with: Naman Singa, Omondi Genga.

<sup>102</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 98.

<sup>103</sup> Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 734; Johnston, H. The Uganda Protectorate, p. 787.

<sup>104</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 95; Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', pp. 54-55.

<sup>105</sup> Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, pp. 743-744.

reconcile the difference by reference to sorghum millet. Most respondents concurred that the staple food crop, sorghum millet was only planted during the first planting season (chiri) and not the second planting season (opon). The reason for this is that during the second planting season, rains are scarce and might not be adequate for sorghum millet that requires a sufficiency of rain.

In pre-colonial South Nyanza, as indeed in the rest of Luoland, people had no names for the months of the year. People relied upon natural phenomena to guide them in timing their agricultural activities. For instance, the people of South Nyanza and the rest of the Luo relied mainly on the stars for making these decisions especially the constellations of Orion and the Pleiades.<sup>106</sup> The two constellations are known as yugini. But the Luo further differentiate them by calling the three stars of Orion belt, the “chuo” or “men” and the cluster of the Pleiades the “mon” (“women”). From the structural arrangement, the “men” are perceived to be polygamists. When these stars are observed at nightfall, roughly midway between the zenith and the horizon, then it indicates that the time for planting is ready. The Luo believed that before these stars reached the appropriate position, planting could not commence, rains notwithstanding. Conversely, if there were no rains but the stars had reached the appropriate position, then people would commence planting. As Owen noted:

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<sup>106</sup> Owen, W. E. (Archdeacon), ‘Food Production and Kindred Matters’, Journal of the East Africa and Uganda Natural History and Society, p. ; Interviews with: Elphas Onduru, Naman Singa.

The Luo said that if the sorghum millet (their main food crop) did not flower by the month when these stars dip below the horizon shortly after nightfall, then there would be a poor harvest and scarcity of food.<sup>107</sup>

In addition to the stars, the other natural phenomena that guided the Luo as to when to plant was the appearance of particular birds. One such bird is called “Ondiek ti oyieng” (in English, would be loosely translated – “the hyena would be well fed”). In English, the bird is known as the brain fever bird. It has a monotonous three-note cry. The Luo refer to its cry as “dak ti ukom” – which can be literally translated as “why aren’t you sowing”. There is also another bird called “Oliech ga apol”. This type of bird normally follows the digger, feeding on insects they get from the soil as they dig. When this migratory bird appeared, it indicated that the planting season was ready. The third type of migratory bird whose appearance indicated that planting was at hand was the African kite. They usually appeared in the autumn in large numbers, feeding on the flying ants in the air and on the ground.<sup>108</sup>

Reverend Wakefield described the climatic conditions of Kavirondo (Luoland) in 1870 as follows:

The climate near the lakeshore is hot, and the nights are sultry. Frequent bathing is resorted to as a palliative. The rains begin in May and end in December, and in

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<sup>107</sup> Owen, W. E. (Archdeacon), ‘Food Production and Kindred Matters’, Journal of the East Africa and Uganda Natural History and Society, p. 238.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p. Interviews with: Elphas Onduru, Naman Singa.



addition there is a light fall of rain, earlier in the year, similar to the vuli of the coast. The winds are variable. There are no monsoons.<sup>109</sup>

It can be concluded that agricultural activities took place from May to December, which accurately concurs with the present time when agricultural activities take place in South Nyanza and the rest of Luoland.

Since climatic conditions have remained almost the same in Luoland as in the pre-colonial period, we can assume that during the primary planting season (chiri), farms were mainly prepared (tilled) between December and January, planting was undertaken in February, while weeding was carried out in March and April. Harvesting took place around August. All crops were planted during the primary planting season, the chief crop being sorghum millet, which was a staple food in South Nyanza and Luoland more generally. The secondary planting season was undertaken immediately after the harvest of the primary planting season. Then people only planted crops which matured faster, such as finger millet, sweet potatoes and vegetables. The second planting season according to interviewees supplemented a shortfall in the primary planting season.<sup>110</sup>

Certain cultural practices were strictly observed during agricultural seasons. For instance, when the time for tilling land, sowing and the first harvest was reached, it was the mikayi

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<sup>109</sup> Wakefield, T. (Reverend), 'Native Routes Through the Masai Country', cited in Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 743.

<sup>110</sup> Interviews with: Joseph Nyakwayo, Benson Mikingo.

or “chief wife” of the head of the community who was the first to till land, sow and harvest. No one could perform these activities before her.<sup>111</sup> Within the homestead, it was the mikayi (the first wife) who was expected to first till land, and to sow and harvest the first crop. Other wives followed in order of seniority.

Each family head (a husband) had his own garden, mondo, which was worked on by his wife or wives, children and dependants if he had any. The harvests from the mondo was stored in his granary, also called mondo.<sup>112</sup> The harvest from the mondo was a reserve for the homestead to be utilised when food shortages occurred. It could also be used to assist a relative who faced a food shortage. When a new harvest was brought in and if there still remained some grain in the granary from the previous harvest, the woman could dispose of it by bartering it for domestic animals. This practice was called rundo. The beast procured from such a transaction, if it was a cow or heifer, was called dher tekre. Such an animal became the property of the woman. She kept it for her sons’, for the future use as bridewealth.

In pre-colonial South Nyanza, as was the case in the rest of Luoland, people practised a traditional mode of production called saga (communal work). No payments were made; only food and traditional drinks (beer) were provided. This was useful during the peak of agricultural activities such as tilling land, weeding and harvesting.<sup>113</sup> Saga was not

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<sup>111</sup> Interviews with: Rebecca Achola, Lucas Owaga.

<sup>112</sup> Owen, W. E. op. cit. pp. 242-243.

<sup>113</sup> Mboya, P. *Luo Kitgi Gi Timbegi (A Hand Book of Luo Customs)*, Equatorial Publishers, Nairobi, 1938, pp. 161-164; Odinga O. *Not Yet Uhuru.*, p.13; Interview with: Naman Singa, Ibrahim Ondiek.

limited to agricultural activities; it was also resorted to during occasions such as building a house, a granary and fencing. Interviewees noted that nobody could refuse to turn up when invited for communal work, unless he or she had other more pressing duties to attend to. Saga operated on the principle of reciprocity.

The practice of communal work appears to have been common in most pre-colonial African communities. In South Africa, Bundy found that the Nguni practised the “work party” similar to the saga. The work parties, Bundy noted, were principal means whereby numbers of people co-cooperated in the performance of difficult work.<sup>114</sup>

In a more recent study Widgren has pointed out that among the many misunderstandings of pre-colonial African agriculture is the loose way in which the term ‘shifting cultivation’ is still used.<sup>115</sup> He remarks that in some general studies one finds all pre-colonial cultivation simply branded as ‘shifting’, despite the many calls for specific terminology to describe the broad variety of extensive farming systems known in the tropics. He asserts that it is now well known that intensive agricultural practices based on permanent fields were widely spread in the region well before colonialism. While Widgren’s observation could be partially true, this study of South Nyanza shows that during the pre-colonial era, one of the most common methods used to maintain soil fertility was the practice of shifting cultivation. Respondents observed that cow dung was

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<sup>114</sup> Bundy, C. The Rise and Fall of South African Peasantry, p. 20.

<sup>115</sup> Widgren, M ‘Towards a Historical Geography of Intensive Farming in Eastern Africa’, in Widgren M. and Sutton, J. E. G. (eds.), Islands of Intensive Agriculture in Eastern Africa, East African. Educational.Publishers, Nairobi, Mkuki na Nyota, Dar es Salaam, Ohio University Press, Athens, James Currey, Oxford, 2004, p. 5.

never used as manure to maintain soil fertility. It appears that the practice of shifting cultivation was used because land was available in plenty, and through the practice soil fertility was maintained. One interviewee noted:

In pre-colonial South Nyanza, people practised shifting cultivation. This allowed the soil to regain fertility, and because of that, there was no need for manure to be applied on the farms. One farm could be cultivated for about four to five years, then left to be fallow to regain fertility. The use of manure is a recent development; it started during the colonial period.<sup>116</sup>

Allan observed that the shifting cultivator had a close understanding of his environment. He could rate the fertility of the place and its suitability for one or other of his crops by the vegetation that covered it and the physical characteristics of the soil. He could also assess the “staying-power” of the soil, and the number of seasons for which it could be rested. He noted that the shifting cultivator’s indicator of initial fertility was the climax of vegetational phases that follow cultivation. In many cases, “his knowledge was precise and remarkably complete”. He had the vocabulary of hundreds of names of trees, grasses and other plants. This fund of ecological knowledge was the basis of shifting cultivation, Allan concluded.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Naman Singa.

<sup>117</sup> Allan, W. The African Husbandman, p. 5.

It should be noted that shifting cultivation was not the only method of maintaining soil fertility. For instance, bush burning was also used to maintain soil fertility. The other method that was used was when ash from cooking places was put on gardens.<sup>118</sup>

## **Fishing**

As Hobley correctly observed, those who lived near the lake (Lake Victoria) were expert fishermen, and in this way supplemented their diet. Johnston, commenting on the diet of the Luo, also noted that besides the flesh of fowls, cattle, sheep and goats, the Luo ate large quantities of fish, which they obtained from rivers, and above all, from Lake Victoria.<sup>119</sup>

Various fishing methods were employed by the people of South Nyanza and the Luo more widely on lake fishing. One of the most common, as described by Johnston, was the use of large conical wicker traps known locally as gogo. These worked as follows: the ends of two very large ropes were firmly tied to the shore. One rope lay, weighed, along the bottom under the water, the other floated on the surface. From it hung a fringe of papyrus stalks. The two ropes above and below were connected at intervals with strings to ensure their alignment, while the fringe of the papyrus strips created a kind of pliable fence. This, by means of canoes, was brought round through the water back to the shore until it formed rather more than a semi-circle. This served to chase all the fish that were

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<sup>118</sup> Interviews with: Rebecca Achola.

<sup>119</sup> Hobley, C. W. 'Kavirondo', The Geographical Journal, pp.365-366; Johnston, H. The Uganda Protectorate, pp.788-789.

between it and the shore towards the mouths of the big wickerwork traps which were placed in a down dragging of a smaller mesh, in which they collected numbers of smaller fish.<sup>120</sup> As some informants observed, gogo was mainly pulled by men and not women since it was labour intensive.<sup>121</sup>

The other fishing method involved the use of a fish-basket known as ounga. This was mainly employed by women operating along the shore and did not involve going into the deep parts of the lake. Women, while fishing in rivers and ponds, also used this method. The fish that were caught were mainly used to supplement the diet, while the surplus was exchanged in trade. Varieties of fish were caught, ranging from the prized ones such as ngege (tilapia), fwani (barbel), and catfish (kamongo), to other less popular ones known locally as okoko, fulu, ningu, and omena.<sup>122</sup>

Other related economic activities that the households in South Nyanza and indeed the Luo more generally engaged in include hunting and gathering. All these went a long way in supplementing the daily diet of the people of South Nyanza.

## **Trade**

In much the same way as pastoralism and agriculture, trade was an important component of the economy of the people of South Nyanza during the pre-colonial era. Hopley emphasised the crucial role trade played in the economy of the Luo:

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<sup>120</sup> Interviews with: Joseph Nyakwayo, Japheth Obuya.

<sup>121</sup> Interviews with: Zedekia Auma, Joseph Nyakwayo.

<sup>122</sup> Interviews with: Zedekia Auma, Joseph Nyakwayo.

The principal occupations of the Kavirondo were cultivation, cattle rearing and trading.<sup>123</sup>

Through trade, households in South Nyanza were able to supplement their food requirements. Trade was also significant because through it, the people of South Nyanza were able to acquire properties such as livestock, agricultural products as well as agricultural implements. According to interviewees, trade was generally active during periods of famine.<sup>124</sup>

Fearn pointed out that in Nyanza, as was the case in most African communities during the pre-colonial period, the traditional system of mutual kinship obligation, which was widely observed, was a significant factor, which minimized the need for trade.<sup>125</sup> Contrary to Fearn's views however, trade was very common in Luoland. For instance, Speke noted the trade between the occupants of the eastern shores of Lake Victoria (the people of South Nyanza) and the Arabs and Swahili as well as the salt trade between the Baganda and the people of South Nyanza.<sup>126</sup> Burton also noted:

It would take a month to go in boats from Kira to (the Masai country), where there is another Nyanza, joined by a strait to the big Nyanza, which King Mutesa's boats

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<sup>123</sup> Hobley, C. W. 'Kavirondo', The Geographical Journal, p. 369.

<sup>124</sup> Interviews with: Naman Singa, Ibrahim Ondiek.

<sup>125</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy, pp.28-29.

<sup>126</sup> Speke, J. H. 'The Upper Basin of the Nile from Inspection and Information', The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, 33, 1863, pp. 326-327, 330.

frequent for salt; but the same distance could be accomplished in four days over-land, and three days afterwards by boat.<sup>127</sup>

The area that Burton describes as “where another Nyanza, is joined by a strait to the big Nyanza” referred to the strait where Winam Gulf joins the main Lake Victoria. The eastern side of the strait the Baganda frequented to buy salt is South Nyanza, at Kaksingri. The Kaksingri people lived and still live on the shores of Lake Victoria. They were known for salt production.<sup>128</sup> Archdeacon Farler observed in 1882 that Wakavirondo (the Luo) were very sharp in their bargains (trade). The German explorer, Carl Peters also pointed out in 1891 that local trade around Victoria Nyanza (Lake Victoria) was a significant activity that “defies all direct calculations”. All these reports, and more which follow, are clear evidence that trade was active in pre-colonial South Nyanza and Luoland more generally.

Respondents noted that there were two forms of trade in pre-colonial South Nyanza, internal and external. The former took place among the people of South Nyanza, while the latter involved the people of South Nyanza and adjacent communities as well as people from far away places from the East African coast, such as the Arabs and the

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<sup>127</sup> Burton, R. S. ‘On Lake Tanganyika, Ptolemy’s Western Lake Reservoir of the Nile’, The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, vol. xxx, 1865, pp.1-14.

<sup>128</sup> Dobbs, C. M. ‘The Kaksingri and Gwasssi Districts of South Kavirondo, Nyanza Province’, Journal of East Africa and Uganda Natural History and Society, 3-4, Nos. 5-8, 1912-14, No. 8, pp.129-131; Kenny, M. G. ‘Pre-colonial Trade in Eastern Lake Victoria’, Azania, 14, 1979, pp. 97-107; Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), ‘Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country’, Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 737; Peters, C. New Light on Dark Continent, Ward, Lock and Co., London, 1891, cited in Kjekshus, H. Ecology and Control, p. 113.



Swahili. The Baganda from the interlacustrine region were also involved in the trade. Respondents observed that external trade was more active between the people of South Nyanza and the Abagusii from whom they received finger millet and sorghum in exchange for livestock, milk and fish. The trade was vigorous with Abagusii since they occupied rich agricultural region. Hence they produced plenty of grain, unlike the people of South Nyanza.<sup>129</sup> Reverend Wakefield, who wrote on the economic activities of the Wa-Kosovo (the Abagusii) in 1870, noted that they were agriculturalists. Archdeacon Farler shortly afterwards in 1882 also observed that Wa-Kosobo (the Abagusii) were an agricultural community.

Ochieng' pointed out that the pre-colonial Luoland trade on Lake Victoria was for a long time connected primarily with the fishing industry.<sup>130</sup> He noted that the Kabakas of Buganda organised fishing expeditions that took fishermen to unknown islands in Lake Victoria where large quantities of fish could be caught. These fishermen developed trade links between Buganda and the people of Musoma in Tanzania and with the people of the Yimbo Kadimo, Rusinga and Mufangano islands. He observed that the trade items which the fishermen from Buganda brought to the Luo included ornaments like bangles, leg-rings and earrings. Other items included bananas, salt and fish. He noted that the Baganda in return received fish, goats and sheep. Ochieng' pointed out that from the middle of the

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<sup>129</sup> Ochieng, W. R. 'The Gusii Before 1900', in Ogot, B. A. (ed.), Kenya Before 1900, pp. 101-102; Wakefield, T. (Reverend), 'Routes of the Native Caravans from the Coast to the Interior of Eastern Africa', The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 308; Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 737; Interviews with: Mzee Agoi, Zedekia Auma.

<sup>130</sup> Ochieng, W. R. An Outline History of Nyanza, P. 58.

nineteenth century, however, the Baganda began to capture people whom they carried off to Buganda and sold as slaves to the Arabs from the coast and Khartoum. South Nyanza evidence shows that Ochieng's argument is flawed, and that the flow of trade was the reverse. It was the Luo, particularly the people of Kaksingri, selling salt to the Baganda. As has already been noted, evidence from Speke, Burton, and Dobbs all concur that the Baganda bought salt from the Luo of Kaksingri, who were widely known for their skills in salt production.<sup>131</sup>

The other group that the Luo were vigorously involved with in trade was the Samia, a Luhya sub-ethnic group. Samia was the greatest centre of "native" ironworkers.<sup>132</sup> The Samia, as has already been noted, manufactured iron hoes that were sold in South Nyanza and the rest of Luoland by the Jo-Yimbo (the Yimbo people). The Jo-Yimbo thus acted as the middlemen in the trade.

The most significant kind of external trade in which the people of South Nyanza were involved, as indeed the Luo more widely, that previous case studies on Nyanza have overlooked, was trade with the Arabs and Swahili traders from the East African Coast.<sup>133</sup> Even general studies on Kenya have failed to mention the trade.<sup>134</sup> Yet Arabs and Swahili

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<sup>131</sup> Speke, J. H. 'The Upper Basin of the Nile', The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, pp. 326-327; Burton, R. S. 'On Lake Tanganyika', The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 11; Dobbs, C. M. 'The Kaksingri and Gwassi', Journal of East Africa and Uganda Natural History and Society, pp. 129-130.

<sup>132</sup> Hobley, C. W. 'Kavirondo', The Geographical Journal, p. 370.

<sup>133</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'.

<sup>134</sup> Ogot, B. A. (ed.), Zamani: A Survey of East African History, Longman, Nairobi, Kampala, Dar es Salaam, 1973, pp. 210-227; Wolff, R. D. Britain and Kenya pp. 30-46.

coastal traders had for a long time been engaged in human and ivory trade with the people of South Nyanza and the Luo up to the time of the abolition of the slave trade and slavery in East Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>135</sup>

Two missionary sources provide detailed information of events in South Nyanza and some parts of Luoland during the slave trade era. One is Reverend Wakefield's, *Routes of the Native Caravan from the Coast to the Interior of Eastern Africa*.<sup>136</sup> Reverend Wakefield belonged to the Methodist Missionary Society and was based at Ribe in Mombasa. He never visited South Nyanza or the interior as a whole, but the detailed article that he wrote on the interior, including South Nyanza, was based on information gleaned from the Arab traders, Sadi bin Ahadi, Mbwana and Hami who made frequent trips to South Nyanza on slave trade expeditions. This is the earliest detailed documentary record on South Nyanza and provides crucial information on the area before colonial rule. The article remarks that it was not only the Arabs and the Swahili who went to South Nyanza to purchase goods, but that some "whites" used trade vessels on the lake to purchase ivory from the people of South Nyanza. Wakefield does not tell us who these "white" traders were because his informant, Sadi bin Ahedi, did not directly encounter the "white" traders, but was informed about them by the local people of South Nyanza from whom they had bought ivory and eggs. The main items that the Arabs and Swahili

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<sup>135</sup> Onduru, T. A. 'Globalisation of a Rural Economy: Case Study of South Nyanza, Kenya, 1870-1920', A Paper Presented at an International Conference: Re- Thinking Worlds of Labour: Southern Africa Labour History in International Context, At University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, 28<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> July, 2006, pp. 1-8.

<sup>136</sup> Wakefield, T. (Reverend), 'Routes of the Native Caravans from the Coast to the Interior of Eastern Africa', *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* pp. 303-338.

traders acquired from South Nyanza and some Luoland areas with whom they traded were slaves and ivory. In return, the people of South Nyanza received less valuable items such as beads and copper wire. Slaves in most cases were raided and rarely purchased.

The other missionary who wrote a detailed article on the interior again including South Nyanza, whose description concurred with Reverend Wakefield, was Archdeacon Farler who authored, *Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country and the Victoria Nyanza*.<sup>137</sup> Farler belonged to the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) and was stationed at Magila in the Usambara region in the present republic of Tanzania. Like Reverend Wakefield, Archdeacon Farler did not visit the interior beyond the Usambara. He likewise relied on information provided by the Arabs and Swahili traders who went into the interior and South Nyanza to purchase slaves and ivory. There are other accounts by missionaries and travellers such as Krapf Travels and Missionary Labour in East Africa, Thomson, Through the Masai Country, and New, Life, Wanderings, and Labour in Eastern Africa.<sup>138</sup> These accounts provide useful information on the trade relations between the Arabs and Swahili traders from the coast and the people of South Nyanza and the interior at large.

Most studies of pre-colonial markets in Africa deny that there were fixed markets. The evidence provided by Reverend Wakefield and Archdeacon Farler, clearly indicates that

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<sup>137</sup> Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, pp. 730-744.

<sup>138</sup> Krapf, J. L. Travels and Missionary Labour, p. XLIX; Thomson, J. Through Masai Land, pp. 489-505; New, C. Life, Wanderings, and Labour, pp. 47—493.

fixed markets existed in pre-colonial South Nyanza and in other parts of Luoland. One such popular market described by Archdeacon Farler was Kabondo. He noted:

...the next march is along one of seven hours into the Ukosobo country. The Wakosobo are an agricultural people similar to the Wangoroini. They live in small villages without any chief for the whole country, but each village has its own headman. The country is populous. We now reach the Kavirondo country after a short march of two to three hours. The border town is Kabondo, and it has for an African town a large population. It is the biggest town in the land of Kavirondo, and is situated on a river running from the north.<sup>139</sup>

The Ukosobo, from the description and geographical location in relation to Kavirondo (the Luo), and more so, in relation to Kabondo “town”, are the present Abagusii. Wakefield called them Wa-Kosovo, who borders the Luo of South Nyanza. This was presumably because the Maasai called the Abagusii and the Kaksingri (a section of the Luo-Abasuba) Kosova.<sup>140</sup>

The Kavirondo is how the Arabs used to refer to the Luo and the Luhyia. But according to Johnston it was Hopley who coined their present name “Ja-Luo” (a Luo).<sup>141</sup> Evidence from South Nyanza does not concur with Johnston’s view. According to Oswald in his

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<sup>139</sup> Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), ‘Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country’, Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 737.

<sup>140</sup> Johnston, H. The Uganda Protectorate, p. 746.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* p. 787.

Alone in the Sleeping Sickness Country, the Kavirondo (the Luo) used to call themselves Ja Lwo, a name derived from Ja Lowo, meaning a free man, and freedom in every respect was the keynote of their life and was expressed by their unfailing cheerfulness and love of song and laughter.<sup>142</sup> Kabondo was probably a town or market named after the clan presently called Kabondo, which borders the Abagusii. The town or market was likely located near the present Oyugis market within the territory of the Kasipul clan. According to one respondent, the present Oyugis market was a pre-colonial market, it was located near River Ayoro, but was relocated to the present site during the colonial rule about three kilometres from its original site. He also pointed out that Arab traders used to raid the area for slaves whom they took away to unknown places.<sup>143</sup>

The other centres are described as follows by Archdeacon Farler:

From Kabondo, the next stage brings one to Nyawa, the residence of the Sultan of Kavirondo. It is four hours' distance from Kabondo in a northwesterly direction... The terminus of the caravan is now reached after a march of three hours. It is a big Kavirondo town called Sendege, under the chief Sendege, who rules the second district of the country. In the north a range of high mountains is visible called Nanda.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Oswald, F. Alone in the Sleeping Sickness Country, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. Ltd, London, 1915, pp. 26-27.

<sup>143</sup> Interviews with: Nicodemo Micholo.

<sup>144</sup> Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Native Routes from Pangani to the Masai Country', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 737.

From Farler's description of Nyawa, the residence of the Sultan (chief or ruoth) of Kavirondo appears to have been near the present Kendu-Bay town in Karachuonyo. The other town called Sendege, with a chief bearing the same name, appears to have been that of the chief of Kano, a Luo location. Kano fits that description well because to the north of Kano are a range of mountains called the Nandi Hills, which Farler calls Nanda Hills. The chiefdom is described by Farler as another Kavirondo district. This could have been due to the fact that from Nyawa, which has previously been surmised could have been in Karachuonyo, there is River Sondu (or Miriu) separating South Nyanza from Nyakach/Kano locations, the area that chief Sendege appears to have ruled. I strongly believe Sendege was the chief of Kano because when Farler describes Kajudu (currently called Kajulu) a big Kavirondo town, he notes:

The people of this town are covetous and quarrelsome, and are rather fond of making a disturbance with the traders. On the journey now described, Sendege had to be sent for to reduce them to order, and he gave them a sound rating (sic) for their bad conduct.<sup>145</sup>

Farler's description of Kajudu (Kajulu) and chief Sendege supports the hypothesis that Sendege was the chief of Kano, since Kano and Kajulu are neighbouring locations. Since Sendege had to be called to punish the Kajulu for their unbecoming behaviour towards the traders, it may be concluded that Sendege was not far from Kajulu. The other factor that gives credence to the claim that Sendege was a chief in Kano is the map provided by

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid. p. 737.

Farler, which places Sendege to the north bordering Lake Victoria, the area occupied by the Kano people. Sendege appears to have been an active trading centre. Archdeacon Farler noted:

Pangani caravans after spending some time at Sendege trading usually returned to the coast. The whole journey, going and returning, takes about seven months.<sup>146</sup>

The other towns (or markets) described by Farler on the road from Kajulu include Kamrele, which he notes was a big Kavirondo town on a river flowing from Nyanza (Lake Victoria). It is necessary here to correct the false idea that there was a river in Nyanza flowing from Lake Victoria. In the whole of the Winam Gulf, there is no single river flowing from the gulf. All the rivers in Luoland flow into the lake. Since Archdeacon Farler wrote the article based on the information provided to him by his Arab traders, he was correct when he observed:

Although I pointed out the improbability of this river flowing from the Nyanza, my informant insisted that it was so, but where it went he did not know.<sup>147</sup>

The description of a river flowing from the Nyanza (Winam Gulf) in fact reflects the way the Arabs describe the flow of rivers, which is the opposite to the common description of the flow of a river. A river flowing into a lake or sea, Arabs will say the opposite and vice

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<sup>146</sup> Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Native Routes East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 737.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. pp. 737-738.



versa. For instance, Captain Speke in his article: *The Upper Basin of the Nile, from Inspection and Information*, was perplexed by this strange Arab phraseology. He noted:

Here at Kaze, in 1857, we first heard that the Victoria N'yanza was the largest lake in this region. Sheikh Snay was our informant; and he said he thought it was the source of the Juba River. Captain Burton was my interpreter; and we both of us agreed it was more likely to be the source of the Nile. I then, with Bombay as an interpreter, heard from Snay and other Arabs that the Kitangule and Katonga rivers ran out of the N'yanza, and another river (which is the Nile, but obviously thought by some of the Arabs to be the upper portions of the Juba) ran into the N'yanza. Further argument explained this away, and showed me that the Arabs, by their peculiar mode of expression, spoke of the flow of a river in the reverse manner to that in which we are accustomed to speak of the direction of the current of a river.<sup>148</sup>

An important aspect of pre-colonial trade that is missing in all the previous case studies on Nyanza was the existence of some markets that were held daily. Farler, for example shows that the market at Kisumo (now called Kisumu) was held daily.<sup>149</sup> Kisumu is not in South Nyanza, but is the Provincial city of Nyanza province. The mode of exchange at the markets was not purely barter trade, as most studies tend to imply. Wakefield for

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<sup>148</sup> Speke, J. H. 'The Upper Basin of the Nile', *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, p. 322.

<sup>149</sup> Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, p. 744.

example noted that fees were levied at the Kisumu market in kind or in beads, from which one can deduce the use of beads as currency. Northcote also observed:

Ja-Luo, who are keen traders have began to realise the advantages of the rupee over iron, being helped to this conclusion by the necessity of having to pay three rupees a year for every hut.<sup>150</sup>

It should be noted that barter as a mode of exchange co-existed with the use of iron or beads as currency.<sup>151</sup> The significant point that thus emerges clearly from a study of South Nyanza is that there were items such as iron/iron products and beads which were used as currency, while at the same time barter was also used.

As has already been noted, the Arabs and Swahili traders from the East African coast penetrated the interior and more particularly South Nyanza to acquire slaves and ivory. What then were the consequences of the slave trade on South Nyanza? By the early 1870s, there was a steady flow of information about the interior of East Africa provided by explorers, missionaries and sportsmen as well as by the Arabs and Swahili who went into the interior. All reports on the interior of East Africa highlighted the vast dislocation and suffering inflicted by the inhuman slave trade. The dislocations could partially explain the existence of jodak (clients) in a number of lineages in South Nyanza.

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<sup>150</sup> Northcote, G. A. S. 'The Nilotic Kavirondo', The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1907, p. 59.

<sup>151</sup> Speke, J. H. 'The Upper Basin of the Nile', The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 322.

The penetration of the capitalist trading systems from the coast to the hinterland, and indeed into South Nyanza through the Arabs and Swahili traders, was the main catalyst for the initial changes in pre-capitalist social formation. The households in South Nyanza first came into contact with the Western capitalist system, which, as has already been observed, involved Arabs and Swahili coastal traders, roughly from the second half of the nineteenth century. Capitalist penetration initiated an unprecedented struggle for survival among the people of South Nyanza.

The slave and ivory trade contributed to the rise of some powerful Luo chiefs who collaborated with the Arabs and Swahili traders, for instance, chief Sendege, who lived in a big Kavirondo town in the early 1880s, also called Sendege, located on the terminus of the trade route. As has already been noted, Sendege was probably the chief of Kano. Chief Sendege's influence appears to have stretched beyond the borders of Kano and to have extended to adjacent locations such as Kajulu.<sup>152</sup>

Despite the absence of statistics, it seems probable that the slave trade caused depopulation of South Nyanza. Evidence from studies on Nyanza show that by the time Kenya was colonised, the area (South Nyanza) was less densely populated than Central Nyanza. There is little or no evidence to show that the Arabs and Swahili traders who went to South Nyanza crossed Winam Gulf to the Luo locations of Uyoma, Asembo, Sakwa, Alego, Gem and Ugenya. The lake appears to have acted as a barrier to the Arabs and Swahili traders' accessing Luo locations across the gulf. This could explain why

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<sup>152</sup> Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 744.

Central Nyanza had a high population density by the time Kenya was colonised, in contrast to South Nyanza. Evidence from Reverend Wakefield's and Archdeacon Farler's articles does not mention Arabs and Swahili traders crossing the gulf to the other Luo locations.<sup>153</sup> From South Nyanza, as the trade route shows, it moved along the northern part of the gulf and the furthest it went was Seme location and not beyond.

The slave trade appears to have contributed to the growth of a number of trading centres (or towns as referred to by the Arabs and Swahili traders) along the trade routes in South Nyanza as well as in other Luo locations of Kano, Kajulu, Kisumo and Seme. Kabondo in South Nyanza is mentioned to have been a border town between the Kavirondo (the Luo) and the Wakosobo (the Abigusii). Archdeacon Farler noted that Kabondo had a large population for an African town and that it was the biggest town in the land of Kavirondo.<sup>154</sup> Interestingly enough, if the present Oyugis market is the former Kabondo "town" as this study has deduced, then it is still the largest market in Luoland. The other towns mentioned to have been populous included Sendege, Kajudu (Kajulu), Kisumo, Kamrele and Seme. But these other towns were not in South Nyanza and were located in the other Luo locations of Kano, Kajulu, Kasimo and Seme.

The slave trade contributed to the spread of smallpox in South Nyanza and Luoland at large. Under endemic conditions, smallpox is a childhood disease.<sup>155</sup> The smallpox that

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid. p. 737.

<sup>154</sup> Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 744.

<sup>155</sup> Kjekshus, H. Ecology Control and Economic Development, p. 132.

the European explorers in East Africa described in the 1890s, however, attacked the adults as well as the young. The Arabs and Swahili traders introduced smallpox into the interior of East Africa. The Maasai thus took extreme caution when they came into contact with the coastal travellers. This was apparently because of the fear of smallpox that had earlier been introduced into the interior through caravans from the coast.<sup>156</sup> The Maasai referred to smallpox as the ‘white illness’ and associated it with the coming of the Europeans.<sup>157</sup> The people of South Nyanza referred to it as *nundu*.<sup>158</sup> Smallpox was the most dangerous epidemic that swept at times like a storm of death over the land.<sup>159</sup> Early explorers to East Africa reported the frightful scenes of smallpox epidemics that broke out on the trading caravan routes. During an epidemic, it was common to see the unburied bodies of the plague victims lying along the caravan routes.

In sum, it has been argued that the pre-colonial economy of South Nyanza was dynamic and not static. The main change in the economy of the households in the area by the 1870s was the shift from pastoralism to crop production as a primary economic activity. The shift, as has already been noted, was as a result of the presence of tsetse fly. The toll it inflicted on cattle (via nagana) forced the people of South Nyanza to shift to crop production. The section below turns to consider the political organisation of the people of South Nyanza during the pre-colonial period.

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid. p. 132.

<sup>157</sup> Johnston, H. H. *The Kilima-Njaro Expedition*, Kegan Paul, London, 1886, p.303, cited in Kjekshus, H. *Ecology Control and Economic Development*, p. 132.

<sup>158</sup> Interviews with: Maritha Onduru, Rusalina Onduru; Odaga, A. B. *Dholuo-English Dictionary*, p. 238.

<sup>159</sup> Burton, R. *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*, 2, vols. Longman, London, 1860, p. 318 cited in Kjekshus, H. *Ecology Control and Economic Development*, p. 132.

## Political Organisation

The Luo had no one paramount ruler (chief or king), but each sub-ethnic group had its own chief who administered his people independently.<sup>160</sup> The view that pre-colonial chiefs in Luoland were mere leaders and not rulers is not true as this study of South Nyanza reveals.<sup>161</sup> Hopley who also wrote of the Luo pre-colonial chiefs noted:

There is no doubt that in the older times the chiefs were far more powerful than now, and a vigorous chief with a large number of wives could have descendants enough to form the beginning of a quite considerable clan.<sup>162</sup>

Pre-colonial chiefs were mostly if not all polygamous and could have up from ten to forty wives.<sup>163</sup> This partially explains why chiefs were highly respected by their subjects. The large number of wives was a sign of wealth and status. They were also respected because chiefs at the same time held the office of jabilo (a diviner), one who was capable of foretelling the future. In pre-colonial South Nyanza, the most famous jabilo (chief) whom the colonial government appointed as a colonial chief was Gor Ogalo of Kanyamwa.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 744.

<sup>161</sup> Ochieng, W. R. An Outline History of Nyanza, pp. 47-49.

<sup>162</sup> Hopley, C. W. 'Anthropological Studies in Kavirondo and Nandi', The Journal of the Anthropological Studies of Great Britain and Ireland, p. 332.

<sup>163</sup> Johnston, H. The Uganda Protectorate, p. 791.

<sup>164</sup> Hopley, C. W. 'Anthropological Studies in Kavirondo and Nandi', The Journal of Anthropological Studies of Great Britain and Ireland, p. 328.

The chiefs (ruothi) in pre-colonial South Nyanza and Luo more generally, held three critical capacities: political, religious and military.

Each ruoth (chief) had a council (Buch piny) that assisted him in the chiefdom.<sup>165</sup> The council (Buch piny) was composed of: clan elders (Jodong dhoot), the peacemaker (ogaye), and the military leader (Osumba Mirwayi). The council assisted the chief in resolving matters affecting the whole ethnic group, such as famine, drought, war, sacrifices and prayers, and peace. It also acted as the final court of appeal for the whole ruothdom (chiefdom).

The chiefdoms were further subdivided into smaller political units (gweng), or what can be called minimal lineages. Each of these minimal lineages had a sub-chief, appointed by the chief (ruoth). The sub-chiefs also had their own councils known locally as doho.<sup>166</sup> Doho operated in a similar manner to Buch Piny, dealing with matters pertaining to the minimal lineage. Any matter that doho could not handle due to its complexity was referred to Buch piny. Doho was composed of the jo-dong gweng (country elders) and the local ogaye. The sub-chiefs had a police force (ogulmama), whose job was to enforce the decisions reached at the doho meetings.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Ogot, B. A. 'British Administration in the Central Nyanza District of Kenya 1900-1960', Journal of African History, p. 252.

<sup>166</sup> Ochieng, W. R. An Outline History of Nyanza Province, p. 49.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.* p. 49.

Ochieng' has observed that it was not unusual to find one dominant clan, due to its military power or wealth, conquering the clans in the adjacent ridges.<sup>168</sup> This, as he remarked, made the position, authority and prestige of the conquering chief expand far and wide. As has already been noted, a good example of such chiefs with imperial ambitions was chief Sendege of Kano, whose political influence extended to other clans such as Kajulu that appeared to have been under his political control during the 1870s.<sup>169</sup> Ochieng observed that rigid and perpetual overrule would not have been possible, since the "rulers" were always limited by the fact that the subjects had the alternative of migrating.<sup>170</sup> A case in point that supports Ochieng's view is the history of Karachuonyo and Kano, when the latter were still living with the former in South Nyanza. Buttermann noted:

As security increased, however, kinship relations achieved greater significance. By 1835 the Kano people had hived off and moved eastwards along the gulf, across Miriu River. They moved because with relatively secure conditions Karachuonyo began to exploit the Kano by not paying full bridewealth for Kano women. Meanwhile, the Karachuonyo men forced Kano men to marry, already pregnant Karachuonyo women, and then arbitrarily seizing bridewealth from Kano homesteads... In order to avoid further systematic exploitation Kano migrated.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid. p. 48

<sup>169</sup> Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, pp. 737-738.

<sup>170</sup> Ochieng, W. R. An Outline History of Nyanza Province, p. 49.

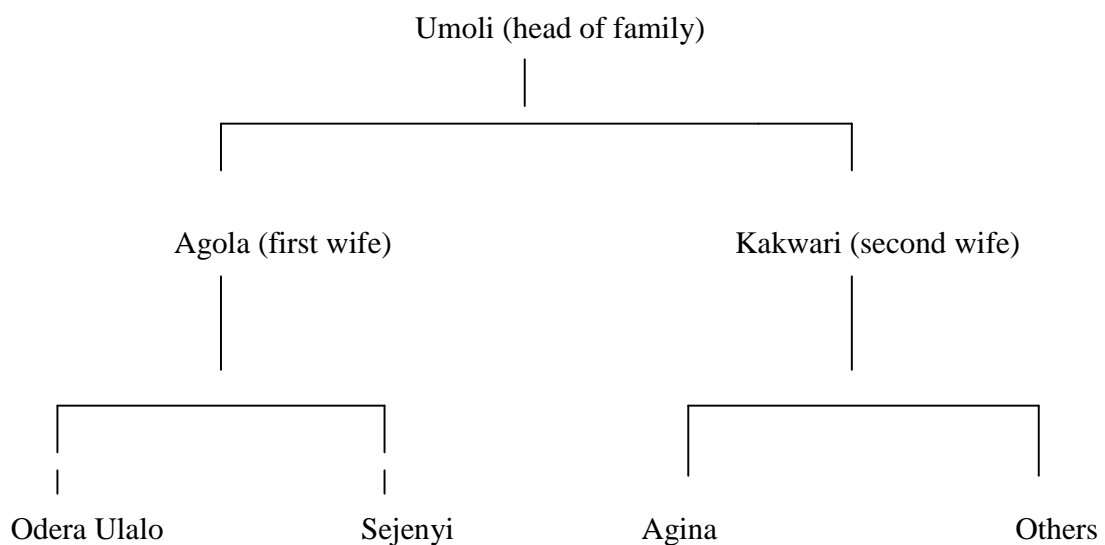
<sup>171</sup> Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', pp. 84-85.



Ruothship (chieftainship) was hereditary. As Hobley observed:

In the Gemi (the correct spelling, Gem) tribes, and several others of the Nilotic origin, the following rule holds with regard to the chieftainship. The chief is always the eldest son of the wife whom his father married first.<sup>172</sup>

The illustration below was provided by Hobley, and shows how the system of chieftainship as practised by the Luo operated:



Hobley explained the above illustration as follows:

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<sup>172</sup> Hobley, C. W. 'Anthropological Studies in Kavirondo and Nandi', The Journal of Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, p. 359.

Agola was married to Umoli before Kakwari, therefore the chiefs are hence-forth chosen from the offspring of Agola, and upon the death of Odera Ulalo, his son being quite small, the second son of Agola, Sejenyi by name, was elected chief. This rule was observed, although Agina is an older man than either Odera or Sejenyi.<sup>173</sup>

Northcote also provided a similar illustration of how the Luo system of chieftainship (hereditary) worked:

Upon the death of a chief, he was succeeded by the eldest son of the first wife, even though his second or third wife may have born a son before the son by the first wife was born; for instance, A is his first and chief wife and E his second. A may bear him a daughter, B and C, and then a son D. Though in the meanwhile E has born him a son F, D will become chief in virtue of his mother's priority, even though he has an elder brother (F). But if D is not fit to govern, F may become chief, as a regency is too advanced an institution; and similarly if both D and F are infants, some elder blood relation, such as their eldest uncle, will succeed their father. This rule not unnaturally leads to much quarrelling, as when the disposed heir grows up he often lays claim to rule, with disastrous results.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Hobley, C. W. 'Anthropological Studies in Kavirondo and Nandi', The Journal of Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, p. 359.

<sup>174</sup> Northcote, G. A. S. 'The Nilotic Kavirondo', The Journal of Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, p. 61.

Secession disputes against unpopular chiefs had also been noted by Northcote when he pointed out that Ja-Luo (a Luo) use secession as their chief weapon against an unpopular chief.<sup>175</sup>

In conclusion, it has been noted that in pre-colonial South Nyanza, the political organisation was dynamic and not static. Before the people of South Nyanza evolved permanent settlements, the political system was fluid. If the subjects perceived their chief to be dictatorial, then they could secede and be under the control of another chief. But once agriculture became the primary economic activity, which resulted in a settled life, the chiefs had more effective control over their subjects, even though some subjects could still break away and settle in other chiefdoms, but this was less frequent.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has shown that the pre-colonial economy of South Nyanza was never static, but dynamic and characterised by remarkable changes. The productive system was basically pre-capitalist, although some people produced to exchange in trade. The primary unit of production was the homestead. But, by the mid nineteenth century, a drastic shift occurred in the economy of South Nyanza and the Luo more generally; crop production now replaced cattle keeping as a primary economic activity. It was noted that the shift was prompted by the outbreak of cattle epidemics, which decimated large herds of cattle in South Nyanza and Luoland more gerenerally.

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid. p. 58

It was noted that in most segmentary lineage organisations, it was common to find refugee (jadak) or refugees (jodak). These people were generally not treated well by their hosts. Their labour in most cases was exploited. They were useful to the hosts in the sense they intermarried with the host group. This enhanced reproduction as well as production by the hosts. Another category of people whose labour was exploited by the host were slaves (misumbini), singular (misumba). Their labour could be utilised by their hosts in any economic activity. They were more exploited than refugees (jodak). In pre-colonial South Nyanza as has been noted, elders controlled the surplus labour of the junior men in both agricultural production and cattle keeping. It was also noted that wealthy families controlled the labour of poor families in crop and livestock production.

It was noted that pre-colonial chiefs in South Nyanza were polygamous. The large number of wives they had promoted the growth of reproduction which was crucial in production. The more people in a family, the more they were utilised in agricultural production. In South Nyanza, it was common to find a strong chief imposing his political control over the neighbouring weaker clans. Once these weaker clans became subjects and integrated into the chiefdom, the chief of the dominant clan could easily exploit their labour.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COLONIAL RULE IN SOUTH NYANZA, 1903 TO 1914

#### INTRODUCTION

The British colonial administration of Kenya, then known as the East Africa Protectorate, commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1895. In 1901, the Uganda Railway reached Kisumu, and the following year, 1902, the Eastern Province of Uganda, the region that currently forms Western, Nyanza and Rift Valley Provinces was transferred to the East Africa Protectorate. The Protectorate's commissioner, Sir Charles Elliot, noted that Africans had as yet not accepted colonial rule. In order to obtain their acquiescence, he believes that it was imperative to organise military expeditions against what he termed recalcitrant Africans. A series of punitive expeditions were carried out between 1900 and 1908 against communities that resisted British rule such as the Nandi, Embu, Abagusii, Kipsigis, Bukusu and Kabras.<sup>1</sup> South Nyanza was brought under British colonial rule in 1903, while the rest of Luoland had been brought under British colonial rule in 1900. A social and political system that characterised pre-colonial South Nyanza that had suited a migratory, semi-pastoral way of life had now to be converted into an administrative system for a settled agricultural population. The colonial government imposed on the people of South Nyanza a centralised system of rule. This new system jarred against the pre-colonial segmentary political system.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matson, A. T. 'Uganda's Old Eastern Province and East Africa's Federal Capital', Uganda Journal, XXII, 1958, pp. 46-47.

<sup>2</sup> Ogot, B. A. 'British Administration in Central Nyanza', Journal of African History, p. 253.

General studies of Kenya's colonial history such as those by Wolff and Van Zwanenberg have emphasised that British colonisation of Kenya totally transformed pre-colonial economies of societies in Kenya. These studies did not take into account regional variations in the response to colonial capitalism.<sup>3</sup> But other general studies of Kenya's colonial history such as those of Tignor, Kitching and Stichter have emphasised regional variations in their analyses of the African response to colonial capitalism in Kenya. They argue that there was no uniformity in response to colonialism.<sup>4</sup> These observations accord with regional studies on Nyanza such as those by Hay and Butterman who took into account regional variations in response to colonial capitalism in Kenya. These studies also pointed out that the articulation of colonial capitalism with pre-colonial African economies led to partial transformation of the latter during colonial rule.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter attempts to show how the imposition of British colonial rule on the people of South Nyanza partially incorporated their pre-colonial economy into colonial capitalism. This was accomplished when the colonial government introduced taxation that households in South Nyanza were to pay either through cash crop production, the sale of livestock, or wage labour. This chapter also shows that there were regional variations in response to colonial capitalism. Even within South Nyanza, there were variations in response to colonialism. The chapter will demonstrate that the establishment of colonial rule in South Nyanza laid a firm foundation for the transformation of the pre-colonial economy of South

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<sup>3</sup> Wolf, R. D. Britain and Kenya; Van Zwanenberg, R. M. A. Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya.

<sup>4</sup> Tignor, R. L. The Colonial Transformation of Kenya; Kitching, G. Class and Economic Change in Kenya; Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya.

<sup>5</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'.

Nyanza. The transformation took place as a result of the articulation of the pre-colonial economy of South Nyanza with the colonial economy.

The British conquest of South Nyanza could be described as being a peaceful undertaking. The section below turns to analyse the reaction of the people of South Nyanza to the British colonisation.

**(i) *Resistance against British colonisation***

The British colonisation of South Nyanza encountered minimal resistance from the local population. Lonsdale pointed out that, as time went on and the British punitive expeditions multiplied in other locations of Luoland, particularly in Uyoma, Sakwa and Seme, the Luo of South Nyanza drew appropriate conclusions from the fate of their kinsmen and made their peace without ever having occasioned war.<sup>6</sup> The people of South Nyanza may well have drawn the same conclusion a decade earlier, between 1884 and 1898, during the German colonisation of Tanzania.<sup>7</sup> As the South Kavirondo District Annual Report for 1909 remarked, “it was not possible to mention a clan within a day’s march of the Anglo-German border that was not punished forcibly by the government of German East Africa”.<sup>8</sup> Although Ochieng’ claims that the Karungu people in South Nyanza resisted the British occupation, there is no colonial administrative record corroborating this.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Lonsdale, J. M. ‘The Politics of Conquest: The British in Western Kenya, 1894-1908’, The Historical Journal, vol. 20, 1977, p. 844.

<sup>7</sup> Iliffe, J. ‘Tanzania Under German and British Rule’, in Ogot, B. A. (ed.), Zamani pp. 295-312.

<sup>8</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 1908-1909, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1909, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ochieng’, W.R. An Outline History of Nyanza p. 85.

The only form of resistance was non-compliance in dealing with British colonial administrators. Such people who registered this attitude refused to co-operate with the colonial government on matters pertaining to Western education, Christianity and the new agricultural methods that the colonial government introduced.<sup>10</sup> Such areas were then mostly neglected and ignored by the colonial government and generally lagged behind on the process of change, contrary to places that co-operated with the colonial government.

In South Nyanza, the elders held different opinions to the youth during the British occupation of South Nyanza. As Hopley rightly noted, the only consistent division of opinion with regard to war and peace that the British colonial administration observed in Nyanzan societies was between the generations. Elders were prone to pass the blame for conflict on the impetuosity of their warriors.<sup>11</sup> Lonsdale believes that these might have been no more than lame excuses. Equally, they may have reflected a division of interest between those who controlled property in women, grain and cattle, and those whose only property came from plundering the same. Colonial peace-making seems therefore to mark an early stage in the increasing bitterness between the generations which, as Lonsdale observed, was one of the fundamental consequences of alien rule, as the access of the young to wages as well as Western education made otiose the wisdom of the old generation. As Lonsdale remarked, even the most benign face of conquest masked an inward strain.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Pala, A. O. 'Changes in Economy and Ideology', p. 33.

<sup>11</sup> Hopley, C. W. to H. M. Commissioner, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1896: E. S. A, A 4/4 same to same, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1898 (A 4/12); and April 1900 (A 4/28), cited in Lonsdale, J. M. 'The Politics of Conquest', pp. 853-854.

<sup>12</sup> Lonsdale, J. M. 'The Politics of Conquest', The Historical Journal, pp.853-854.



## **(ii) Co-operation**

In South Nyanza, most communities opted to co-operate with the British colonial government, and not to stage a futile armed resistance against the better-armed conquerors. Some people in South Nyanza, as in other parts of Luoland, felt impelled to co-operate with the British colonial government as a result of the injunctions that had been issued by their jobilo, diviners or prophets. The jobilo had foretold of the coming of ‘red strangers’, long before whites arrived in Luoland, who would come from the sea. The jobilo (diviners) warned that once these “strangers” (whites) arrived, people should never try to fight them because they had superior weapons in contrast to the ones that the Luo possessed.<sup>13</sup> As Hodges remarked, if the prophecy and advice had been based upon reports from the early Arabs and Swahili traders from the coast, this may have meant that the jobilo thought resistance inadvisable towards people of apparently incalculable powers.<sup>14</sup> Johnson, who wrote on the Luo, noted that Jaluo (the Luo) had diviners who could foretell the future. He observed that chief Odua, when a young man, had prophesied the coming of a white man, and that this prophecy was uttered at a time when no white man had entered the country.<sup>15</sup> In Kanyamwa, the most famous jabilo (diviner) in South Nyanza, whose fame spread all over Luoland, was Gor Ogalo, who warned people against fighting the British. He was appointed the first colonial chief of Kanyamwa and later one of the paramount chiefs of South Nyanza.<sup>16</sup> In Kanyamkango, the best-known jabilo (diviner) was Oloo Ragot who

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<sup>13</sup> Odinga, O. Not Yet Uhuru, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Hodges, G. W. T. ‘African Response to European Rule in Kenya to 1914’, in Ogot, B. A. (ed.), Hadith 3, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1971, p. 89.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, H. The Uganda Protectorate, p. 792.

<sup>16</sup> Hobley, C. W. ‘Anthropological Studies in Kavirondo and Nandi’, The Journal of Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, p. 328; KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, 14-4-1914, P. 5.

was a contemporary of Gor Ogallo.<sup>17</sup> In Karachuonyo, the jabilo (diviner) who warned the people against fighting the British colonial government was Nyakiti Ogutu. He was the first colonial chief of Karachuonyo.<sup>18</sup>

In South Nyanza, many individuals who co-operated with the British colonial government did so for reasons of personal advantage. For instance, some personalities who after associating with the colonial government for a short duration of time, serving the colonial government as interpreters, realized that the whites were there to stay and that their presence could be taken advantage of. One such individual was chief Ezekiel Kasuku of Gwasi. Kasuku first engaged with the colonial administration while still a boy, accompanying askari (police) on safari (tours) within the district.<sup>19</sup> He was appointed as a court interpreter in 1907.<sup>20</sup> As a court interpreter, his role was to translate Dholuo (Luo language) into English at the district headquarters, Kisii.<sup>21</sup> He sought out the position because of the benefits and influence that he gained. Mr. R. Gethin, an Anglo-Irish entrepreneur who was one of the first Europeans to settle in Kisii and was familiar with Kasuku as an interpreter remarked:

In 1926, Kasuku stated that he had over 1,000 head of cattle. He ran South Kavirondo and practically nothing could be done in the district without his approval. All chiefs were under his influence and were said to pay him a retaining fee. He was also employed by a recruiting company as their chief recruiter and was

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<sup>17</sup> Butterman, J. M. ' Luo Social Formation in Change', pp. 97-99.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. pp. 97-99.

<sup>19</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report: Early Days in Kisii – by R. Gethin, DC/KSI/3/7, pp. 5-6.

<sup>20</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District: Character of Chiefs, DC/KSI/3/1, 1922-1937, 24-11-1937, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report: Early Days in Kisii, DC/KSI/3/7, 1912, p. 5.

paid Rs. 5 per head. As the company was recruiting anything up to 1,000 a month, Kasuku was not doing badly.<sup>22</sup>

From an interpreter, he rose to become chief of Gwasi in 1932.<sup>23</sup> It seems that Kasuku could have acquired proficiency in English when he worked as an askari's boy. The ability to speak English qualified him to be appointed a court interpreter and finally a chief.

Other men like Kasuku elsewhere in colonial Kenya were also appointed chiefs because of their language skills. For instance, in Sakwa location, Central Nyanza District, Ugada Ondiek, who had gone for a while to live in Kano location, near Kisumu, where he had learned to speak Kiswahili, used that skill to enable him to be appointed chief of Sakwa in 1912.<sup>24</sup> Among the Maasai, Lengemojik Ole Nakorodo was a 'boy' for Francis Hall, a British colonial administrator. Nakorodo was therefore able to acquire linguistic skills in English and Kiswahili that allowed him to be appointed a Maasai chief of Kaputiei location.<sup>25</sup>

In South Nyanza, most of the pre-colonial ruothi (chiefs) who, when the colonial government arrived, co-operated with the new power, retained their positions in the new political dispensation. Such pre-colonial ruothi (chiefs) included Gor Ogalo of Kanyamwa, Oloo Ragot of Kanyamkago and Nyakiti Ogutu of Karachuonyo. Such rulers acquired more powers, status and wealth in the new political system.

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<sup>22</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report: Early Days in Kisii, DC/KSI/3/7, 1912, pp. 5-6; Van Zwanenberg, R. M. A. Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, p. 111.

<sup>23</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District: Character of Chiefs: DC/KSI/3/7, 1922-1937, 24-11-1937, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Hodges, G.W.T. 'African Response to European Rule', in Ogot, B. A. (ed.), Hadith 3, p. 89; Odinga, O. Not Yet Uhuru, p. 21.

<sup>25</sup> Tignor, R. L. The Colonial Transformation of Kenya, pp. 64-65.

## **Colonial Administration**

For administrative purposes, the British colonial government divided Kenya into a number of provinces, which were administered by expatriate Provincial Commissioners. The provinces were further sub-divided into district administrative units, headed by District Commissioners who, like Provincial Commissioners, were expatriates. Districts were sub-divided into divisions, also under the jurisdiction of expatriate officers. Divisions were sub-divided into locations under the control of African chiefs.

The establishment of the British colonial administration in Kenya after 1894 had little immediate impact on the people of South Nyanza. When a Protectorate was declared over Uganda in July 1894, the region to the east of Lake Victoria as far as Naivasha was formally brought under British colonial rule. The region became known as the Eastern Province of Uganda Protectorate, to which South Nyanza also belonged. The province was formally divided into four districts: Nandi, Mau, Baringo and Suk. South Nyanza fell within Nandi District. The district comprised three divisions: Nandi proper, South Kavirondo and Ugaya.<sup>26</sup> Despite the existence on paper of the divisions, colonial administrators had little contact with the people of South Nyanza between 1894 and 1903. The closest administrative station was the Provincial headquarters at Kisumu. As Matson observed, “little real administration had been undertaken in the face of the overriding necessity of keeping the Nyando Valley clear and the construction of the railway up to schedule”.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 27.

<sup>27</sup> Matson, A. T. ‘Uganda’s Old Eastern Province’, Uganda Journal, p. 46.

The British colonial administration of South Nyanza effectively commenced in January 1903, when a parcel of Union Jacks was dispatched from Provincial headquarters, Kisumu, to the Karungu area to be raised in all villages in the vicinity to show that South Nyanza was under the British colonial administration. Karungu was then made the district headquarters. An acting District Commissioner, Boughton Knight, was posted to Karungu in August 1903, as the District Commissioner for South Kavirondo.<sup>28</sup> The colonial administration established the Karungu station in order to check on German encroachment on South Nyanza.<sup>29</sup> The Germans had already colonised Tanganyika (now the republic of Tanzania), which shared borders with South Nyanza, an area that the British had not brought under their political control. Other parts of South Nyanza, particularly Karachuonyo, Kabondo and Mumbo (Kasipul) had been formally under colonial rule since 1900, but had no government representatives operating in the locations. The locations were part of Kisumu District until 1908 when the three locations were transferred to South Nyanza District.<sup>30</sup> The British colonial administration soon realised that for effective administration, Karungu was not strategically placed, since it was not centrally located. G.A.S. Northcote, assistant collector in charge of Karungu from October 1904 to September 1906 observed:

Karungu (then district headquarters for Ugaya) is extremely ill adapted for a trade centre; the reason for its position is its vicinity to the German border. Again it is

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<sup>28</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, PC/NZA, 1910-1911, p. 12; South Kavirondo District Annual Report, Kisii/Ugaya District: DC/KSI/1/1, 1908-1912.

<sup>29</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, Kisii/Ugaya District: DC/KSI/1/1, 1908-1912.

<sup>30</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District: DC/KSI/3/2: Histories and Customs of Kisii and Luo between 1911-1924.

difficult to work the district from the station, more especially as that part (Kisii) which requires the most supervision is almost furthest removed.<sup>31</sup>

The district headquarters was later transferred from Karungu to Kisii in 1907. Apart from being centrally placed, the British colonial administrators also wanted to be close to the Abagusii (the Kisii) who were still resisting British colonial rule in order to defeat them and effectively bring them under colonial administration like the rest of South Nyanza. The British colonial administration carried out the first military expedition against the Abagusii in September 1905. Maxon, a scholar of the Abagusii, has pointed out that the Abagusii were daily “raiding the Kavirondo (the Luo of South Nyanza) along their borders”.<sup>32</sup> As Maxon rightly noted, the British could not ignore attacks on the people who were, however tenuously, under their administration and protection. These could neither be stopped nor compensation gained for the Luo without the use of armed force.<sup>33</sup> In the subsequent engagement, as Foran tells us, the British casualties were negligible, the leading Abagusii chiefs surrendered unconditionally and the Abagusii were fined heavily in cattle and sheep.<sup>34</sup>

Early in 1907, the site for the district headquarters was identified in Gusiiland and construction work started under the supervision of the District Commissioner, G. A. S.

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<sup>31</sup> KNA, Report on the Province of Kisumu for the year 1903-1906, pp. 15-16; Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya: The Gusii and the British, 1907-1963, Associated University Presses, Cranbury, London, Ontario, 1989, p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, 1989, p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 30.

<sup>34</sup> Foran, W. R. A Cuckoo in Kenya, Hutchinson, London, 1936, cited in Wipper, A. Rural Rebels: A Study of Two Protests Movements in Kenya, Oxford University Press, Nairobi, London, New York, 1977, p. 25.

Northcote.<sup>35</sup> Despite this, the Abagusii of Kitutu continued with their cattle raids.<sup>36</sup> The second military expedition against the Abagusii was undertaken in 1908 when the District Commissioner, G. A. S. Northcote was speared by an Abagusii man, Otenyo who had stolen money from some Swahili traders. Northcote had gone to Otenyo's home to investigate the alleged theft. Otenyo was annoyed when Northcote confiscated his cattle as a fine for theft. In an act of fury, Otenyo picked up a spear and waylaid Northcote on the path; he threw the spear and struck Northcote on the back inflicting a painful, but not a fatal wound.<sup>37</sup> This incident sparked off a second British military expedition against the Abagusii. In this, the Abagusii killed two policemen, an Indian trader and two Luo porters. Nevertheless, the Abagusii were decisively defeated and this marked the end of Abagusii armed resistance against the British colonial rule.<sup>38</sup>

The main vehicles of colonial administration in South Nyanza were colonial chiefs who provided a link between the local population and the colonial administration. Chiefs were first appointed in South Nyanza in 1903.<sup>39</sup> Their primary duty by then was to collect taxes. By 1907, chiefs and headmen had been appointed in the various locations in South Nyanza. The position of a chief was explained in a District Circular:

A Chief is a direct agent of the government in his location; his position is much the same as that of a District Commissioner. All over Kenya every chief has certain general functions and duties that go with his appointment. Among these are actively

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<sup>35</sup> Wipper, A. Rural Rebels, p. 26.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* p. 26.

<sup>37</sup> Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, pp. 38-39.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 44-45.

<sup>39</sup> Hobley, C. W. 'An Anthropological Studies in Kavirondo and Nandi', The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, p. 328.

to maintain a spirit of loyalty to the British Crown, and to inculcate such spirit to see that all lawful orders are obeyed by the African inhabitants of his location. It is the chief's duty to collect tax in his location.... He must take a continuous personal interest in the collection of tax.<sup>40</sup>

Although the powers and duties of chiefs gradually evolved, the basic legal framework on which the authorities of chiefs rested derived from two ordinances enacted before the First World War. A 1902 ordinance gave the chiefs three broad areas of responsibility. They were to maintain public order and could be subjected to fines if disturbances occurred in their areas of jurisdiction. They were to keep roads in their location clear and they could preside over petty cases.<sup>41</sup> In 1912 these outlines were defined in more detail. To maintain order, chiefs were permitted to employ other persons to assist them. They could issue orders restricting the brewing of African liquor (kongo), the holding of drinking bouts, the cultivation of poisonous plants such as hemp, the carrying of arms and any conduct likely to lead to a riot.<sup>42</sup>

The native authority ordinances of 1902 and 1912 also gave chiefs powers to recruit labour for various purposes. The 1912 ordinance permitted chief to turn out labourers for communal work for benefit to the community (called communal work) and stipulated that no person was to work more than six days a quarter. Failure to take orders from a chief resulted in a fine not exceeding 75 rupees or two months in prison.<sup>43</sup> The colonial government pointed out that since this type of labour was provided by the local population

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<sup>40</sup> KNA, Ordinance to Make Provision in Regard to Powers and Duties of Native Chiefs, No. 22, October 16, 1912, PRO Co 633/3.

<sup>41</sup> KNA, Regulations No. 22 October 23, 1902, C633/1, p. 120.

<sup>42</sup> KNA, Ordinance No. 22 October 1912, PRO Co 633/3.

<sup>43</sup> KNA, Ordinance No. 22 October 1912, PRO Co 633/3.



for the benefit of their area, it did not warrant payment. The lack of payment for such labour led households in South Nyanza to detest engagement in such labour because it was at the expense of their own economic activities such as agricultural production, livestock keeping and trade.<sup>44</sup> These were forms of exploitation to which the colonial government subjected Africans.

Two other bodies that were also engaged in local administration in South Nyanza, as indeed in other African locations, were the “native” tribunals and local native councils. The colonial government recognised both bodies on the understanding that these had governed many African people before colonial rule. But in both organs, the needs of the colonial administration and the powers of chiefs were strongly reflected. The 1897 Native Court Ordinance enjoined the government to supervise the judicial activities of tribunal authorities, allowing them to employ customary law, subject to the restriction that punishment was not to be inhumane or convictions obtained through witchcraft, torture, or “barbarous practices”.<sup>45</sup> These tribunals operated in a similar fashion to the pre-colonial councils of elders that had settled disputes. However, these tribunals did not operate effectively in South Nyanza and in other areas of Luoland due to the countervailing power of Luo chiefs. This was an issue that the colonial authorities never came to terms with. The pre-colonial Luo chiefs were more powerful than the colonial chiefs. Hopley, who wrote on the Luo, noted that chiefs were often more powerful in pre-colonial times.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Interviews With: Timothy Toro, Nyamkore Adel.

<sup>45</sup> KNA, Ordinance No. 22, October 16, 1912, PRO Co 633/3.

<sup>46</sup> Hopley, C. W. ‘British East Africa: Anthropological Studies of the Kavirondo and the Nandi’, The Journal of Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, p. 332.

The establishment of colonial rule in South Nyanza brought to an end wars and hostilities that were common between maximal lineages during the pre-colonial era. Wars and hostilities that were perpetuated by the youths during the “old days” came to an end once colonial rule was established. The colonial administration disarmed the youths and most of them engaged in migrant wage labour in the new political dispensation. Those who did not engage in migrant wage labour became involved in other economic opportunities opened up by colonialism. Such economic activities included trade and cash crop production. Others were involved in livestock production. But this development had its own drawbacks and in the end, caused disruption of ethnic control. The colonial government was as a result forced to reinforce the power of elders.

The appointment of colonial chiefs that went hand in hand with the establishment of colonial rule in South Nyanza changed the pre-colonial political dispensation in a number of ways. For instance, the position of chiefs and their relationship to elders changed once colonial rule was established in the area. During pre-colonial rule, councils of elders assisted chiefs in settling disputes in their respective jurisdictions. But with the establishment of colonial rule, the position of elders became marginalised in the new political dispensation. Being illiterate, elders could not fit in the day to day running of the colonial administration that required some degree of Western education. Their positions were now filled by the youths who had acquired some elements of European culture and were able to assist chiefs in colonial administration.

The position and power of pre-colonial chiefs who were retained by the new political order changed drastically as they moved from independence to subordination. On the one hand as Hopley pointed out, chiefs were often more powerful in pre-colonial times, as a result of

multiple marriages, and the ability to deploy armed force.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, however, the council of elders also checked their powers.<sup>48</sup> As has already been seen in chapter two, during the pre-colonial period, chiefs inherited their positions, but with the establishment of colonial rule, they were now being appointed by the colonial state. They were now direct agents of the colonial government in their locations.<sup>49</sup> They were accountable to the colonial state and therefore were no longer a power unto themselves as they had been during the pre-colonial era. They could be dismissed from their posts at any time and even be jailed by the colonial government for misconduct. This degraded their power compared to the pre-colonial period. Yet in other ways, they became more despotic.

As has already been noted in the previous chapter, a council of elders assisted ruoth (chief) in his administrative duties. Youths also had their role to play in the administration of the chiefdom during the pre-colonial period. For instance, they were the warriors who defended the chiefdom and raided the rival lineages for livestock and land. When colonial rule was established in South Nyanza, elders and youths continued to assist chiefs in their administrative duties as before. Initially, chiefs in South Nyanza tried to ignore the role of elders in assisting them in administration. This weakened the chiefs' ability to effectively administer their locations. The colonial administration therefore had to restore the powers of elders. In a related study, Fields in his Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa also found out that once chiefs were stripped of coercive powers they had to rely on customs in carrying out their administrative duties.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Ochieng', W. R. An Outline History of Nyanza p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> KNA, Ordinance to Make Provision in Regard to Powers and Duties of Native Chiefs, No. 22, October 16, 1912, PRO Co 633/3.

<sup>50</sup> Fields, K. E. Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1985.

The 1910-1911 Nyanza Province Annual Report remarked of the Luo chiefs:

The Jaluo (the Luo) chiefs, seem to think that anything in the nature of a council will tend to diminish their authority, and they prefer to act independently in all matters or in consultation with their retainers, relying on the government to support them in the event of opposition. Where we have a capable and energetic chief this despotic rule works well enough, but unfortunately very few of them bear out this description. The majority of them are either wanting in intelligence and power and accomplish nothing, or make use of their authority to enrich themselves at the expense of their people.<sup>51</sup>

Prominent among these retainers were youths who had acquired some form of Western education or those who were engaged in wage labour. Chiefs disregarded the elders and instead consulted youths. These were useful to the chiefs on two accounts: first, they could translate from the vernacular into Swahili (many chiefs, at least at that time, could not); second, they had become acquainted with the Europeans, and chiefs in working with the British preferred assistants who had some knowledge of the white man's ways.<sup>52</sup>

As the colonial government came to appreciate the importance of the elders in traditional Kenyan societies, it sought to revive the powers of the elders on the tribunals.<sup>53</sup> For a variety of other reasons however, by the first decade of colonial rule, the crucial role that the elders had played in the affairs of their community had further declined. The South

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<sup>51</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA, 1910-1911, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> Wipper, A. Rural Rebels: A Study of Two Protest Movements in Kenya, p. 46.

<sup>53</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 1908-1912, p. 158.

Kavirondo District Annual Report for 1908-1912 emphasised the significance of the restoration of the native council in assisting chiefs to settle cases in consultation with the elders. The report observed:

The custom had gradually grown up, more specifically among the Luo, of the chief ignoring the old men, who were formerly accustomed to assemble together and deal with tribal affairs, and substituting therefore a number of youths, who had managed to procure European or Swahili clothing, the donning of which is popularly supposed to immediately increase their powers.<sup>54</sup>

The report admitted that the youths undoubtedly had their uses and were always conspicuous in obtaining labour for work on the roads or anything of a similar nature, though they “never by any chance do any manual work themselves”. By virtue of the use made of them by chiefs and government officers, they had begun to consider themselves indispensable and to arrogate to themselves considerable power.<sup>55</sup>

A 1910 memorandum from the Secretary to the Administration to the Provincial and District Commissioners, stressed the importance of soliciting the wishes of the people before recommendations were made to the governor for the selection and appointment of chiefs and headmen. The memorandum emphasised that administrative officers should never lose sight of the fact that if men were artificially raised above their fellows, or forced upon the people they were expected to govern, they generally proved unsatisfactory, and in the course of time would have to be deposed, causing the native authority to be entirely

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<sup>54</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 1908-1912, p. 157.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p. 157.

undermined.<sup>56</sup> Chiefs were not only not respected because they were imposed on the people of South Nyanza. They were also not respected because some of them took advantage of their position to exploit their subjects. Cooper rightly remarked that among the Kikuyu of central Kenya, chiefs used their connections with the colonial state to gain access to land and labour in the so-called reserves.<sup>57</sup> This was also true of South Nyanza, for instance Butterman has observed that chief Orinda of Karachuonyo did not hesitate to use his pressgang powers for private advantage. She noted that Orinda's eighty acres of land in East Karachuonyo were worked by forced labour drawn from the location.<sup>58</sup>

By 1910, seven years after South Nyanza had been colonised, chiefs had been appointed in all locations in South Nyanza, which are listed in Table 3: 1 on the next page.

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<sup>56</sup> KNA, East Africa Protectorate: Memoranda For Provincial and District Commissioners, DC/KSI/5/5, 1910.

<sup>57</sup> Cooper, F. *Africa Since 1940*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 23.

<sup>58</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 122.

**TABLE 3: 1**

**LOCATIONS AND RESPECTIVE CHIEFS IN SOUTH NYANZA AS AT 1910**

<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>CHIEF OR HEADMAN</b>
1. Karungu	Ochola
2. Gwasi and Utegi	Mbaria
3. Kaksingri and Ongoi	Ogwata
4. Rusinga and Mfangano	Keriga
5. Kabondo	Obudtho
6. Karachuonyo	Orinda
7. Mumbo	Oyugi
8. Kajuoch	Mado
9. Konyango	Omiti
10. Kagan	Opala
11. Kochia	Annaio
12. Gem	Ager
13. Kamagambo	Njoje
14. Sakwa	Ongoro
15. Kabuoch	Oguta
16. Kanyamwa	Gor
17. Kanyada	Omuni
18. Kamreri	Lango
19. Kasigunga	Odida
20. Maronda	Osoa
21. Usaki	Osodo
22. Kanyidoto	Ofuko
23. Kawabuai	Ojoi
24. Kadem	Owuonda
25. Muhuru	Machira
26. Kanyamkago	Ongudi
27. Suna	Chacha
28. Suna (Wasimbiti)	Girago
29. Utende	Nyangoko
30. Ukiria	Mwita, Marua, Chacha, Matiko
31. Nabassi	Chacha Nyansuko
32. Oregi	Mnoko
33. Masai	Toroni
34. Wanjari	Oyugi

Source: KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 1908-1912, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1910-11, p.16.

The establishment of the new political dispensation in South Nyanza was also marked by the emergence of new actors (men) who played a crucial role in the life of the local population. This category of people, as has already been seen, included those who had

acquired Western education from the missionary institutions such as teachers and pastors who operated in the rural areas. Others were those who engaged in wage labour as well as Christian converts. The other remarkable men who emerged and enjoyed considerable influence were the court interpreters. As has already been noted, in South Nyanza, one such individual was Ezakiel Kasuku who assumed the office in 1907. He was such a powerful personality that chiefs were under his control.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to ordinary chiefs, the office of a paramount chief was a very powerful one in the area. South Nyanza had two such chiefs, Orinda and Gor. The former was the paramount chief of the Karachounyo, Kabondo and Kasipul, while the latter was the paramount chief of the remaining Luo locations in South Nyanza, including Luo-Abasuba. Their influence and presence were felt more than that of sub-chiefs subordinate to them. This was more so with Orinda whose power was regarded as despotic. Gor was advanced in age and was infirm; his influence was waning.<sup>60</sup>

Gor was a respected jabilo (diviner), and as has already been noted, he was the first colonial chief of Kanyamwa. The pre-colonial status of diviners also changed considerably as a result of the establishment of colonial rule. During the pre-colonial period, diviners were held in high esteem. Those who were fortunate to have been appointed chiefs by the colonial administration at least retained their pre-colonial status to some extent. But those who were not appointed saw their influence dwindle in the new political dispensation. The new colonial chiefs who now represented the colonial government in the villages replaced them. Their pre-colonial expertise in medicine was also eroded by the introduction of

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<sup>59</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report: Early Days in Kisii, DC/KSI/3/7, 1912, PP. 5-6.

<sup>60</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 1908-12, 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1910, p. 190; KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 14-4-1914, p. 5.



Western medicine. The Christian missionaries, who characterised their medical expertise as witchcraft, also condemned them. The colonial government did not permit their medical practice and they were liable to being jailed if found engaging in medical practises.

The following section turns to analyse the colonial demands such as taxation, agricultural production, migrant labour and Western education that the colonial government imposed on the people of South Nyanza.

## **COLONIAL DEMANDS**

### **(i) Taxation**

Osterhammel has argued that colonial taxation was used by the colonial state as their prime instrument to mobilise workers without resorting to force. He noted that if workers wanted to earn cash to pay their taxes, they had to leave the closed circle of their subsistence economy. He argued that the traditional economy had to be dismantled, since it was no longer a village or another collective that was assessed, but the individual household.<sup>61</sup>

In Kenya, the British colonial government introduced taxation as a means of generating revenue to run the colonial state. It also aimed at forcing Africans to leave their rural homes to seek wage employment.<sup>62</sup> The Hut Tax was instituted under the Native Administration Ordinance of 1900. Kisumu Province (later renamed Nyanza Province in 1909), and Naivasha Provinces were up to 1902 part of the Eastern Province of Uganda when they were transferred to the East Africa Protectorate (later renamed Kenya in 1920). There is no

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<sup>61</sup> Osterhammel, J. *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, 1995, p. 72.

<sup>62</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 161.

historical evidence to demonstrate whether or not the people of the two provinces paid taxes to Uganda Protectorate. Most studies on Nyanza have erroneously pointed out that taxes were first levied in Nyanza in 1900.<sup>63</sup> The Hut tax was in fact first levied in the East Africa Protectorate (Kenya) in 1901, and was originally assessed at 2 rupees per hut as far west as the Ukambani Province. In 1902, a Hut Tax of 3 rupees was levied for some time in the Kisumu and Naivasha Provinces. The Hut Tax was then brought up to 3 rupees all over the Protectorate, and was still standing at 3 rupees by 1910.<sup>64</sup> Households in South Nyanza started paying Hut Tax in 1903, when the area was colonised, the rate being (rupees 3) per hut. In 1910 a new tax was added, a Poll Tax, which was aimed at adult males who were not hut owners.<sup>65</sup> According to a memorandum explaining the new development:

The Poll Tax on the adult males who are not hut owners resolves itself into a tax of what may be termed the “warrior class”, and this tax is not in accordance with ordinary native usage, as according to the old ideas these individuals were expected to hold themselves ready for military service and to be prepared to assemble at a moment’s notice to repel attack by an invader.....on this account, they were not considered liable to taxation, and moreover but rarely held any property other than their arms.

Times have however altered, and there is no longer any fighting to be done. This circumstance has sapped the discipline of this class of the native community, and in many places they tend to degenerate into bands of idle youths who, contrary to their

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<sup>63</sup> Odinga, O. Not Yet Uhuru, p. 18.

<sup>64</sup> KNA, East Africa Protectorate: DC/KSI/5/5, 1910, P. 6, Memoranda for Provincial and District Commissioners.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

old law, become vagrant dissolute and defy the authority of their elders. It is believed that the imposition of a tax on this section will have a good effect on their mode of life; it is not likely to be well received, and district officials must proceed cautiously with its collection.<sup>66</sup>

Ordinance No. 40 of 1915 raised the rate to 5 rupees, and the general rate jumped to 10 rupees in 1920 – almost double an unskilled worker’s monthly wage.<sup>67</sup>

Butterman argued that up to the time of the outbreak of the First World War, there was no evidence that taxation was a great hardship for most households. She noted that people sold hides and skins, or brought sesame to the local stores to be converted into money and thus met their tax requirements.<sup>68</sup> What emerges from the study of South Nyanza partly contradicts Butterman’s findings. Faced with the issue of taxation, the people of South Nyanza devised tactics to evade paying taxes. Since the Hut Tax was charged per hut, the people of South Nyanza developed the practice of either burning huts that were not essential or were in disuse or by removing grass from the roof to pretend that the hut (or huts) was in disuse. This would be repaired once the tax collection was over.<sup>69</sup> In his Annual Report for the year 1912 on tax evasion, the District Commissioner for South Kavirondo, D. R. Crampton noted:

The natives have reduced the number of “simba” (a Luo word for bachelors’ hut) huts i.e. the huts inhabited by the young unmarried men and girls. They formerly

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. pp. 6-7.

<sup>67</sup> Hay, J. M. ‘Economic Change in Luoland’, p. 161.

<sup>68</sup> Butterman, J. M. ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’, p. 124.

<sup>69</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, Kisii/Ugaya District, DC/KSI/1/1, 1908-1912, p. 6; Interviews With: Timothy Toro, Caleb Oduar.

had several small simba huts in each village, but they have now realised that it costs them less to have one large one only.<sup>70</sup>

One interviewee recalled that it was not economical to build many simba because each attracted a hut tax.<sup>71</sup>

The District Commissioner D. R. Crampton reported other methods of tax evasion:

The natives whose ethnic groups were separated by colonial boundaries i.e. Luo, Kuria, Maasai and many others used to avoid paying taxes by crossing the border to stay with their relatives during tax collection period.<sup>72</sup>

There is evidence that women paid Hut Tax. But whenever tax was not paid, it was the owner of the homestead (the husband) who was punished by being jailed. Colonial records show that tax was levied even on huts whose owners had died; likewise, a kitchen or a hut for small livestock was levied with tax.<sup>73</sup> Table 3: 2 shows the intensity of tax collection in South Kavirondo (South Nyanza) and other districts in the province.

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<sup>70</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, Ksii/Ugaya District, DC/KSI/1/1, 1908-1912, p. 6.

<sup>71</sup> Interviews With: Naman Singa.

<sup>72</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report: Early Days in Ksii, DC/KSII/3/7, 1912, p. 7.

<sup>73</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1917, p. 16.

**TABLE 3: 2**

**TAX COLLECTION IN SOUTH KAVIRONDO AND OTHER DISTRICTS IN  
NYANZA PROVINCE, 1909-10 TO 1916-17**

<b>District</b>	<b>1909-10</b>	<b>1910-11</b>	<b>1911-12</b>	<b>1912-13</b>	<b>1913-14</b>	<b>1914-15</b>	<b>1915-16</b>	<b>1916-17</b>
Kisumu	215,463	238,692	248,109	265,680	270,939	303,354	308,556	501,460
North Kavirondo	207,324	264,264	305,679	355,917	383,565	417,126	426,357	661,245
South Kavirondo	224,580	222,498	230,079	238,224	250,965	263,928	253,326	429,685
Lumbwa	37,383	47,874	49,788	55,953	58,578	62,625	67,848	108,820
Nandi	25,488	28,848	31,482	33,501	36,054	36,147	38,679	67,065
Total	710,238	802,176	865,137	949,275	1,000,101	1,083,180	1,094,166	1,768,295

Source: KNA, PC/NZA, 1917, p.7.

**(ii) Cash Crop Production**

The vast majority of households in colonised societies earned their livelihood from cash crop production. Socially and culturally, they belonged to a rural milieu. Colonial conquest had a twofold impact: it forcibly seized rural means of production, and it promoted agrarian commercialisation.<sup>74</sup> This was also true of South Nyanza as this study demonstrates. Ndege

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<sup>74</sup> Osterhammel, J. Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview, Markus Weiner Publishers, Princeton, Ian Randle Publishers, Kingston, 1995, pp. 73-74.

in his study of western Kenya has argued that in the absence of adequate support by the colonial state, the development of commodity production was primarily due to the initiative of the indigenous peoples themselves. He goes further to remark that this is not to deny the fact that colonial authorities introduced new seeds, iron hoes and ploughs, mills for the grinding of maize and separators for the preparation of ghee.<sup>75</sup> Evidence from South Nyanza and findings by Maxon in his study of Vihiga and Gusiiland, shows that the state's actions improved agrarian production in African areas.<sup>76</sup> The establishment of effective colonial administration in South Nyanza promoted expanded agricultural production in the area. The people of South Nyanza were forced to increase agricultural production in order to meet new colonial demands such as taxation, and to pay for new needs such as for imported goods and Western education. The need for tax money was the primary factor in this process.<sup>77</sup> The colonial administration's campaign to introduce cash crops into South Nyanza, initially through enforced cultivation, greatly contributed to increased agricultural production in the area.

During the first decade of colonial rule in South Nyanza, the main cash crops that were produced and exported from the district were indigenous crops, which included sesame and "Ciroko". G. A. S. Northcote, assistant collector of revenue in charge of Ugaya District (the original name of South Nyanza District), in his 1903-1906 annual report noted:

A far more convincing sign of coming prosperity lies in the fact that the natives have already begun to grow grains such as "Ciroko" and "sim-sim" for export. In order however that this may be, it is imperative first, that the country be opened up

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<sup>75</sup> Ndege, P. O. 'Struggles for the Market', p. 68.

<sup>76</sup> Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways, p.57.

<sup>77</sup> Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 145.

by roads and by another port situated near to the grain producing parts of the district, the site suggested being KUMBOGO point in Homa Bay. This will tap the North Eastern parts of the district, while Karungu will serve for the Southern and South Eastern parts.<sup>78</sup>

Expanding upon these factors inhibiting against grain production in South Nyanza during the first decade of colonial rule in G.A.S. Northcote's, report noted:

What at present militates most strongly against the grain export trade here is, first, the fact that all the grain has to be carried in by the natives after being bought in the district, the cost of the carriage eating up most of the profit. Secondly, the uncertainty of being able to ship on the Railway Steamers, and thirdly, according to the Indians, that there is no European firm dealing in native produce in Nairobi. Hence all that they send down country has to be sold to their own compatriots whose methods are extremely slow, if sure, the exporter's money being thus locked up for months.<sup>79</sup>

In South Nyanza, up to 1911, the cash crop that was cultivated and had the best market value was sesame (sim-sim). As early as 1906, an Italian trading company using local Asian agents was purchasing 3,510 fransila of sesame from South Nyanza.<sup>80</sup>

The table 3.3 shows sesame (sim-sim) as one of the leading cash crops from South Nyanza.

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<sup>78</sup> KNA, Report on the Province of Kisumu for the Year 1903-1906, pp. 14-15.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p. 15.

<sup>80</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report in PC/NZA, 1910-1911, p. 13.

**TABLE 3: 3****TRADE RETURNS IN SOUTH KAVIRONDO, 1910 – 11**

Item	1910-11				Value	1909-10
	Quantity					Value
	Tons.	Cwts.	Qrs.	Ibs.	Rs. C.	Rs. C.
Bajree	-	18	1	5	48.58	9,429.00
Chiroko	115	3	1	15	5,333.46	
Chowla (mixed grain)	29	10	3	22	1,590.00	
Ghee	32	13	2	14	16,186.98	9,958.00
Groundnuts	72	12	2	3	10,824.68	1,463.00
Hides Ox	76	11	-	7	67,316.08	84,416.00
Hides Goat		?			21,111.19	32,214.00
Hides Sheep		?			1,309.60	
Maize	18	1	3	26	480.00	435.00
Wimbi	69	19	-	3	5,145.20	1,556.00
Sim-Sim	479	19	3	5	117,936.20	65,020.00
Tobacco (Country)	-	-	3	26	12.00	-
Wheat	6	18	3	6	840.00	60.00
Mtama	-	-	-	-	-	836.00
	902	10	2	12	24,813.97	205,387.00

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District: Trade Return for the year 1910-11 in PC/NZA 1910-11,

p.14.



Between 1907 to the time of the outbreak of the First World War, sesame was the chief agricultural export from South Nyanza. It was exported to Marseilles and other European ports, where it was used to manufacture soap and edible fat.<sup>81</sup> In Kisumu, the provincial headquarters, an oil manufacturing plant was constructed as early as 1913.<sup>82</sup> The outbreak of the First World War resulted in shipping hazards and the closure of ports, and caused the price of sesame to fall, which was only partially compensated by the local demand for cooking oil for troops.

The people of South Nyanza displayed a preference for the cultivation of sesame because of its high cash value. The money generated from the sale of sesame was used to meet tax expenses. Sesame production was therefore an essential alternative to selling livestock to meet tax demands. It was a short rain crop and therefore did not interfere with the growing of staple crops. Households in South Nyanza believed it was better to sell agricultural produce to meet tax demands rather than sell livestock for the same, since they treasured livestock and regarded them as a sign of wealth.<sup>83</sup>

The colonial administrative policy favouring agricultural production was influenced by a number of factors; the necessity for export revenue from the East Africa Protectorate, the imperial demand for “economic products”, and the administrative preferences for a stable, non-migratory, self-sustaining peasantry as the most easily exploitable social formation. In Nyanza Province, this policy was encouraged during the tenure of John Ainsworth, the Provincial Commissioner from 1907 to 1917.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> KNA, Kisumu Province AR, December 1908, Sum 2801.

<sup>82</sup> KNA, KD DA AR 1912-1913, p. 36.

<sup>83</sup> Interviews With: Nyamkore Adel, Timothy Toro.

<sup>84</sup> Ogot, B. A. ‘British Administration in the Central Nyanza’, The Journal of African History, p. 253.

Apart from “ciroko” and sesame that dominated exports from South Nyanza during the first decade of colonial rule, the other major commodity that was exported was skins. G. A. S. Northcote reported on the trade in the district:

The great increase in export is the best index of healthy and expanding trade, though it can only bear evidence as to a part of the trade done, i.e. in skins. But the trade in skin would increase a great deal when Kisii is opened up.<sup>85</sup>

As in other parts of the colony, the establishment of colonial rule over the African population went hand in hand with the encouragement of export production.<sup>86</sup> The colonial administration in South Nyanza therefore introduced a number of new cash crops into the area. In 1908, groundnuts were introduced by the colonial administration in South Nyanza. The Department of Agriculture distributed 9000 Lbs of groundnut for seed to chiefs as well as to Asian traders throughout the area.<sup>87</sup> Initially, the district administration faced difficulties in convincing households in South Nyanza to integrate groundnuts into their agricultural system. Two crucial factors appear to have militated against the acceptance of groundnuts by the local population. Firstly, the people of South Nyanza were discouraged owing to the failure of the first crops since households did not know the conditions under which they would thrive. However, as the households continued experimenting with its cultivation, they gradually learnt how best it could be cultivated and the type of soil suitable for it. Thus, by the time of the outbreak of the First World War, groundnut was the most widespread cash crop introduced by the colonial government that the people of South Nyanza cultivated.<sup>88</sup> The South Kavirondo District trade returns for the year 1910-11

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<sup>85</sup> KNA, Report on the Province of Kisumu for the Year 1903-1906, p. 14.

<sup>86</sup> Maxon, R. M. *Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>87</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 5<sup>TH</sup> October 1908, p. 6; KNA, Dobbs, C. M. SK AR, Dec. 1908.

<sup>88</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI, 1908-1912, p. 169.

shows that groundnut was the fourth highest export in tonnage from South Nyanza (see Table 3: 2 page 189).

The second factor that induced the people of South Nyanza to refuse to cultivate groundnuts when it was initially introduced was the rumour that it caused venereal disease, which was becoming prevalent at the same time groundnut cultivation was being promoted in the district.<sup>89</sup> Households in South Nyanza increased its production once they came to realise that there was no correlation between venereal disease and the consumption of groundnuts. The 1913 District Annual Report noted:

The Luo were now growing a good deal of groundnuts more than formerly. The Luo realised that groundnuts do better than sim-sim.<sup>90</sup>

The other cash crop that was introduced by the colonial administration during the first decade of colonial rule was cotton. The introduction of cotton cultivation into South Nyanza and Nyanza more widely was closely linked to the introduction of the Hut Tax Regulations of 1900 and the completion of the Uganda Railway line in 1901.<sup>91</sup> The colonial administration wanted to introduce cotton as a cash crop in the province to enable households to generate cash to meet colonial demands. Similarly, the colonial administration needed to establish traffic for the railroad in order to generate cash for its maintenance. As Bennett pointed out, this second argument was equally used to justify European settlement in Kenya.<sup>92</sup> The Provincial Commissioner for Nyanza, John

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<sup>89</sup> Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 149.

<sup>90</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, 31-3-1913, p. 24.

<sup>91</sup> Onduru, T. A. 'Some Aspects of Economic Change in Kano', pp.77-78.

<sup>92</sup> Bennett, G. Kenya: A Political History-The Colonial Period, Oxford University Press, London, 1963; Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'.

Ainsworth, was responsible for the promotion of cotton cultivation in Nyanza. It was first introduced into areas bordering Kisumu in 1906 and 1907,<sup>93</sup> while in South Nyanza it was first introduced in 1908.<sup>94</sup> The Department of Agriculture provided seeds to chiefs and headmen to distribute to people under their jurisdiction. But cotton proved to be unpopular with the people of South Nyanza and the rest of Luo. Studies on Nyanza such as those by Fearn, Hay, Butterman and Ndege provide several reasons to account for the failure of cotton cultivation in South Nyanza and Nyanza more generally during colonial period, namely that it was inedible, it took a long time to mature (about nine months), it was labour intensive and its price was generally low compared to other cash crops such as groundnuts.<sup>95</sup> According to the District Annual Report of 1915, the decline of cotton cultivation, which by then had practically collapsed was due to two factors:

- (1) The exceedingly low prices
- (2) Inherent slackness on the part of natives living in cotton growing areas.

Price seems to have played the major role as by 1915 the Nyanza Province Annual Report also observed:

Cotton production harvested in 1914 showed increase of 500,000 to about 600,000 pounds seed cotton. But due to a drop of 100% in the price offered to the native

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<sup>93</sup> KNA, Central Kavirondo District, DC/CN/3/2, 1909, p. 1.

<sup>94</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1913-1914, DC/KSI/1/1, cited in Ndege, P. O. 'Struggles for the Market', pp.69-70.

<sup>95</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy; Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'; Ndege, P. O. 'Struggles for the Market'.

growers they were seriously discouraged to continue cultivating cotton. Due to the low prices, cultivation ceased in the province.<sup>96</sup>

The people of South Nyanza and Nyanza more generally therefore showed preference to the staple food (millet) over cotton. Table 3: 4, (page 199) that reflects trade returns in South Kavirondo does not list cotton as one of the trade items, clearly indicating its unpopularity.

Efforts by the colonial administration to effect agricultural changes in the area were hampered by a number of factors. A lack of knowledge on the part of the colonial administrators of the climate of the area greatly contributed to the poor performance of new crops in the economy of the households in South Nyanza. Crops were randomly introduced by the colonial administration without prior knowledge of the soil suitability for the crops. The District Commissioner D. R. Crampton, in his Annual Report for the year 1909, acknowledged that it was difficult for the colonial administration to know what to advise the local people to grow.<sup>97</sup> In the same report, the District Commissioner noted that groundnuts that were grown near the lake in black cotton soil were of poor quality because of the unsuitable soil. It is clear that the colonial officials who were based at the district and provincial headquarters in Kisumu had very little knowledge of the Luo agricultural system. At the same time, they knew very little about the particular requirements of the crops they were introducing into South Nyanza. Moreover, as Hay noted in her study of Kowe, the extensive research and trials that were carried out for the benefit of the European farming community were not reproduced for their African counterparts.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, 1915; East Africa Protectorate, p. 30.

<sup>97</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 1908-1912, 2-4-1909, p. 3.

<sup>98</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', pp. 139-140.

The other factor that militated against the process of change in agricultural production in South Nyanza, as indeed in the whole of Nyanza Province up to the time of the outbreak of the First World War, was that only one Assistant Agricultural Officer was appointed for the entire province. The one assistant from the Economic Plant Section served in South Nyanza District, an area that was too vast for one agricultural official.<sup>99</sup>

One reason that was commonly mentioned by the colonial officials in South Nyanza as impeding agricultural production in the area was livestock keeping. In his Annual Report for 1915, the District Commissioner, D. R. Crampton observed:

Probably the enormous number of cattle owned by chief Gori's people and chief Orinda's tend to make the people scoff at the advantages of agriculture and I confess that until some severe epidemics has practically swept away the cattle from Jalu locations, it is almost impossible to either expect or obtain from these people any interest in products which require manual labour.<sup>100</sup>

The two chiefs mentioned above, Gori (Gor) and Orinda were paramount chiefs of South Nyanza. What such an observation obscures, nevertheless, is that agricultural production was steadily on the increase as is confirmed by numerous District Annual Reports. Thus, the 1908 Annual Report noted that a larger quantity of sim-sim and chiroko had been shipped from Karungu and Homa-Bay than ever before.<sup>101</sup> Table 3: 4 on the next page shows increased agricultural production from 1909 to 1918.

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<sup>99</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, PC/NZA/1/5, 1910, p. 34.

<sup>100</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, 10-4-1915, p. 5.

<sup>101</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 5<sup>th</sup> October, 1908, p. 5

**TABLE 3: 4**

**AFRICAN GROWN PRODUCE EXPORTED FROM VARIOUS STATIONS AND  
LAKE PORTS IN NYANZA PROVINCE, 1909 TO 1918 (TONS)**

<b>Crops</b>	<b>1909</b>	<b>1910</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>1912</b>	<b>1913</b>	<b>1914</b>	<b>1915</b>	<b>1916</b>	<b>1917</b>	<b>1918</b>
Beans	47	182	327	268	471	?	109	242	1,366	187
Groundnuts	42	77	59	254	590	368	118	94	167	169
Maize & Maize Flour	469	2,024	3,254	8,510	8,954	11,882	7,165	12,108	14,192	?
Mtama & Mtama Flour	1,770	997	1,039	1,210	1,457	462	986	772	99	19
Sweet Potatoes	26	52	58	30	26	7	10	14	34	3
Sim-Sim	394	1,447	1,661	3,951	3,991	3,155	1,085	2,981	3,224	983

**Source:** Adopted from figures in Fearn, H., An African Economy, Table 7, p. 84.

Another factor which also militated against agricultural production, but which the colonial administrators in South Nyanza failed to take into account was insufficient rainfall. The 1911 Annual Report noted:

Much of the district suffers from insufficient rainfall, more especially in the northern and western parts bordering on the lake, and the crops are frequently a failure. The most fertile parts are Kisii itself and the Kavirondo country close to the Kisii hills.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District: Political Record Book, DC/KSI/3/5, 1-4-1911.

Finally, the issue of lack of infrastructure in South Nyanza during the initial years of colonial rule was a further factor that impacted negatively on agricultural production. Once roads and ports were constructed in the area, the area opened up. As the 1908 Annual Report observed:

For effective administration and transportation of the produce from the district to Kisumu, roads were built to connect Kisii to Karungu, Kisii to Homa-Bay and a pier constructed at Homa-Bay and Kendu-Bay also a road linking Kisii to Kendu-Bay.<sup>103</sup>

As Osterhammel rightly remarked, when colonial states saw the development of export potential as their primary economic aim, they pursued infrastructural projects as the most direct means of obtaining it.<sup>104</sup> As Berman also rightly observed, the construction of roads and ports facilitated extraction of resources from the rural areas.<sup>105</sup> Even so, this remains a factor given insufficient weight in much of the literature. By 1912, three ports had already been constructed on the shores of Lake Victoria in South Nyanza. The 1908-1912 Annual Report noted:

There are three ports established in the district: Homa-Bay, Karungu and Kendu-Bay. Lake steamers call on these ports regularly to export and import commodities. Exports mounted to over 1000 tons and the imports to 285 tons. Considering that four years ago the trade was practically nil, I think these figures must be regarded

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<sup>103</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 1908, p. 5.

<sup>104</sup> Osterhammel, J. Colonialism, 1995, p. 73.

<sup>105</sup> Berman, B. 'Structure and Process in Bureaucratic State of Colonial Africa', in Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. Unhappy Valley.



highly satisfactory. But the figures did not reflect total trade in the whole district since exports from Kendu are not included.<sup>106</sup>

To encourage the effective extraction of resources from South Nyanza, the colonial state established a number of trading centres at strategic places throughout the district. Below is a list of Townships and Trading Centres that had been established in South Nyanza by 31-3-1915.

**Townships and Trading Centres (as at 31-3-1915)**

- (1) Homa Bay Township  
17 plots leased to Indians
  - (2) Rangwe Trading Centre  
16 plots leased to Indians  
1 plot leased to a Goan
  - (3) Kendu Trading Centre  
5 plots leased to Indians  
1 plot leased to a Goan  
1 plot leased to an Arab  
1 plot T. O. licence to a Muhamedan Community
  - (4) Oyugis Trading Centre  
7 plots leased to Indians – 5 shops built
  - (5) Migori Trading Centre  
4 plots leased to Indians  
1 T. O. licence by Indian
  - (6) Karungu Township  
10 plots occupied on T. O. licence by Indians
  - (7) Riana Trading Centre  
13 plots occupied on T. O. licence by Indians  
4 plots occupied on T. O. licence by Goans
- There were also:  
4 Indian shops on T. O. licence in Suna  
6 Indian shops on T. O. licence in Mbita  
7 Indian shops on T. O. licence in N. Mugurango  
1 Indian shop on T. O. licence in Awach

} 10 Shops built

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report DC/KSI/1/2, 1913- 1923, Annual Report, 10 – 4 – 1915, p. 6.

The primary aim of the colonial administration in establishing townships and trading centres was to facilitate trade in the district and hence the extraction of resources from

<sup>106</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 1908-1912, p. 168.

African rural areas. Indians dominated trade in rural South Nyanza during the period under review. Practically the whole trade in the district was in the hands of Indians and Goans.<sup>107</sup>

The Indian traders exploited the people of South Nyanza in the trade. This was evident from the South Kavirondo District Annual Report for the year 1913:

The Indians stock goods for European consumption, which are frequently sold to the Europeans at a lower rate than obtained in Kisumu, nevertheless, they do not fail to buy cheap and sell dear to the natives.<sup>108</sup>

Apart from the construction of roads and the establishment of trading centres by the colonial administration in South Nyanza, the colonial administration also allowed Indian traders to accompany colonial officials on safari (inspection tour) with trade goods, which the people of South Nyanza were encouraged to buy. As Butterman argued, this was to facilitate the transfer of surplus from the rural areas to the metropolitan centres.<sup>109</sup> This system was copied from Kisumu District. The 1914 Annual Report noted that the aim of encouraging Indian traders to accompany colonial officials on safari was:

(1) To create wants on the part of the natives and thereby to induce him to invest his money on imported goods instead of in cattle and sheep.

(2) To supply him with improved agricultural implements.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 31-3-1913, p. 28.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p. 28.

<sup>109</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 126.

<sup>110</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report for 14-4-1914, p. 11.

The colonial administration permitted the Indian traders to import good hoes, of Birmingham manufacture, to sell to the people of South Nyanza at Rs. 1/50 each in place of the inferior (German) hoe at 25 cents. At the same time, the Indian traders also imported quality machetes (pangas).<sup>111</sup> All these were utilised in improving agricultural production in the area. As the Annual Report remarked, the use of better hoes would result in deeper tillage of the soil, which was eminently desirable.<sup>112</sup> The inferior (German) hoes were at that point being imported from Mwanza, in German East Africa (now the republic of Tanzania) that borders South Nyanza.<sup>113</sup> According to the Kisumu Province Annual Report (later renamed Nyanza Province in 1909) for 1903-1906:

There is a good opening here in Ugaya (later renamed South Kavirondo) for the sale of rough but strong iron hoe (jembe). At present a large number of these but of inferior make and quality are imported from Mwanza, German East Africa. A more serviceable article would sell at once.<sup>114</sup>

According to South Kavirondo District Annual Report for 1914, the people of South Nyanza acquired more agricultural implements:

The Indian traders were permitted to import good hoes, of Birmingham manufacture to sell to the natives at Rs. 1/50 each in place of the inferior (German)

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid. p. 18.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. p. 11.

<sup>113</sup> KNA, Report on the Province of Kisumu for the year 1903-1906, p. 14.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p. 14.

hoe at 25 cents. About 15,000 of Birmingham hoes were sold to the natives during the past two months and some thousands of good machetes.<sup>115</sup>

The report noted that the large sales of the English hoes were intended to stimulate increased production of economic products of the households in South Nyanza. The use of the better hoe (English hoe) would result in deeper tillage of soil, which was eminently desirable, the report observed. Given that Kowe, Hay's study area, is close to Kisumu where many Indian traders settled, the Kowe people could have acquired English hoes from Kisumu before the people of South Nyanza since South Nyanza was relatively remote from Kisumu. This evidence does not concur with Hay's assertion that the Kowe households obtained the English hoe by the end of the First World War.

To further boost agricultural production in South Nyanza, the colonial administration established an agricultural school at Kisii, which was inaugurated at the beginning of 1914 with an instructor in charge. At the school, some 50 bulls were trained to the plough. The colonial administration invited selected people of South Nyanza to view the advantages of the use of bulls for ploughing. This did not meet with immediate success.<sup>116</sup> People viewed it as a punishment to bulls when they were used for ploughing. But this attitude changed with time as a number of households in South Nyanza came to realise the advantages of the use of bulls for ploughing since bulls could plough large acreages of farm within a short time. The colonial administration also set up some demonstration plots in various locations in South Nyanza where the households were shown how to cultivate cotton and sim-sim.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1914, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 14-4-1914, p. 11.

<sup>116</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/1/2, 1913-1923, 14-4-1914, p. 18.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. p. 19.

In South Nyanza, the predominant export commodities up to the outbreak of the First World War, other than agricultural produce, were hides and skins. As early as 1906, 4,224 frasila of hides, 29,535 of goatskin, and 11,969 of sheepskins were exported from South Nyanza.<sup>118</sup> Arab traders dominated the hides and skin trade. The main agent between the locals and the international market was an Italian company based in Kisumu.<sup>119</sup>

The immediate impact of the imposition of colonial capitalism on the people of South Nyanza was that, the peasant far from being “destroyed” continually expanded despite the dominance of settler production. Lonsdale and Berman have observed that the peasant economy did not merely nourish the expanded reproduction of the wage-labour force outside the capitalist relation of production. They note that in sharp contrast to the South African experience, it dominated domestic cereal markets.<sup>120</sup> In his Annual Report for the year 1910, the District Commissioner R. W. Hemsted noted that cultivated produce was considerably on the increase when compared with the previous year, and business generally in this connection had been quite satisfactory.<sup>121</sup>

### **(iii) Wage Labour**

Cooper in his work Africa since 1940 has argued that in parts of Africa, colonisation drove rural dwellers into deepening poverty, sometimes as a deliberate policy to create “labour reserves” where people had little alternative to selling their labour cheaply, sometimes as a

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<sup>118</sup> KNA, Kisumu Province AR 1906-7, Frasila is equivalent to 36 lbs. (C. 20 Kg).

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* p.

<sup>120</sup> Lonsdale, J. and Berman, B. ‘Coping with the Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State in Kenya, 1895 to 1914’, Journal of African History, No. 2, 1979, p. 294.

<sup>121</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA, 1/5, 1910, p. 6.

result of actions which made difficult ecosystems worse.<sup>122</sup> Studies on Nyanza such as those of Hay, Butterman and Nyong'o have shown that the region supplied labour to the rest of the country.<sup>123</sup> As this study shows, South Nyanza and Nyanza in general never developed a cash crop upon which households could rely as a major source of income. Consequently, the establishment of colonial rule in South Nyanza was marked by the development of a new economic activity, migrant wage labour. The new economic activity saw young men of South Nyanza temporarily leave their rural homes to seek wage employment within and without the district. The British colonial government in Kenya wanted to create a "white man's country".<sup>124</sup> The European administrators as well as the European settlers were convinced that voluntary labour would not be forthcoming from the African reserves. Specifically, after 1908, the development of labour-intensive plantation agriculture in the highlands, road and railway construction, and the increasing number of sportsmen who needed porters, led to increased demands for labour.<sup>125</sup> In order to obtain such a labour supply, the European settlers demanded a reduction of the land available for African agriculture, increased taxation for Africans, contract labour with penalties for infringement, and government support for a policy of forcing Africans to engage in wage labour. Studies on Kenya during the First World War such as those by Hay, Butterman, Stichter and Maxon have observed that the demand for African soldiers and porters during World War 1 brought the labour crisis to a head.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Cooper, F. Africa Since 1940, p. 21.

<sup>123</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'; Nyong'o, P. A. 'The Development of the Middle Peasantry in Nyanza', Review of African Political Economy, pp. 108-124.

<sup>124</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland, Kowe', p. 159.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. p. 160.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. p. 160, Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation'; pp. 129-130, Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya, pp.38-40; Maxon, R. M. Struggle For Kenya: The Loss and Reassertion of Imperial Initiative, 1912-1923, Associated University Presses, Cranbury, London, Ontario, 1993, pp. 90-91.

In South Nyanza, the first labour demands that were made when the area was colonised were for the road construction. Roads were required by the colonial administration to facilitate the extraction of commodities from the area to the metropolitan centres. The first road to be constructed in South Nyanza was Kisii to Kendu Bay, which was completed in 1909.<sup>127</sup> Forced labour on road construction was extracted from the adjacent area. Chiefs along the site of the road were required to provide monthly quotas to work on the road. The 1903 to 1906 Annual Report noted:

A number of Kavirondo now work for the railway along the various parts of the line, others are employed by the Public Works Department, while others by the settlers. This made them enlarge their views.<sup>128</sup>

By 1906, very few men from South Nyanza were engaged in wage labour outside the district. This is also evident in general studies such as those by Tignor, Kitching and Stichter.<sup>129</sup> Studies on Nyanza such as those of Buttermann also concur with findings from these general studies.<sup>130</sup> These studies have emphasized the fact that South Nyanza was rich in livestock, which was detrimental to an early entry into migrant wage labour. But, as this research shows, South Nyanza was still peripheral to the centre of employment, Kisumu, since infrastructure had not been established to connect the area to Kisumu. The Kavirondo, who were participating in wage labour on the railway, were people from Kisumu and North Kavirondo districts who were within reach of Kisumu and the railway

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<sup>127</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 5<sup>th</sup> October 1908, p. 5.

<sup>128</sup> KNA, Report on the Province of Kisumu for the year 1903-1906, p. 3.

<sup>129</sup> Tignor, R. L. The Colonial Transformation of Kenya; Kitching, G. Class and Economic Change in Kenya; Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya.

<sup>130</sup> Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'.

line. The employment figures by 1906 show that railway employed 650 and the Public Works Department 1,450.<sup>131</sup>

As has already been noted, the first road to be constructed in the area was Kisii to Kendu in 1909. It seems unlikely that out of the 1,450 labourers who were employed by the Public Works Department, none came from South Nyanza. However the percentage was quite likely small. As this study demonstrates however, by 1907, the people of South Nyanza had started engaging in wage labour, in contrast to the initial years of colonial rule. In an article written in 1907 on the Nilotic Kavirondo, G.A.S. Northcote, the District Commissioner, South Kavirondo observed:

The Jaluo (the Luo) are now employed as soldiers, sailors, sawyers, police, masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, gardeners and boys. For the last five to six years, they have shown great progress.<sup>132</sup>

What is suggested from Northcote's observation is that all the Luo areas, which must have been inclusive of South Nyanza, where Northcote was the District Commissioner, were now engaging in wage labour. This conclusion is supported by Bishop J. J. Willis who remarked that by 1907, the Luo became quickly popular as labourers and were sought after as waiters on Lake Victoria Steamers, as stevedores at Kisumu Port and as recruits to the Uganda police.<sup>133</sup> Had the people of South Nyanza not been engaging in wage labour by 1907, Bishop J. J. Willis would presumably have highlighted that in his letter. Other

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<sup>131</sup> KNA, Report on the Province of Kisumu for the year 1903-1906, p. 18.

<sup>132</sup> Northcote, G. A. S. 'The Nilotic Kavirondo', The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, p. 66.

<sup>133</sup> Bishop, J. J. Willis, Letter of November 30, 1909, C. M. S. Annual Letter, 1909, p. 272.



evidence that shows that by 1907 the people of South Nyanza had entered the labour market comes from the 1908 Annual Report on South Kavirondo:

The Kavirondo have worked very well. In order to motivate headmen of the village to recruit labourers from 5 to 8 men every day for a month, the headmen were given cattle for recruiting labourers to work on road construction from Karungu to Kisii.<sup>134</sup>

Certainly, shortly prior to the war, South Nyanza was contributing significantly to overall Nyanza recruitment. One problem which arises in assessing the scale of labour mobilisation in South Kavirondo (South Nyanza), lies in separating South Kavirondo from Central and North Kavirondo districts. The 1910 Nyanza Province Annual Report, for example, noted that there was no real difficulty experienced by reputable persons in obtaining labour in Kavirondo, and that the supply offering was gradually on the increase. The report emphasised that to get enough labourers from the Kavirondo, recruitment needed to take place between the planting seasons. The report observed that the best months for recruiting labour for work outside the districts were the months from June to September or October. But for work in the district, labour could be obtained all year round.<sup>135</sup>

In 1912, however, the South Kavirondo District Annual Report observed that South Kavirondo, with a population of nearly a quarter of a million souls, had so far not been a factor in the labour supply and that the latest information from the District Commissioner gave very little promise for the immediate future.<sup>136</sup> The Annual Report for 1913 again

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<sup>134</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 5<sup>th</sup> October 1908, pp. 4-5.

<sup>135</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, 1910, p. 50.

<sup>136</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1912, p. 53.

noted that in districts such as South Kavirondo which were rich in livestock, people would rarely go out to labour, and indeed would rarely labour in their own locations.<sup>137</sup>

Most accounts by the colonial administrators emphasised that the supply of men amongst those populations from which labour was usually drawn was much regulated by the seasons.<sup>138</sup> Just before the rains and the earlier parts of the rainy seasons, the people were reluctant to leave their own country. They either went to help in the family cultivation or else to look on. The local authorities were nevertheless optimistic that this would gradually change:

With increased industry and improved agricultural effort among the people there is no doubt but that an increasing quantity will go out and even in the native planting season. The reason for this is that as the general population becomes industrious the locality produces much more and the workers become richer. This naturally imbues those who either have no land or do not want to work on the land with a desire to obtain money and they go out to seek it. If better methods of agriculture with implements are taught, it must follow that there will be still more production with less labour employed and so result in a still larger supply of labour for outside. The process may be longer as regards immediate requirements than a system of pressure or force. It is however the only sane and reasonable process for building up a permanent labour supplies.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1913, p. 124.

<sup>138</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1913, pp. 76-77.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. p.

A further factor that deterred many a number of people from engaging in migrant wage labour in far places was the high death rates amongst labourers. The 1913 Nyanza Province Annual Report noted that “native” labour “has had many nasty knocks when employed down country”. The report pointed out that the death rates acted as a severe deterrent to labourers. The other factors that also made a number of people reluctant to embark on migrant wage labour included: want of knowledge of language, the employers being unknown to the labourers and the absence of local food supplies and variety of food and change of climate. One last factor that persuaded people against migrant wage labour both within and without the district was the teachings of the dominant Christian denomination in the area, the Seventh-Day Adventist mission. The Seventh-Day Adventist missionaries did not allow their converts to work for wages, insisting instead that they be involved in agricultural production to generate income.<sup>140</sup> This also concurs with Butterman’s findings of her study of Karachuonyo and Kanyamkago.<sup>141</sup> This will be discussed in more detail later.

#### **(iv) Western Education**

Tignor, in his study Colonial Transformation of Kenya, observed that two most important developments that marked the early colonial regime were the introduction of wage labour and Western education. He rightly argued that early educational changes closely paralleled those in wage labouring. He observed that at first Africans demonstrated little interest and regarded missionary educators as a threat to their traditions.<sup>142</sup> In South Nyanza, Western education was first introduced by the Christian missionaries who established mission

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<sup>140</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1913, pp. 77-78.

<sup>141</sup> Butterman, J. M. ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’, p. 184.

<sup>142</sup> Tignor, R. L. The Colonial Transformation of Kenya, see chapter 4 and 5.

stations in various places in the area. The first Christian missionaries to arrive and settle in South Nyanza were the Seventh-Day Adventists who reached there in 1906 and opened a mission station at Gendia, in Karachuonyo location, under Pastor A.A. Carscallen. Apart from erecting a church, they also built a school, which by 1912 had enrolled 91 pupils, 79 boys and 12 girls.<sup>143</sup> The mission had translated the Gospel of St. Matthews into the local language, Dholuo by 1913. Those who received education at the mission school at Gendia were able to serve in the colonial administration in various capacities such as clerks, agricultural instructors, market masters, teachers and chiefs.

The Seventh-day Adventist missionaries placed a distinct emphasis on agriculture in their curriculum. The converts were eager agriculturalists, and co-operated with the colonial administration in cash crop production in the district. In his letter to the District Commissioner, South Kavirondo, Pastor A.A. Carscallen, the head of the Seventh-Day Adventist mission noted: “Our aim is to teach our people (converts) to improve cultivation and yet stay at home”.<sup>144</sup> This suggests that while the colonial administration wanted people to go out on migrant wage labour, the Seventh-Day Adventist church policy was the reverse. Hay, in her study of Kowe also noted that the Church Missionary Society, which had established a presence in the area, placed more emphasis on agricultural production. She observed that men who had become Christians assumed a greater share of agricultural labour than ever before. Hay argues that, from the first, the Church Missionary Society School at Maseno emphasised the virtues of hard work and agricultural training as well as

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<sup>143</sup> KNA, Pastor A.A. Carscallen, ‘History of the Seventh-Day Adventist’, KSI/2.

<sup>144</sup> KNA, Pastor, A. A. Carscallen, ‘History of the S.D.A. mission’, Political Record Book, KSI/27.

religious instruction.<sup>145</sup> But unlike in South Nyanza, in Kowe, the Church Missionary Society did not discourage their converts from engaging in migrant wage labour.

The Seventh-Day Adventist mission at Gendia was profoundly affected by the outbreak of the First World War. The missionaries were evacuated from their mission station at Gendia in 1914 at the start of the war, because their mission headquarters was in Hamburg, Germany. The church station at Gendia was then converted to a military depot for all the people of South Nyanza drafted into the war.<sup>146</sup> The Seventh-Day Adventists were not permitted to return until 1916.

The second mission to arrive in South Nyanza was the Roman Catholic Mill Hill Fathers who established a mission station at Nyabururu, in Kisii in 1911.<sup>147</sup> Like the Seventh-Day Adventist missionaries, the Mill Hill Fathers were equally involved in converting the local population to Christianity and in spreading Western education. Bishop J.J. Willis remarked on the Kavirondo:

From the missionary point of view, the Kavirondo has certain distinct assets, which has done much to prepare the way for the introduction of the gospel message. He has a sturdy independence that makes him take his own course, even in childhood, heedless of his parents; and in manhood he seldom follows, as Muganda (Baganda) will naturally, the lead of his chief. Secondly, religious ideas are not strange to him.

All his life he has in thought dwelt in a spirit-world; prayer and sacrifices,

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<sup>145</sup> Hay J. M. 'Luo Women and Economic Change During the Colonial Period', in Hafkin, J. N. and Bay, E. (eds.), Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1976, p. 99.

<sup>146</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 130.

<sup>147</sup> KNA, 'History of South Kavirondo District', Kisii.

recognition of obedience to unseen powers, the possibility of substitution, the need of mediation, individual revelation all these are familiar ground to him. That unseen is, to him, the most real thing to him in life.<sup>148</sup>

From these early missions stations, more mission stations were later opened up in various parts of South Nyanza. By 1915, the following mission statistics were recorded:

(a) **Missions**

Roman Catholics:

- (1) Asumbi under the charge of Father Scheffer assisted by Father Proctor
- (2) Nyabururu under the charge of a “native” teacher

Seventh-Day Adventists:

- (1) Gendia under the charge of Mr. Morss assisted by Mr. Lane
- (2) Wire Hill under the charge of Mr. Phillips
- (3) Kamagambo under the charge of Mr. Carscallen
- (4) Kanyidoto under the charge of Mr. Matter
- (5) Karungu not occupied
- (6) Rusinga under the charge of Mr. Watson
- (7) Kisii unoccupied

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<sup>148</sup> Bishop J. J. Willis, ‘Report on the Kavirondo’, Church Missionary Review, 1911, vol. LXII, p. 536.

(b) **Education**

Number of Mission Schools

	Under European Control	Under Native Control
Roman Catholics:	1	38
Seventh-Day Adventists:	<u>5</u>	<u>41</u>
Total:	<u>6</u>	<u>79</u>

Attendance at various schools:

<u>School</u>	<u>Average Attendance</u>
Asumbi Mission – R.C.	130
Gendia Mission – S.D.A	70
Kamagambo Mission	72
Karungu Mission	55
Kanyidoto Mission	54
Rusinga Mission	<u>37</u>
Total:	<u>416</u>

Village Schools:

Roman Catholics	900
Seventh-Day Adventists	<u>830</u>
Total	<u>1730</u>

Source: KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2 Annual Report

25-4-1916.

Besides evangelising, and promoting Western education, health care and modern agricultural production, the missionaries were also involved in trade. A report by a European trader R. Gethin who was based at Kisii, noted of the Seventh-Day Adventist missionaries:

I had not been in Kisii long when two people came to me. They were both missionaries and claimed ownership to a religion I had never heard of before. They introduced themselves as Pastor Sparkes and Pastor Carscallen of S.D.A. (Seventh-day Adventists) mission, that they informed me followed the Old Testament and kept Sunday on Saturday. As far as I could see they were not very religious and were far more interested in trading in buffalo hides, for which they got five cows per hide from the Jalu, than they were in converting the native to their way of thinking.<sup>149</sup>

In addition to the Christian missionaries, some colonial administrators who resided or toured the rural areas also played an important role in bringing about the process of change. The section below analyses the role these administrators and other individuals played in enhancing agrarian change in the area.

In South Nyanza, a number of people acting as a group or individually contributed to the process of change in the district. The very first group to effect the process of change were the colonial administrators that included District Commissioners, District Officers and chiefs who were in charge of their respective administrative units. They promoted the

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<sup>149</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report: Early, Days in Kisii, DC/KSI/3/7, 1912, p. 5.



cultivation of new crops in the district.<sup>150</sup> Of these, three chiefs were very central in bringing about the process of change in the area. Chiefs in the various locations in South Nyanza acted as a link between the people and the colonial administration. Chiefs made sure that government policy was implemented.<sup>151</sup> From the beginning of colonial rule in South Nyanza up until the 1920s when agricultural instructors were first posted in the African Reserves, chiefs were the ones who instructed people on new methods of agricultural production.<sup>152</sup>

Hay has observed that while colonial officials played an important role in introducing crops and tools which were completely new to the area, their influence was often marginal in the actual decision-making process of acceptance or rejection. This limited influence, she noted, could be traced to two factors: the limited resources in funds and in personnel available to them.<sup>153</sup> Maxon, a scholar of the Abagussi, also concurs with Hay's findings.<sup>154</sup> The District Commissioner, D. R. Crampton, reported on the shortage of personnel in the district:

The district, generally speaking, is in good order but has naturally suffered for the fact that for the greater part of the year only two officers have been stationed here.

A great deal of time is taken up with magisterial and general administrative duties

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<sup>150</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1910, p. 2.

<sup>151</sup> KNA, Ordinance to make Provision in Regard to Powers and Duties of Native Chiefs, No. 22, October 16 1912, PRO Co 633/3.

<sup>152</sup> KNA, Central Kavirondo District, DC/CN/3/2, 1909, p. 1.

<sup>153</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland, Kowe', p. 132.

<sup>154</sup> Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways, p. 272.

and owing to the size of the station one officer is employed for several hours daily supervising outside work.<sup>155</sup>

The other group of agents of change were the educated mission converts. A report by the Church Missionary Society official, E.R. Kenyon noted:

During the past twelve months that I visited East Africa twice, I had come away with two deep impressions: (i) we have abundant cause for encouragement in and thankfulness. (ii) In Kavirondo, at Maseno, a C.M.S. school, boys go out in pairs for a fortnight at a time to teach in the surrounding villages what they have learnt from the missionaries. The boys whom they have taught have in their turn gone out further a field, formed classes around them, and have passed the knowledge they themselves have gained. The result is that now there are hundreds of these natives in Kavirondo asking for baptism.<sup>156</sup>

Apart from the educated group who played a crucial role in the process of change in South Nyanza, the other group of people who also contributed were those who had enjoyed some access to Western culture. This category of people was comprised of those who engaged in migrant wage labour, jopango and Christian converts, jochristo. These people introduced new food and cash crops in the rural areas that they had become familiar with in the places they had been to. The presence of such people in the rural areas persuaded their kinsmen to adopt such new crops into their agricultural system.<sup>157</sup> The Christian converts who were

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<sup>155</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, 31-3-1912, in Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA, 1912, p. 57.

<sup>156</sup> Kenyon, R. E. 'Report on the Kavirondo', Church Missionary Review, 1914, vol. LXL, p. 357.

<sup>157</sup> Interviews With: Lucas Adhiambo, Rosa Anyango, Stanlau Nyagwaya.

mostly in contact with the European missionaries were able to acquire new crops and modern farming methods that they promoted at their homes.

A final category of agents of change in South Nyanza who also played a significant role in facilitating the process of change were the entrepreneurs. They established shops in remote rural areas at the trading centres where they sold agricultural produce as well as agricultural implements that the local people purchased from them. Households in South Nyanza were therefore able to access new crops and agricultural implements from the entrepreneurs.<sup>158</sup>

The establishment of colonial rule in South Nyanza provided some insights to some women who came to know their rights within the new social and political dispensation brought about by colonialism. During the pre-colonial era, women were totally submissive to their husbands and by extension to men in general. But with the establishment of colonial rule, new social and economic developments occurred which drastically changed the position of women in the society. In certain cases, women were beginning to assert themselves, for instance, some demanded the right to be clothed. A 1916 Nyanza Province Annual Report remarked: “the unclothed state of the Kavirondo women will soon be a thing of the past”.<sup>159</sup> There were also instances in which some members of the female sex were declining to be bound by ethnic customs.<sup>160</sup> In her assessment of the impact of Christianity in Kowe, Hay provides an example of Loye Elizabeth, the first Christian in Kowe not to tear off her clothes and wail at the death of her husband, Ogembo. She also refused to be taken in levirate marriage (wife inheritance) by one of his kinsmen. After Ogembo’s death,

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<sup>158</sup> Onduru, T. A. ‘Some Aspects of Economic Change in Kano’, pp.192-193.

<sup>159</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1916, p. 19.

<sup>160</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, 1915: East Africa Protectorate, p. 10.

Hay writes that Loye succeeded him as Ja golpur (“the-one who begins cultivating”).<sup>161</sup> These changes adopted by women were due to the influence of Christianity to which a number of women had converted. Christianity demanded that converts were to dress decently. Christianity at the same time preached against some cultural practices such as wife inheritance, polygamy and other related anti-Christian practices. Women converts therefore demanded that they should not be bound by such ethnic customs that were contrary to Christianity. At the same time, women were able to generate their own cash incomes through cash crop production as well as wage labour. All these factors allowed women to acquire some degree of independence and to prompt them to demand for their rights.

The section below turns to analyse the agents of reactions to, and appropriations of change, to the establishment of British colonial administration and Christianity in South Nyanza. As has already been noted, there was no Luo group in South Nyanza that physically resisted the imposition of British rule. Why then did they later turn against their colonial masters? Were they reacting to changes introduced by British administrators and Christian missionaries? The section below will attempt to provide insights to these questions, and changes, which occurred as a result of these reactions.

## **AGENTS OF REACTIONS TO, AND APPROPRIATIONS OF CHANGE**

The response of the people of South Nyanza to the establishment of British colonial rule was ambiguous. They did not rise in arms against the British, but they did reject aspects of the new order. This happened in different registers and can be discerned in different

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<sup>161</sup> Hay, J. M. ‘Luo Women and Economic Change,’ in Hafkin, J. N. and Bay, E. (eds.), Women in Africa, p. 101.

spheres, and was especially visible in the religious/ideological arena. The most significant such movement, which arose in South Nyanza and Nyanza more generally, were the Nomia Luo mission and the cult of Mumbo. These movements are often viewed as early forms of nationalism, but this is simplistic. What they were characterised more by, was selective appropriation of the new and the modern, and selective rejection of the rest. In this way they interacted completely with the colonial order.

Cooper in his work Africa since 1940 has rightly noted that from early on, African converts refused to follow the missionary script. At times, Cooper argues, African clerics took their flock away from the heavy-handed control of white missionaries to build a church that was much like the one they had left. Cooper observes that autonomous movements also widened the range of doctrinal possibility by denying that being Christian meant acting like a European. As he notes, polygamy was one source of contention, initiation rights another.<sup>162</sup> For instance, in Central Province, Kikuyu converts and leaders who emerged among them in the late 1920s and 1930s, established schools and churches to enable them to maintain the Christian faith and educate their children, while rejecting what they saw as missionary efforts to destroy Kikuyu culture.<sup>163</sup>

As early as 1907, some Luo converts were able to distinguish between Christianity and Westernism. Such converts were only ready to embrace the new faith, Christianity, on their own terms without accepting European culture and administration. A number of South Nyanza converts felt alienated from the European missionaries as a result of what they termed the disrespect that the Christian missionaries showed toward African customs, for instance, polygamy, initiation rites, worship through ancestors and many other cultural

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<sup>162</sup> Cooper, F. Africa Since 1940, pp. 127-128.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28.

practices. As a result of this, a number of converts openly rebelled against the missionaries. Against this background of Christian evangelism, a number of Messianic and Millenarian movements, breakaway sects and independent churches made their appearance. The earliest recorded of these movements that sprang up in Nyanza was the Nomia Luo Mission that emerged in 1910, followed by the cult of Mumbo in 1913.<sup>164</sup>

Scholars have attributed different causes to these movements. Lanternari's survey of prophetic and Messianic movements in colonial countries presented them as primarily 'cult(s) of liberation' seeking freedom for their oppressed people:

The birth of these movements can only be understood in the light of historical conditions relating to the colonial experiences and in the striving of subject people to become emancipated. Premonitory religious movements of revival and transformation usually lie at the origin of every political or military uprising among the native peoples and take the form of Messianic cults promising liberation.<sup>165</sup>

As Wipper remarked, few would argue that there has not been a close association in Africa between these rural-based movements and the development of modern nationalism.<sup>166</sup> She argued that these movements were attempts to create a new and a more satisfying religious life to reconcile old and new religious beliefs and to reunite the sacred and secular so

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<sup>164</sup> Wipper, A. Rural Rebels, p. 2.

<sup>165</sup> Lanternari, V. The Religion of the Oppressed, Mentor Books, Toronto, 1963, pp. vi, 19, cited in Wipper, A. Rural Rebels, p. 5.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

fundamental to indigenous society, which were lost by the older mission churches as they became larger and more bureaucratized.<sup>167</sup>

Wipper points out that the links between movements led by Simon Kimbangu, Andre Matswa and Simon Mpadi in the former Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) and the national independence struggle have been spelled out by Andersson, van Wing and Balandier.<sup>168</sup> Wipper observes that although Balandier does not deny their sociological and cultural aspects, he argues that though they are outwardly religious, these movements rapidly developed a political aspect; they are at the origin of nationalisms, which although unsophisticated were unequivocal in their expression.<sup>169</sup>

In a related study, Fields in her detailed work Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa points out that in Central Africa (the region occupied currently by the republic of Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Democratic Republic of Congo), movements combining the ambitions of moral regeneration and political revolution had far-reaching political consequences, even though they did not create large-scale political organisations to evict the colonisers and seize control of the colonial state. She asserts that secular militants, not millenarian believers in divine intervention, won this historic victory.<sup>170</sup> The thrust of the argument in her analysis is that while chiefs were the main pillars of colonial rule, they were denied under colonialism any coercive or military powers. As a result their authority

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<sup>167</sup> Turner, H. W. African Independent Church: The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord Aladura, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1967; and 'African Prophet Movements', Hibbert Journal, LXI,242, April, 1963, pp.112-16, cited in Wipper, A. Rural Rebels, p. 9.

<sup>168</sup> Andersson, E. Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo, Kegan Paul, London, 1958; Balandier, G. 'Messianismes et Nationalismes en Afrique Noire', Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie, XIV, 1953; cited in Wipper A. Rural Rebels, p.5.

<sup>169</sup> Wipper A. Rural Rebels, p. 5.

<sup>170</sup> Fields, K. E. Revival and Rebellion, p. 6.

sat “on a cushion of custom”. It was this customary authority however which the millenarian movements corroded or even denied. Hence the political threat that they posed. This can be seen most clearly in South Nyanza in the case of the cult of Mumbo.

Some scholars have also provided economic as well as social dimensions as alternative factors that caused the rise of these movements. According to Schosser in her survey Prophets in Afrika, she remarks that in most African separatist religious movements, the rise of prophets was not only due to purely personal ambition, but also as a result of economic and political factors.<sup>171</sup> In an attempt to account for the rise of *Dini ya Msambwa*, in North Nyanza District (in the present Western Province), Wolf identifies two factors as having played a critical role, namely massive inflation and insecure squatters. He noted:

Most important of these circumstances that gave rise to Dini ya Msambwa was a massive inflation. There were large amounts of money in circulation because of remittances from people serving in the army, compulsory wage labour on European farms, and compulsory cattle sales. At the same time there was a large-scale eviction of unwanted squatters.<sup>172</sup>

Economic explanations as factors that gave rise to these anti-colonial movements have been criticised on the basis that poverty, hardship and oppression cannot in themselves account for millenarianism.<sup>173</sup> But Anderson in his study of messianic movements in Lower Congo (Democratic Republic of Congo), particularly Kimbanguism and Khakism

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<sup>171</sup> Schosser, K. Propheten in Afrika, Braunschweig, 1949, quoted in Wipper, A. Rural Rebels, pp. 6-7.

<sup>172</sup> Wolf, J. D. ‘Religious Innovation’, quoted in Wipper, A. Rural Rebels, p. 7.

<sup>173</sup> Wipper, A. Rural Rebels, p. 7.



concludes that economic crisis can contribute to the rise of these millenaria movements even though he argued that they do not serve as an actual cause.<sup>174</sup>

Cultural reasons have also been provided as factors, which contributed to the rise of millenarianism. Fields points out that cultural approach to the understanding of these movements emphasises that millenarianism exhibits not political hopes but cultural disruption and an attempt by the movements' followers to restore cultural coherence, which had been disrupted as a result of the imposition of the colonial system. According to this view, the charismatic practice that everywhere distinguishes millenarianism is symptomatic of stress, which leads in turn to confusion, hysteria, desperation and widespread anomalies.<sup>175</sup>

#### **(i) Nomia Luo Mission**

The earliest and most important Christian rebel in Kenya came from Central Nyanza District, John Owalo. He had been initially converted to the Roman Catholic faith and joined the Scottish Mission at Kikuyu, in Central Province. He later abandoned the Scottish Mission and converted to the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) at Maseno, Central Nyanza. In 1907, John Owalo claimed that he had received a direct call from God to start his own religion. He claimed that God had told him:

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<sup>174</sup> Anderson, E. Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo, p. 232 quoted in Wipper, A. Rural Rebels, p. 8.

<sup>175</sup> Fields, K. E. Revival and Rebellion, p. 16.

I am now sending you to be my messenger and the bearer of my sharp sword. I shall require you to raise it high. He, who hears your message and understands it, let him hold fast to it. He who refuses shall be left alone.<sup>176</sup>

In 1910, John Owalo founded the first independent church in Nyanza, the “Nomia Luo Mission” (the Luo Mission that was given to me). He then proclaimed himself a prophet and went on to deny the divinity of Christ. Within a short spell, the mission spread to all parts of Nyanza. Owalo built his own primary schools in Kenya.<sup>177</sup> Owalo and his followers were not simply reactionaries or conservatives; they integrated what they regarded as “good” Christian teachings with selective African traditional practices. Other parts of Luoland converted to Owalo’s church because it allowed African traditional practices which European missionaries condemned.

This movement was a syncretic one, in the sense that it attempted to combine certain African religious beliefs of the Luo with certain features of the Old Testament. As Muga noted, the separation from the Anglican Church, which brought this movement into being, was as a result of the desire of its leaders to set up a church where an African indigenous hero would be the Messiah and “Saviour” of the people. This attitude, Muga observed, represented a rejection of the European missionary leadership which was discriminatory against Africans, and certain Western Christian values, such as monogamy, which are integral to Christian teachings.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Ogot, B. A. ‘Kenya Under the British, 1895 to 1963’, in Ogot, B. A. (ed.), Zamani, p. 262.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. 163.

<sup>178</sup> Muga, E. African Response to Western Christian Religion, East African Literature Bureau, Kampala, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, 1975, p. 148.

In accordance with the African traditional religious practices, the followers of this movement held an annual feast, instead of the Holy Communion, in memory of the late founder, John Owalo, “the black man’s saviour”. They also practised circumcision according to the Jews rites as a symbol of their sanctification. The movement accepted polygamy.<sup>179</sup>

The Nomia Luo Mission aimed at reversing the changes that had been introduced by the European missionaries as well as by the colonial administration. They aimed at reviving pre-colonial ways of life. The Nomia Luo converts did not revert completely to pre-colonial Luo cultural practices, but ended up integrating some of the traditional practices with the Christian practices. This kind of movement was not unique to South Nyanza and the Protectorate in general. They also arose in other African countries. For example, in Malawi, an independent church, the Watchtower movement under the leadership of Elliot Kenan Kamwana was founded in 1908.<sup>180</sup> Historians best remember him as an intellectual who made the Watchtower ideology into an ideology of anti-colonial revolution. Kamwana was a product of the Free Church mission. But he became dissatisfied with the mission when it introduced school fees in 1898. This was compounded by the introduction of the Hut Tax in his area in the same year. This accentuated the impact of the movement.

Kamwana charged that the established missions were simply extorting money instead of performing their appointed task. Kamwana’s movement was a plot against the white men. He expressed popular discontent with both missionaries and colonial officials. He told his followers, “Officials, you will see no more. We shall build our own ship, make our own

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid. p.148; Odinga, O. Not Yet Uhuru, p. 68.

<sup>180</sup> Fields, K. E. Revival and Rebellion.

powder and make or import our own guns”<sup>181</sup> Kamwana commanded many followers because the only religious action he emphasised was baptism that could save people from sin and its consequences. People joined his movement in large numbers because the movement allowed dancing and beer drinking-practices long outlawed by Livingstonia. People started to reverse the cultural transformation that was part and parcel of the “change of heart”. Polygamous spouses accepted baptism together instead of being divorced and accepting it separately. After thirty years of Christian mission activity, such independent churches flourished, under such men as Elliot Kenana Kamwana. Therefore Owalo’s church was something of a portent after only about six years of missionary work in Nyanza.<sup>182</sup>

African millenarian movements, particularly the Watchtower movement had a lot of parallels with American Watchtower millennium movement. For example, Fields points out that much that seems “fantastic” in the African movements existed in the American as well: belief in the reality of spirit, in the sudden return of the dead to life on earth, in the battle involving the heavenly and earthly armies, in a this-world paradise to come. Further, both movements have always had an implicit political potential. Fields notes that the theocratic doctrines of the Watchtower have engendered conflict with civil authorities in and outside of Africa.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid. p. 115.

<sup>182</sup> Hodges, G. W.T. ‘African Response to European Rule’, in Ogot, B. A. (ed.), Hadith 3 p. 99.

<sup>183</sup> Fields, K. E. Revival and Rebellion.

## **(ii) The Cult of Mumbo**

The second anti colonial anti Christian movement that emerged in Central Nyanza and later expanded rapidly in South Nyanza was the cult of Mumbo. The movement was even more radical than Nomia Luo Mission and had more widespread political repercussions in South Nyanza and Nyanza more widely. From 1913 to 1934, the cult of Mumbo, the serpent god of Lake Victoria, spread from Central Nyanza to South Nyanza. Mumbo condemned Christianity as rotten and vowed to cleanse Luoland of European colonial administrators and missionaries together with their associates, chiefs and African converts. Mumbo threatened to sever the arms of those adorned in Western clothes and to transform whites and their associates into monkeys, and appears to have been totally alienated from the colonial administration.<sup>184</sup> Among other things, it rejected most European customs and ways and advocated a return to most old customs and the ways of life before the establishment of colonial rule.<sup>185</sup> Despite condemning European customs, Wipper argues that the Mumboists did not scorn all Western ways. Wipper noted: “the Mumboists showed a deep admiration for Western goods and technology. The underlying theme in visions, stories and comments was their longing for all those wonderful things which Europeans possessed.”<sup>186</sup> Mumboism’s message was a skilful attempt to revitalise traditional beliefs by combining traditional and Western ideas and thereby obtaining the best of two belief systems.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> KNA, Fazan, S. H. ‘Report on Investigation made Concerning the Worship of Mumbo’, South Kavirondo Political Record Book; Shadle, B. L. ‘Patronage, Mellenialism and the Serpent God Mumbo in South-West Kenya, 1912-1934’, *Africa*, vol. 72, No. 1, 2002, p. 29.

<sup>185</sup> Maxon, R. M. *Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya*, p. 64.

<sup>186</sup> Wipper, A. *Rural Rebels*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.* p.49.

On the political implication of Mumboism, Wipper noted that the prophecy of the early departure of Europeans and the coming of a millennium were most important. She observed that the millennium was seen as a golden age when believers in Mumbo would be blessed with abundance. They would have an ever-lasting supply of livestock, and crops would grow unattended. Food would be falling from heaven and from Lake Victoria. That they would be reunited with their dead, especially their prophets and warriors and their god Mumbo.<sup>188</sup> But before this the world would undergo a great cataclysm at which time considerable vengeance would fall on those regarded by the Mumboists as enemies, namely British colonial officials and chiefs.<sup>189</sup>

Onyango Dunde, the founder of Mumboism, claimed that as he was reclining on the shores of Lake Victoria one day in 1913, a giant serpent swallowed him, calling itself Mumbo. This then regurgitated Onyango and spoke:

Those whom I chose personally, and those who acknowledge me, will live forever in plenty. Their crops will grow of themselves and there will be no more need to work. I will cause cattle to come up out of the lake in great numbers to those who believe in me. All Europeans are your enemies, but the time is shortly coming when they will all disappear from the country. Lastly, my followers must immediately slaughter all their cattle, sheep and goats. When this is done, I will provide them with as many as they want from the lake.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid. pp. 43-44.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. pp. 42-57 cited in Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, p. 64.

<sup>190</sup> Nyangweso, 'The Cult of Mumbo in Central and South Kavirondo', The Journal of East African and Uganda Natural History and Society, May-August, 1930, p. 13.

Mumbo's sermon spread far and wide in Central and South Nyanza as well as in Gusiiland, and Onyango Dunde became a household name and a person much sought after for more information about Mumbo. From South Nyanza, four men from Karachuonyo location and one Mosi Auma from Kabondo made a pilgrimage to Onyango, each with a goat or an ox as gifts.<sup>191</sup> Mumboism soon spread in South Nyanza. Due to the anti-colonial activities of the Mumboist converts in South Nyanza, in 1914 the colonial administration imprisoned Mosi Auma for one year for witchcraft, presumably in connection with Mumboism.<sup>192</sup>

Mumbo's attitude to modernity was ambiguous, while advocating a return to old customs and ways; they coveted Western goods and technology. At the same time, they subverted the colonial project by opposing one of its key aims, the provision of migrant labour. The area where the cult of Mumbo appears to have been most strong in South Nyanza was Karachuonyo location. The demand for labour, both outside the location and for roadwork within as well as for Orinda's (the chief of Karachuonyo) private estates, resulted in resistance apparent in the cult of Mumbo.<sup>193</sup> As Butterman noted, the relative visibility of Karachuonyo location on the administrative horizon meant that Karachuonyo was more efficiently taxed, and was the site of many more official campaigns to increase agricultural production, than most of the adjacent locations. This was why Karachuonyo was the epicentre of Mumboism. At the same time, Karachuonyo was the centre for the new ideologies introduced by foreign religious groups that settled in the area, namely, the Seventh-Day Adventist mission as well as Islam. Butterman believes that the people of

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid. p. 31; Shadle, B. L. 'Patronage, Millennialism and the Serpent god Mumbo', *Africa*, p. 33.

<sup>192</sup> Shadle, B. L. 'Patronage, Millennialism and the Serpent god Mumbo', ' *Africa*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>193</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 133.

Karachuonyo readily embraced Mumboism as a way of venting their anger on colonial demands.<sup>194</sup>

The Karachuonyo men who were accused by the colonial administration of being members of Mumboism were forced by the colonial administration to provide labour on the Kendu-Homa Bay road, while others were sent on migrant wage labour at Magadi and in Mombasa.<sup>195</sup> During the First World War, Mumboism advanced from South Nyanza to neighbouring Abagusii locations, despite the violence meted against its followers by the colonial administration. Chief Onsongo of Getutu and his headmen feared that Mumboism was “assuming the most alarming proportions” and rounded up sixty eight Mumboists and took them to the District Commissioner W. F. G. Campbell, who interrogated them, burnt their cloaks and dispatched them to go and work outside the district. The activities of the Mumboists persisted until 1934 when the District Commissioner W.F. G. Campbell, ordered chiefs and assistant chiefs of Getutu to arrest all known Mumbo follower in the location. About 2000 Mumbo followers were arrested and some of them put on trial and imprisoned, others were deported.<sup>196</sup>

In a related study of millennial movements, Phimister in his An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe, 1890 to 1948 argues that once some black peasants began to identify the colonial state as the main source of their problems, most people’s reaction to economic and social ills took the form of what Government officials described as ‘religious hysteria’. He points out that this ranged from uneven radicalisation of previously respectable

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid. p. 136.

<sup>195</sup> KNA, Campbell, W. F. G. ‘Mumbo in Karachounyo’, Central Nyanza District NZA PRB, CN/43 (PRB 191).

<sup>196</sup> Shadle, B. L. ‘Patronage, Millennialism and the Serpent god Mumbo’, Africa, p. 33.



denominations like the African Methodist Episcopal Church to the rapid spread of new cults and independent churches.<sup>197</sup> Phimister points out that other people, especially labour migrants, sought release 'from personal and social stress' by extending an enthusiastic welcome to the itinerant agents of the mchape cult whose fine red powder mixed with water promised to cleanse and defend believers from evil. He notes that many thousands more responded to the prophetic visions of the Vapostori and Amazioni churches. By the end of the decade, as Phimister remarks, both churches were established over large areas of Mashonaland, particularly amongst the 'uneducated, the poorest and most deprived, those least able to accommodate themselves to the pressures of change.'<sup>198</sup>

Mumbo was perhaps even more subversive of the colonial project when it rejected the authority of colonial chiefs, the main pillars of indirect rule. The millennial followers treated chiefs with particular contempt. For instance, in South Nyanza at the District Sports Meeting, Mumboists in warriors' garb openly defied both the senior Gusii and an important Luo chief sent by the District Commissioner to stop their dancing. The District Commissioner E. R. S. Davis reported:

I believe that they all intrigued against the authority of the chiefs and headmen and deliberately hindered them from carrying out their duties by insult and threats, and claiming greater powers...When I arrested Muchirogo the day after the meeting of the Mumboists at Kisii, I heard him abusing the chiefs, some of them individually by name and all of them collectively in a way that showed me that such teaching was dangerous to peace and good order, and inciting enmity between his followers

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<sup>197</sup> Phimister, I. An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe, 1890-1948: Capital Accumulation and Class Struggle Longman, London, New York, 1988, pp. 196-197.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.* p. 197.

and government. He and those who thought like him were without doubt intriguing against constituted power and authority. Moreover, the chiefs were evidently afraid of it and realized that they are the special objects of hatred and scorn.<sup>199</sup>

As Wipper rightly points out, given the powerful position of chiefs, the authoritarian structure of Gusii society, and the fact that the order had come directly from the District Commissioner, this defiance was particularly bold.<sup>200</sup> She observes that the Mumboists conspicuous style, the men decked out in fighting attire (perhaps symbolising the former revolts) and participated in tribal dances (perhaps denoting loyalty to tribal values)-suggested premeditated action designed to antagonise as well as to convey a message.<sup>201</sup>

In Karachuonyo where Mumboism established a strong presence in South Nyanza, chief Orinda remarked, ‘the sect consists only of young men. There are no old men in the sect or practically none’.<sup>202</sup> In some areas the young men were preaching to the effect that it would only be a short time before white men go, that they (young men) will be having a free fight, and it will be a case of survival of the fittest. This as Wipper rightly asserts, sounds as if the young men were openly challenging the elders’ authority.<sup>203</sup> The young men joined the movement because they were dissatisfied with the colonial system that had banned their pre-colonial occupation such as cattle raid and inter-ethnic fighting. The young men had relied on raids to acquire cattle needed for bridewealth. The young men now being unemployed were becoming increasingly restless. This provided them with the right incentive to join the movement.

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<sup>199</sup> Wipper, A. Rural Rebels, p. 42.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. p. 42.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid. pp. 42-43.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid. p. 61.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid. p. 61.

Mumboism was a rejection of the pre-colonial traditional authority. At the centre of the traditional authority system were the ancestors and the elders. In death as well as in life, in the Luo traditional society, the ancestors were regarded as being intimately bound up with the welfare of the clan. It was only the elders, because of their lineage relationship to the ancestors that were at a position to ascertain the ancestors' will and, when necessary, make the required propitiations. As Wipper has noted, this gave them much power and permitted them to exercise strong social sanctions and bestowed on the elders the necessary attributes of authority.<sup>204</sup> But the rise of Mumboism witnessed the establishment of other criteria for leadership. As Wipper points out, in keeping with its reversal theme, youth and women, both of whom had occupied relatively low status in the traditional structure, figured prominently as the cult leaders. They now took over the role of the elders and mediated between the ancestors and members of the community. They made many decisions, which in the traditional society were the prerogative of the elders. Therefore, in rejecting age and sex, two major attributes of traditional leadership, and in introducing new norms and leadership roles, Mumbo in essence, rejected "tribal" authority.<sup>205</sup>

Most of these movements originated by secession from Christian missions, but some arose independently without any direct connection with a particular mission. Quite a large number of them did not last long. In most cases the general message of these movements contained old as well as new beliefs, religious, political and economic aspirations. Their approach varied from militant revolt to ritualistic prescriptions.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid. p. 62.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. p. 62.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

Most of these millennial movements had similarity of vision. For instance, in majority of these cults, the followers believe that the king or hero never dies but still lives and will one day return and lead his followers to a utopian order. Thus, Andre Matswa of the Kimbanguist movement died in 1942, according to documentary evidence, but legend has it that he is still alive and will one day return. Similarly, when the founder of South African Zionism, Isaac Shembe died, his followers believe that he would rise again.<sup>207</sup> These beliefs are based on the Christian teaching that Jesus will return a second time to take his followers to paradise.

The millennial movements share anti-European sentiments and belief in a millennium when they expect their prophets to return and expel foreigners. Mumboism for instance prophesied the early departure of Europeans and the subsequent coming of the Golden Age in which the Mumboists would be blessed with abundance. From the Democratic Republic of Congo to South Africa, separatist movements such as the Bakongo cult of Simon Kimbangu and Adre Matswa all preached the impending doom of the white man and the ultimate triumph of the Black Messiah and his followers.<sup>208</sup> In Kenya, Dini ya Msambwa's followers believed that the triumph of blacks was associated with a millennium wherein Masinde the Messiah, would rule the world. Like Mumbo's followers, the faithful were assured that once the foreigners were expelled they would inherit all their wealth.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Sundkler, B. G. M. Bantu Prophets in South Africa, Oxford University Press, London, 1961, pp. 111, 126 quoted in Wipper, A. Rural Rebels, p. 10.

<sup>208</sup> Balandier, G. 'Messianism and Nationalism in Black Africa', in Van den Berghe, P. L. (ed.), Africa: Social Problems of Change and Conflict, Chandler Publishing Co., San Francisco, 1965, pp.443-460 cited in Wipper, A. Rural Rebels, p. 146.

<sup>209</sup> Wipper, A. Rural Rebels, p. 46.

In sum, in most of these millennium movements, their stories, myths and prophecies reflected the wishes and dreams of peasants for riches, bliss, freedom and the punishment of their nemesis. Under the weight of the new political dispensation, which was beyond their comprehension, the peasants were at pains to understand the new phenomenon. Both mission and Mumbo youth were rebelling against the “tribal” authority, and some of the Mumboists were engaging in activities highly disapproved of by the older generation.

## **CONCLUSION**

The establishment of colonial rule in South Nyanza contributed further to the process of change that was already in progress during the pre-colonial era. The changes were brought about by the colonial system of taxation, crop production, migrant wage labour and Christianity. Economic change in South Nyanza between 1903 and 1914 was characterised by experimentation with the newly introduced cash crops such as cotton and groundnuts. The people of South Nyanza also tried new opportunities such as migrant wage labour as well as entrepreneurship as regular sources of income. The people who pioneered this process of change were the youths of South Nyanza whose labour became free when the area was colonized. The youths of South Nyanza came to realise that prosperity would now be determined by new opportunities created by colonialism.

The imposition of colonial rule in South Nyanza subjected the area’s pre-capitalist forms of production to an historical break in their autonomous development. As Berman and Lonsdale have observed: “In the terminology of the time, they were literally opened up”.<sup>210</sup> They became part-economies, externally oriented to suit the dynamic of capitalism that had

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<sup>210</sup> Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. ‘Coping With the Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State, 1895-1914’, in Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. Unhappy Valley.

been imposed on them from the outside, noted Berman and Lonsdale. This was also true of South Nyanza. The pre-colonial economy of South Nyanza was subjected to a particularly sharp ordeal of restructuring as a result of the articulation of pre-capitalist and capitalist forms of production. The varying patterns of capitalist penetration and the diverse forms of pre-capitalist economies of South Nyanza produced a number of basic patterns of change. The basic forms of change included peasant commodity production for international markets, which was probably the most common and important colonial 'development' throughout South Nyanza.

Even though colonial officials played a crucial role in introducing crops and agricultural tools which were basically new to the people of South Nyanza, their influence was actually peripheral in the final decision making process of rejection or acceptance. This limited influence was as a result of scarce resources, for instance, personnel and funds at the disposal of colonial officials. In South Nyanza, up to 1914, there was no agricultural official posted in the district to provide direction in the production of new cash crops. Colonial officials who assisted the local people in crop production were not knowledgeable on the prevailing geographical and climatic conditions of South Nyanza and crops that were suitable for the area. They had no idea of the types of local soil as well as patterns of rainfall in the region. The achievements of agricultural production during the period under review were basically a result of the efforts of the households in South Nyanza who were experimenting with the new crops to establish their suitability.

The establishment of the presence of Christian missionaries in South Nyanza was in tandem with colonial capitalism. Christian missionaries enhanced the process of change in the areas where they established a presence. Apart from converting the local population to

Christianity, missionaries also built schools and promoted Western education. Those who received Western education were utilised in colonial administration in various capacities. In addition, missionaries encouraged Western agricultural production in areas where they established a presence.

The next chapter examines changes in the agricultural production in South Nyanza during colonial period between 1914 and 1930. The chapter will focus on the new crops and agricultural implements that were introduced by the colonial administration and the response of the households in South Nyanza to the newly introduced crops and agricultural implements. The chapter will also analyse the impact of the process of change on the gender, generational, and class relations as well as on political and economic structures during the period under review.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATION, 1914 TO 1930**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The period under review, 1914 to 1930 was a critical one in the agrarian transformation in South Nyanza. The period was marked by a further promotion of the production of new cash crops, which had been introduced into the area by the colonial administration. The administration also continued to encourage the integration of new implements into the agricultural cycle of the households in South Nyanza to enhance crop production. These measures were aimed at integrating the economy of South Nyanza into colonial capitalism. As noted in the previous chapter, by 1914, the economy of South Nyanza had been partially integrated into colonial capitalism. The period under consideration was marked by world events that influenced the process of agrarian change in South Nyanza. The events included the First World War and the depressions of the 1920s and 30s. A number of internal factors in South Nyanza also influenced the process of change during the period. They included the outbreak of drought and famine. Although South Nyanza lacked pre-colonial statistics on agricultural production, it is a safe assumption that agricultural production increased during colonial period.

Osterhammel in his study of colonialism rightly argues that when a colony was not primarily acquired for economic reasons, extensive repercussions on the economy of the



region in question were inevitable. He observes that the establishment of colonial rule was one of the most important means of acquiring natural resources and human labour to foster intercontinental trade, which accelerated during the early modern period.<sup>1</sup> These observations are also true of South Nyanza as this chapter demonstrates. General studies of Kenya's peasant agrarian change during colonial rule such as those by Wolff and Berman have argued that the articulation of a capitalist economy with indigenous African economies transformed the latter for the international market. These studies have also emphasised the role of the state as opposed to households in promoting agrarian change.<sup>2</sup> The observations in these studies partly agree with findings from South Nyanza. However, while it is true that the state played a crucial role in the agrarian transformation in South Nyanza, it is nevertheless important to recognise that success or failure in this regard depended on the households in the area. This is supported by the evidence of the failure of cotton as a cash crop in South Nyanza. Regional studies of Nyanza on agrarian change such as those by Hay, Butterman and Maxon have emphasised that though the colonial state played a critical role in intervening in the agrarian system in Nyanza, the final word lay with the households. These studies have also highlighted the fact that the incorporation of the economy of Nyanza into colonial capitalism enhanced the transfer of surplus from the local population to the colonial and metropolitan sectors.<sup>3</sup> This chapter confirms these findings.

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<sup>1</sup> Osterhammel, J. Colonialism, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Wolff, R. D. Britain and Kenya; Berman, B. 'Structure and Process in the Bureaucratic States of Colonial Africa,' in Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. Unhappy Valley.

<sup>3</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'; Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways.

This chapter attempts to analyse the process of the agrarian change that occurred in South Nyanza from 1914 to 1930. The chapter demonstrates that by the 1920s, most households in South Nyanza were still experimenting with the new crops and implements in their agricultural cycle. Consequently, the chapter shows that by 1930, the people of South Nyanza were more involved in commodity production than in the previous years. This was as a result of improvement of infrastructure in the area as well as state intervention in the agricultural system in South Nyanza. These accelerated the process of agrarian change in the area.

### **The Impact of War and the Post War Depression, 1914 to 1930**

The outbreak of the First World War, 1914 to 1919, subjected households in South Nyanza and Nyanza more generally to hardships. The people of South Nyanza became involved in the war directly or indirectly. Military and civil recruitment was large-scale among households in South Nyanza and Nyanza in general. When war commenced in September 1914, the German forces crossed from Tanganyika (now the republic of Tanzania) into South Nyanza and temporarily occupied Kisii, the district headquarters. The British colonial administration had tactfully retreated from the district headquarters upon hearing of the impending German invasion. The British withdrawal from Kisii on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1914, and the subsequent German invasion demoralised the people of South Nyanza.<sup>4</sup> This resulted in wide spread looting by the people of South Nyanza, who targeted government properties, missionaries and foreign traders. When the German forces were defeated at the

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<sup>4</sup> See KNA, the account of Richard Gethin in his 'Erly Days in Kisii' DC/KSI/3/6, written in 1953.

“Battle of Kisii”, by combined British and African detachments on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1914 and driven out of the district, the British colonial administration reoccupied the headquarters.<sup>5</sup> In retaliation for the looting spree, the colonial administration punished the people of South Nyanza (the Luo and Abagusii). In the same month of September 1914, the administration imposed a fine on the people of over 19,000 head of cattle, valued at 65,000 pounds.<sup>6</sup>

The war generated further demand for labour from South Nyanza. Table 4:1 (page 246) shows the figures of people from South Nyanza in relation to other districts in the province, who were engaged in labour activities including in the military. The colonial state employed increasingly forceful means to recruit men for the Carrier Corps since few men came forward voluntarily.<sup>7</sup> The District Commissioner, South Kavirondo, W. F. G. Campbell, described the method of recruitment in the Annual Report for 1914-15: “lately in order to fill labour requirements, force had to be applied, i.e. the young men have been rounded up during the night”.<sup>8</sup>

The First World War marked a critical stage in the migrant wage labour history of South Nyanza. A remarkable expansion in wage labour participation occurred on the part of many households in South Nyanza within and outside the district. The 1914 South Kavirondo District Annual Report acknowledged that about 4,000 men had been sent out of the district

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<sup>5</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District, DC/KSI/3/2, pp. 2-7: Histories and Customs of Kisii and Luo, 1911-1924, ‘The Battle of Kisii’.

<sup>6</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, PC/NZA, 1915, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo Annual Report, 1914-15, cited in Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, p. 66.

in that year to work on contracts that ranged from 3 to 6 months.<sup>9</sup> They worked all over the country, employed by the Public Works Department, harbour, railway, European settlers, irrigation work in the Maasai Reserve and on the railway extension to Magadi.

As this study shows, by 1915, the District Commissioner for South Kavirondo, Mr. Hemmant, admitted that the people of South Nyanza were engaging in migrant wage labour on a considerably larger scale than before:

I imagine this district – as indeed most others – has never contributed to the labour market so handsomely as has been done this year.<sup>10</sup>

The expansion in labour engagement in 1915 by households in South Nyanza can be attributed to the effects of the war. During the war, thousands of men from South Nyanza and Nyanza more generally were recruited into the Carrier Corps and the civil sector.

The immediate impact of the First World War on South Nyanza was the increased demand for labour from the area and from Nyanza as a whole. Recruitment from the province was very heavy, for both military and civil requirements. The Nyanza Province Annual Report for 1915 admitted that the demands on the province for labour during the year had been exceptionally heavy for carriers for the military.<sup>11</sup> As Odinga remarked in his autobiography,

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<sup>9</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1914, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 14-4-1914, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1914, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-3-1915, p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, PC/NZA, 1915, P. 41.

‘during the war, Nyanza was milked dry for carriers, thousands of who never returned to their homes but died of disease in service, though they wore no soldiers’ uniforms’.<sup>12</sup> Berman and Lonsdale noted that for four years during the war, the colonial state stopped its plan of intervention and control of the African labour supply in the interest of settler and estate production. They argued that the state during the war was preoccupied with meeting military labour requirements and that wartime experience provided a crucial watershed demonstrating the efficiency of ‘total’ pressure and systematic organisation to squeeze out labour supplies. They also recognised that the introduction of massive forced conscription into the Military Carrier Corps created a threat that drove Africans to work on settler farms in order to avoid military service.<sup>13</sup> Table 4: 1 shows the figures of labour/conscription from South Kavirondo and other districts in the province that were registered for both civil and military work. The figures included all men registered for work both in the province and at other centres in the Protectorate, and included 21,925 drafted for military requirements.

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<sup>12</sup> Odinga, O. Not Yet Uhuru, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. ‘Crises of Accumulation, Coercion and the Colonial State: The Development of the Labour Control System, 1919-1929’, in Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. Unhappy Valley, p. 105.

**TABLE 4: 1**

**LABOUR/ CONSCRIPTION FROM SOUTH KAVIRONDO AND OTHER DISTRICTS IN NYANZA PROVINCE, 1914 – 15**

Quarter	North Kavirondo	Kisumu	South Kavirondo	Lumbwa	Nandi	Total
April-June 1914	894	2,942	654	-	99	4,589
July-Sept. 1914	2,636	6,044	1,015	80	140	9,915
Oct.-Dec. 1914	3,118	10,553	1,440	539	125	15,775
Jan-March 1915	2,697	4,047	4,266	696	96	11,802
Total	9,345	23,586	7,375	1,315	460	42,081

**Source:** KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, PC/NZA, 1915, p. 41.

The above figures did not include the following:

(1)	Ngabotok convoy (Turkana patrol)] North Kavirondo about	4,000
(2)	Military Transport, telegraph construction] South Kavirondo about	2,000
(3)	Kendu pier and local defence Kendu] South Kavirondo about	1,000
(4)	Kisumu defences and bush clearing] Kisumu about	2,000
(5)	Kisumu – Mumias Road...	
(6)	Lumbwa – Kericho – Sotik Road...	_____
	Total	About <u>11,000</u>

**Source:** KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, PC/NZA, 1915, p. 41.

In addition, the report admitted that a large number of unregistered labourers had gone to work on various settler farms on the Uasin Gishu, Trans-Nzoia, Muhoroni, and Nandi farms. The report noted that while the returns for registered labour for 1913-1914 were 28,496,<sup>14</sup> by 1915, the number of labourers from the province had doubled.

Labour from the province was grouped into two categories: registered and unregistered. A large number of unregistered labourers from South Nyanza and the province generally went to work on the European settled areas in the province and on the Uasin Gishu plateau. The 1916 Nyanza Province Annual Report acknowledged that the European farmers received enough labour and did not request more from the labour agents.<sup>15</sup> Table 4: 2 below shows registered labour in the province during 1916.

**TABLE 4: 2**

**REGISTERED LABOUR IN NYANZA PROVINCE DURING 1916**

(a)	Carrier Corps	=	23,573
(b)	Government Department	=	4,091
(c)	Private	=	8,735
	Total	=	36,399

**Source:** KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, PC/NZA, 1916, 31-3-1916, p.11.

<sup>14</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, PC/NZA, 1915, P. 41.

<sup>15</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, PC/NZA, 1916, 31-3-1916, P. 11.

The above figures did not include men who were employed locally by the Public Works Department, and 4,000 men used for transport to Kacheliba in Turkana were not included in the registered figures.<sup>16</sup> As illustrated in Table 4: 2, more people served in the military than other sectors combined. Tignor noted that in the last two years of the war, British military forces in East Africa had required large numbers of Africans for their military campaigns and that the administration had devoted all its energies to recruiting able-bodied men for the Carrier Corps.<sup>17</sup> In South Nyanza and Nyanza generally, the average duration of service for registered labourers in 1916 was six months. This excluded the Carrier Corps for which men were registered for a period defined as “the duration of the war”.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, Tignor found, the Kikuyu employees did not engage in long-term contracts of six months. They preferred to sign 30-day agreements with the railway, the Public Works Department and settlers, although they were often willing to renew the contracts once or twice more. Tignor noted that the Kikuyu returned to their homesteads more regularly than labour recruited from Nyanza Province.<sup>19</sup> The South Kavirondo District Annual Report for 1917 noted that labour recruitment from the district during the year had been confined almost entirely to the Carrier Corps and government work in the district. Table 4: 3 on the next page shows labour recruitment within and without the district from 1913 to 1917.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. P. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Tignor, R. L. The Colonial Transformation of Kenya, p. 165.

<sup>18</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, PC/NZA, 1916, 31-3-1916, P. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Tignor, R. L. The Colonial Transformation of Kenya, p. 176.



**TABLE 4: 3**

**(a) LABOUR REGISTERED FOR WORK OUTSIDE AND INSIDE THE DISTRICT**

Year	Inside	Outside	Total
1912-1913	535	1,987	2,522
1913-1914	401	4,029	4,430
1914-1915	4,412	9,560	13,972
1915-1916	963	6,929	7,692
1916-1917	1,210	10,006	11,216

**(b) Average Monthly Wages Paid**

1912-1913	-
1913-1914	-
1914-1915	Rs. 6/86 per man
1915-1916	Rs. 5/70 per man
1916-1917	Rs. 5/25 per man

**(c) Average Period of Service**

	Months	Days
1912-1913	-	-
1913-1914	-	-
1914-1915	5	18 per man
1915-1916	5	18 per man
1916-1917	3	17 per man

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923 Annual Report, 31-3-1917, p. 235.

From Table 4: 3 it can be observed that from 1914 when the war broke out, there was an increase of labour engagement by households in South Nyanza, particularly outside the district. Before the war, 1913, 1,987 labourers engaged themselves outside the district. By the time war broke out in 1914, the number soared to 4,029, and by 1917, the number of labourers outside the district had grown to 10,006. In addition, more unregistered labourers were also working elsewhere in the province.<sup>20</sup> Evidence based on Table 4: 3 indicates that during 1914 to 1915, the average monthly wage was Rs. 6/86 per month, but it decreased during 1915/1916 and 1916-1917 period.<sup>21</sup> Collier and Lal noted deplorable working conditions during the war period across Kenya. They pointed out that wages if paid at all were extremely low; and actually fell between 1910 and 1920.<sup>22</sup> This parallels the situation in the South African mining industry, as described among others and by Bundy.<sup>23</sup>

Labour demands for war requirements practically drained South Nyanza of its able-bodied men. The District Commissioner, Mr. Hemmant in a report in 1916 observed:

It will thus be seen that the two years 1914-1916, 21,864 men were sent out to work and of this period, the bulk of men were not sent out until September, 1914, thus in reality giving a period of 18 months recruiting i.e. 1,215 men per month for 18 consecutive months... When it is remembered that the estimated strength of the able-bodied youths for the whole South Kavirondo District is 25,447 only of which total

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<sup>20</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, PC/NZA, 1916, 31-3-1916, P. 11.

<sup>21</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-3-1917, p. 235.

<sup>22</sup> Collier, P. and Lal, D. Labour and Poverty in Kenya, 1900-1980, Oxford, 1986, p. 33.

<sup>23</sup> Beinart, W. The Political Economy of Pondoland, p. 5.

an average of 35% are rejected by the M.O.H. as not in fact being able-bodied, it will be seen that the labour recruiting has become exceedingly difficult. It should be pointed out here that many of the men sent for work as a punishment for one year were kept considerably 25% over their time though others have also returned.<sup>24</sup>

The province contributed substantially towards Kenyan war efforts. For instance, more than half the total number of recruits (some 92,000 of 165,000) came from Nyanza Province.<sup>25</sup> The Annual Report for 1919 noted that between 1915 and 1919, Nyanza Province contributed about 200,000 males for both civil and military recruitment, which comprised about one-sixth of the total population. The province also supplied over 50,000 head of cattle towards war requirements.<sup>26</sup> In South Kavirondo (South Nyanza), an estimated 10,000 men had been recruited from the district for war services. The figure represented those who had been recruited from the Luo and the Abagusii locations by 1917.<sup>27</sup> The District Annual Report for 1917 noted that between January and April 1917 alone, 9,000 more recruits were drafted.<sup>28</sup> When war commenced, the colonial administration raised the Hut Tax and the newly enforced Poll Tax from Rs. 5/- in 1915 to Rs. 8/- in 1920.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, Annual Report, 7-4-1916, p. 251.

<sup>25</sup> Savage, D. and Munro, J. F., 'Carrier Corps Recruitment in British East Africa Protectorate, 1914 -1918', *Journal of African History*, V11, 1966, pp. 323 – 338.

<sup>26</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Reports, 1915-1916 and 1918-1919; Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', pp. 125-126.

<sup>27</sup> KNA, Northcote, G. A. S. 'History of South Kavirondo District', KSI/28.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Lonsdale, J. M. 'A Political History of Nyanza, 1883-1945' Ph.D. Dissertation, Cambridge University, 1964, p. 216, cited in Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 151.

Mr J. Ainsworth, the Nyanza Provincial Commissioner, who was concerned with labour recruitment in the province during the war recorded:

As the campaign progressed the civil administration was very largely employed to find porters for transport. A very large portion of the responsibility for producing porters fell on the Nyanza Province. It can be said with truth that they helped to win the war. The Kavirondo Porter became a well-known feature in 'German East' during the war. He was usually referred to as omera (a Luo word meaning brother).<sup>30</sup>

The war caused high mortality rates among the men of South Nyanza and the Protectorate in general who were recruited for the Carrier Corps. Wolff has remarked that the sufferings of Africans touched by the war in all ways reached enormous proportions. He notes that of the total of about 164,000 Africans formally engaged in the British campaigns, at least 46,618 died in combat or from one or more of the many prevalent corps connected diseases.<sup>31</sup> It has been estimated that about one-third of all those who were recruited for the Carrier Corps died during the war. Among those who managed to return home after the war, diseases had infected a number contracted during the course of war as a result of the unhygienic conditions to which they were subjected. Others became disabled due to injuries suffered in the war.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ogot, B. A. 'British Administration in the Central Nyanza', Journal of African History, p. 258.

<sup>31</sup> Wolff, R. D. Britain and Kenya, p. 109.

<sup>32</sup> Ogot, B. A. 'British Administration of the Central Nyanza', Journal of the African History.

Conditions of life were so bad that more soldiers died from them than from the actual war injuries. This forced the colonial administration in 1917 to resort to recruiting through armed raids in order to replenish the diminishing ranks of the Carrier Corps. At the same time, the settlers demand for labour continued unabated.<sup>33</sup> This prompted the colonial government to enact more repressive labour legislation. Hence in 1915, the Native Registration Ordinance came into force. It introduced the infamous kipande registration system that was implemented in 1920.

The outbreak of World War 1 in 1914 was a critical event that expanded the scale of engagement in migrant labour by the people of South Nyanza and Nyanza more widely. The war made the presence of the colonial regime felt in the rural areas in a way it had not done before.<sup>34</sup> The recruitment of the men to the Carrier Corps was a crucial event that aroused the people of South Nyanza and the Protectorate in general to the events in the larger world and provided thousands of men with new experiences and ideas.<sup>35</sup> The war increased the labour demands among the households in South Nyanza. An estimated 10,000 men had been recruited from the district for war services.<sup>36</sup>

The engagement of the people of South Nyanza in migrant wage labour impacted on their pre-colonial organisation in various ways. For instance, the absence of able-bodied men in

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<sup>33</sup> Zeleza, T. 'The Establishment of Colonial Rule, 1905-1920', in Ochieng', W. R. (ed.), A Modern History of Kenya, 1895-1980 Evans Brothers (Kenya) Limited, Nairobi, 1989, pp. 50-51.

<sup>34</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland, Kowe', p. 125.

<sup>35</sup> Lord Cranworth, B. F. Kenya Chronicles, Macmillan, London, 1939, pp. 73-74, cited in Wipper, A. Rural Rebels, p. 32.

<sup>36</sup> KNA, Northcote, G.A.S. 'History of South Kavirondo District', KSI/28.

the villages who departed on migrant wage labour meant that the bulk of agricultural work was now left to women and junior men. One informant recalled that since a large number of men were engaged in migrant labour, women bore more agricultural work than before.<sup>37</sup> Men who did not engage in migrant wage labour became involved more in agricultural production, working together with their wives. This practice of men working on farms with their wives became more common than during the pre-colonial era. This was because the people of South Nyanza realised that they could raise tax money from their agricultural proceeds in order to avoid selling their livestock for the same.<sup>38</sup>

As Maxon rightly notes, the labour drain from African areas had disruptive effect on agricultural production in African areas. He observes that about 69,000 African men were recruited into the war by the end of March 1916 with Nyanza Province providing the majority, 42,300.<sup>39</sup> In South Kavirondo District an estimated 10,000 Luo and Gusii men had been sent out on migrant labour by 1917.<sup>40</sup> As Lonsdale noted, between January and April 1917 alone 9,000 more men from South Kavirondo were drafted.<sup>41</sup> George Ndege in his thesis entitled 'Disease and Socio-Economic Change' remarked that South Kavirondo District provided more recruits than the populous districts of North and Central Kavirondo. He rightly noted that the district during the initial years of the war was the epicentre of the war. He observed that the people of South Kavirondo had to be recruited to guard the

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<sup>37</sup> Interviews With: Risanael Nyakado.

<sup>38</sup> Interviews With: Daniel Ojjo.

<sup>39</sup> Maxon, R. M. *Struggle for Kenya*, p. 98.

<sup>40</sup> KNA, Northcote, G. A. S. 'History of South Kavirondo District', cited in Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p.151.

<sup>41</sup> Lonsdale, J. M. 'A Political History of Nyanza', p. 216, cited in Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 151.

district borders against any possible German invasion.<sup>42</sup> As this chapter demonstrates, the recruitment of the large numbers of men from South Nyanza into the war drained the area of its manpower. Agricultural production suffered most. Nyanza Province's Annual Report for 1917-1918 noted that agricultural efforts during the year were greatly hampered by the withdrawal of large numbers of men for the Carrier Corps.<sup>43</sup> The First World War had also seriously interfered with trade in the area. The people of South Nyanza withheld large stocks of maize and sesame as the supply had exceeded the demand owing to exports from coastal ports being prohibited and also to a consequent fall in prices.<sup>44</sup> For instance, the export bookings in 1913-1914 amounted to 18,023 tons, while in 1915, the figures had dropped to 11,197, a decrease of 6,826 tons.<sup>45</sup>

In South Nyanza, trade was negatively affected by the war. The people of South Nyanza had to pay high prices for everything they bought and in most cases they obtained low prices for what they sold. The people of South Nyanza had less inducement to produce and less power of consumption than they had before the war.<sup>46</sup> According to the South Kavirondo District Annual Report for 1913-1923, trade had been much upset and restricted during the war. Trading centres in the area suffered from lack of business and the virtual

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<sup>42</sup> Ndege, G. O. 'Disease and Socio-Economic Change: The Politics of Colonial Health Care in Western Kenya, 1895-1939,' Ph.D. Dissertation, West Virginia University, 1996, p.173.

<sup>43</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1917-1918, p. 19.

<sup>44</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, PC/NZA, 1915, p. 34.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p. 34

<sup>46</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/I/2, Annual Report, 31-3-1917, p. 206.

closing of all markets for sim-sim had extremely bad effects on South Nyanza.<sup>47</sup> Table 4: 4 shows a list of commodities produced and sold in the district in 1917.

**TABLE 4: 4**

**COMMODITIES PRODUCED AND SOLD IN SOUTH KAVIRONDO DISTRICT DURING 1917**

<b>Produce</b>	<b>Average Price</b>		
Hides	Rs	15/-	Per Frasila
Sim-sim	"	3/-	" Load
Maize	"	1/-	" "
Mtama	"	/75	" "
Wimbi (flour)	"	1/-	" "
Groundnuts	"	3/50	" "
Beans (mixed)	"	1/-	" "
English Potatoes	"	2/-	" "
Wheat	"	2/-	" "
Onions	"	12/-	" "
Chillies	"	20/-	Per Frasila
Ghee	"	18/-	" "

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, Annual Report, 31-3-1917, p. 204.

The table above shows the price drop of sim-sim compared to the period before the war; see the previous chapter, Table 3: 4 (page 199).

<sup>47</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/I/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 10-4-1915, p. 272.



Multifarious natural calamities also struck the area in close succession after the war. During 1918 and 1919, South Nyanza suffered from drought. Rains failed over most of the Protectorate, which resulted in famine in many districts.<sup>48</sup> In South Nyanza, the colonial administration had provided five hundred tons of maize as a relief food to the Luo lakeshore locations, which had been adversely affected by famine.<sup>49</sup> The famine of 1918 and 1919 compounded the hardships caused by the First World War. Ndege claims that the Luo referred to this famine as ke-kanga.<sup>50</sup> As this study of South Nyanza shows, this famine was known by different names in the Luo districts of South and Central Kavirondo. In South Kavirondo (South Nyanza), the famine came to be known locally as ke-ongere<sup>51</sup> (a name derived from the relief yellow maize). In Central Kavirondo District, it was locally known as ke-kanga, or the famine of the “tribal police”.<sup>52</sup> In addition to these woes, in the latter part of 1918, an influenza epidemic began to sweep through the district and the Protectorate in general.<sup>53</sup> The epidemic claimed five thousand lives in the district.<sup>54</sup> The District Commissioner W. F. G. Campbell noted:

Unfortunately, as often so happens, famine and pestilence followed hard on the heels of war. In the months of November and December the influenza epidemics swept

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<sup>48</sup> Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, p. 72.

<sup>49</sup> KNA, R. Weeks, SK AR 1919-1920, cited in Butterman, J. M. ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’, p. 152.

<sup>50</sup> Ndege, G. O. ‘Disease and Socio-Economic Change’, p.201.

<sup>51</sup> Butterman, J. M. ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’, p. 126.

<sup>52</sup> Hay, J. M. ‘Economic Change in Luoland’, p. 126; Odinga, O. Not Yet Uhuru, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, p. 72; KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, Annual Report, 31-5-1919, p. 144.

<sup>54</sup> KNA, ‘History of South Kavirondo District, KSI/27, cited in Butterman, J. M. ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’, p. 152; Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, p. 72.

through the reserve, disorganising everything and causing the death of some 500 people. Famine, in a more or less acute form, was present in the Kavirondo locations throughout the year. At the end of 1918, the scarcity became serious in some parts.<sup>55</sup>

In his assessment of the impact of famine on the people of South Nyanza, the District Commissioner admitted:

Although I cannot say that any deaths were directly due to starvation, many were undoubtedly indirectly caused by the food shortage, viz persons who had been weakened thereby and consequently were unable to resist when attacked by disease. As a result of all this, the Kavirondo have not been called upon to do much in the way of road making etc as they were not in a position to perform much work. Moreover, owing to the drought, experiments in planting of new crops and trees were out of the question.<sup>56</sup>

Trade was seriously affected by the famine. The people of South Nyanza bartered large numbers of livestock with the Abagusii for grain. This, was observed by the South Kavirondo District Commissioner:

The other effect of famine was that trade came to a standstill during the year, and in consequence about 75% of the Indian shops had to close down temporarily. The

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<sup>55</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, Annual Report, 31-5-1919, p. 144.

<sup>56</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-5-1919, p. 145.

famine was brought about by the failure of rains. The Luo had to barter cattle for grain with the Abagusii whose areas appear not to have suffered from much drought. It is not easy to make an estimate of the number of cattle thus disposed of, but I should think that the Kavirondo locations that suffered most of the famine, such as Karachuonyo, have parted with 60% of their stock in this way.<sup>57</sup>

As Maxon established in his study of Abagusii, the region adjacent to the Luo of South Nyanza, the Gusii highlands, were one of the African areas least hard hit by the famine and influenza. The Abagusii, Maxon remarked, benefited somewhat economically during this period as they sold grain to the Luo of South Nyanza who were more sorely affected by the famine. However, he observed that the influenza epidemic did cause a considerable number of deaths in the highlands.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to the ravages of famine, the people of South Nyanza lost large herds of cattle from the outbreak of Bovine Pleuro-pneumonia, anthrax and rinderpest that necessitated the quarantine of the district. The District Annual Report for 1920 noted that the price of cattle then dropped by 60% from that of the previous year and there were no buyers.<sup>59</sup> The name for cattle diseases such as rinderpest and pleuro-pneumonia varied slightly in Luoland according to the part of the district, but all the following were understood in most Luo locations:

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<sup>57</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/I/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-5-1919, p. 147.

<sup>58</sup> Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, p. 72.

<sup>59</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District, DC/KSI/3/2, 1920, p. 249: Histories and Customs of Kisii and Luo between 1911-1924.

NYABOLA

(Gem, Seme, Sakwa, Ugenya, etc.)

AJUR

(Kano, Nyakach, Kajulu, South Nyanza)

NYAM DHOHO

or

OBO

(Gem, Seme, etc.)

NDINYA

or

OSOYI

(Kano, Nyakach, South Nyanza)

ACHNIYA - A wasting disease; Tuberculosis

ABACH - Quarterevil

AGWINGA - East Coast Fever

YAMO - Used for anthrax, but can refer to disease especially of man

OCHUYA - Is not a disease, but a leech that attacks cattle

ACHANY - Attacks the hoof of cattle in the hot season

**Source:** KNA, Central Kavirondo District: Political Records; Historical and Customs,

DC/CN/3/1, 1925, p. 139.

The economic difficulties to which households in South Nyanza were subjected during the First World War did not come to an end when the war stopped. The first years of the 1920s were marked by economic hardship for Africans, which was triggered off by the depression that affected the people of South Nyanza and the rest of the country from 1919 through the greater part of 1922. Since the people of South Nyanza were involved in agricultural production for both consumption and sale, they were hard hit by the slump in prices of most commodities. Maxon in an article 'The Years of Revolutionary Advances' noted that the collapse of prices ensured that production for internal and external markets received very low returns.<sup>60</sup> Butterman in her assessment of the effect of the depression on the local economy noted that the cost of imports rose. She further observed that the few consumer goods, which had been incorporated into the local economy doubled and quadrupled in price. For instance, a hoe costing Rs. 1/50 in 1914 cost Rs. 4/75 in 1918 while a machete (panga) for cutting bush, went up from Rs.1/25 to Rs. 3/-.<sup>61</sup> The South Kavirondo District Annual Report for 1922 tried valiantly to talk up the situation by claiming:<sup>62</sup>

The trade flourished in the district during the year. Export of principal products such as groundnuts and sim-sim had very largely increased. Groundnuts production had increased by over fifteen times and sim-sim four times. Groundnuts fetched a half the price in 1923 and sim-sim about a third less than in 1919-1920. Ghee showed a decrease because the price dropped by 50%. Whereas in 1919-1920, 809 tons of

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<sup>60</sup> Maxon, R. M. 'The Year of Revolutionary Advances, 1920-1929', in Ochieng', W. R. (ed.), A Modern History of Kenya, p. 79.

<sup>61</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 153.

<sup>62</sup> KNA, Hemmant, E. G. South Kavirondo, AG 1918-1919.

produce were valued at 1,443,494/- in 1923, 3,463 tons were only valued at 1, 188, 518/-.<sup>63</sup>

In his assessment of the effects of the depression in the district, the District Commissioner M. R. R. Vidal remarked in 1921:

The district had been hit hard by the general depression, and at the end of the year was almost at a standstill. The Indian traders had been getting nearer and nearer to total insolvency and in real (sic) cases found difficulty in paying their rents and license fees. The natives grew large quantities of sim-sim for which they could only find a very limited market at very low prices. For imports, there was little demand, chiefly owing to the enormous prices asked by the traders, and the small surplus of money after payment of a Rs. 8/- tax. The stock trade was fair in the early part of the year until movement of cattle was prohibited.<sup>64</sup>

In another related report in 1922 on the economic slump in Nyanza Province, the Provincial Commissioner, D. R. Slade, observed:

It was another year of extreme depression that affected the spending capacity of the people to a low level. The sale of trade goods had been less than the previous year, a

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<sup>63</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-12-1922, p. 22.

<sup>64</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 13-5-1921, p. 22.

large number of local people reverting to their former custom of wearing skins owing to their refusal to pay prices above those obtaining before the war.<sup>65</sup>

The effects of the economic slump (the depression) on South Nyanza and Nyanza more widely, coupled with the demands of the Young Kavirondo Association (see later) caused taxes to be reduced from Shs. 16/- to Shs. 12/-. The good harvest in 1922 slightly improved the purchasing power of the people of Nyanza Province.<sup>66</sup> In South Nyanza, the District Annual Report for 1922 also noted that the trade had shown some signs of improving during the year. The report observed that the Indian traders were on the way to financial recovery from the effects of the depression.<sup>67</sup>

Table 4: 5 on the next page shows the comparative statement of exports from the South Kavirondo District into Kisumu during the years 1919-1920 and 1923.

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<sup>65</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA/1/7,1922, p. 21.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p. 21

<sup>67</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report 31-12-1922, p. 51.

**TABLE 4: 5**

**EXPORTS FROM SOUTH KAVIRONDO DISTRICT, 1919 – 1920, 1923**

Article	1919-1920		1923	
	Quantity cwts	Value Shs	Quantity cwts	Value Shs
Beans	83¼	794	493	2,608
Flour Maize	-	-	377	2,386
Ghee	1,137¼	125,048	728	33,795
Fish Dried	-	-	2	45
Garlic	-	-	34	1,756
Groundnuts	948¼	29,264	15,575	241,540
Goat Skins	776	261,104	440	53,816
Hides	5,824½	612,202	4,709	206,466
Lime	-	-	7,130	70,430
Moong	809¼	27,524	1,974	25,484
Maize	434¼	2,972	16,126	62,225
Onions	¾	24	172	4,286
Sim-sim	5,194	157,880	19,268	362,496
Potatoes	15	200	2	26
Tusks Ivory	2½	3,940	24	28,670
Wheat	308¾	9,706	363	6,236
Wimbi	398½	5,436	1,854	7,973
Fruit Fresh	-	-	-	162
Mtama	221	2,082	6	19
Sheep Skins	3	450	-	-
Buffalo hides	18	3,230	-	-
Cotton seeds	1	4	-	-
Millet	3	48	-	-
Eggs No.	23,500	1,466	90,780	4,403
Goats alive	-	-	148	1,324
Sheep	-	-	48	344
Fowls	170	120	-	-
Timber Prices	-	-	26	28
Total	16,179¼	1,443,494	69,277	1,118,518

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913 – 1923, Annual Report, 31-12-1922, p. 26.



From the table above, it can be seen how the commodity prices were higher in 1923 compared to 1919-1920 during the depth of the depression.

The economic difficulties brought about by the slump in trade and the failure of the long rains, meant that the people of South Nyanza could not meet their tax obligations. The District Commissioner M. R. R. Vidal reported:

Owing to the slump in trade, partial failure of the long rains in the lake areas, lack of demand for labour until September, and the district being closed throughout the year for export of cattle, the natives have experienced the most unenviable time. The people of South Nyanza were not able to pay the whole amount of Hut and Poll Tax by December 31<sup>st</sup>, Florins 666,728/- only being collected out of an estimated of Florins 810,000/-.<sup>68</sup>

The famine led to a more or less constant migration from the lakeshores to the higher and more fertile areas.<sup>69</sup> The lakeshores were and still are prone to droughts and famines, unlike the higher grounds.

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<sup>68</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District, DC/KSI/3/2, 1929 Report, p. 219: Histories and Customs of Kisii and Luo between 1911 and 1924.

<sup>69</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-5-1920, p. 7.

## **Changes in Agricultural Production**

The section below turns to examine changes in agricultural production during the period under review. As this study shows, up to the 1920s, the households in South Nyanza and Nyanza more widely were still experimenting with the new crops and agricultural implements. Studies of Nyanza Province such as those by Fearn, Hay and Butterman demonstrate that up to 1930, cotton had not been established as a cash crop. They attribute this to low prices.<sup>70</sup> This study of South Nyanza shows that up to 1924, no agricultural official had been posted to the district. Non-agricultural experts on crop production were still instructing the households in South Nyanza. Evidence from this study demonstrates that a serious cotton campaign only started in South Nyanza in 1924. This study shows that up to 1925, households in South Nyanza were still relying on their pre-colonial commodities as their chief cash crops. This section focuses on the response of the people of South Nyanza to the crops introduced by the colonial administration. It examines why some crops were easily integrated into the agricultural cycle of the local economy while others were not. Three main crops are examined: cotton, groundnuts and hickory king maize.

### **Cotton**

Given the importance assigned by the administration to cotton, it is worth explaining why cotton production failed in South Nyanza and Nyanza Province more generally. As has

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<sup>70</sup> Fearn, H. *An African Economy*; Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'.

already been noted in the previous chapter, cotton was introduced into Nyanza Province in 1906 and 1907. The administration in Nyanza had introduced cotton into the province to empower the local population to generate cash to meet colonial demands in cash rather than in kind.<sup>71</sup> But up until the 1920s, cotton had not yet been established as a major cash crop. In most studies of cotton production in Nyanza such as those by Fearn, Hay Butterman Onduru and Ndege, the factors that are supposed to have contributed to cotton's failure as a cash crop were a succession of price falls, delay in payments, its labour intensive character and the fact that it was not a food crop.<sup>72</sup>

As has already been noted in chapter three, during and after the First World War, experimentation with cotton as a cash crop in South Nyanza was still in progress.<sup>73</sup> The Nyanza Province Annual Report for 1915 acknowledged that due to a drop of 100% in the prices of cotton offered in Nyanza Province, cultivation of cotton had ceased.<sup>74</sup> The same was true of South Nyanza as well. Table 4: 6, on the next page, shows a list of produce sold in the district two years later in which cotton does not feature.

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<sup>71</sup> Bennet, G. Kenya: A Political History; Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'.

<sup>72</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy; Hay J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'; Onduru, T. A. 'Some Aspects of Economic Change in Kano'; Ndege, P. O. 'Struggle for the Market'.

<sup>73</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 150.

<sup>74</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, PC/NZA, 1915, p. 30.

**TABLE 4: 6**

**COMMODITIES SOLD IN SOUTH KAVIRONDO DISTRICT DURING 1917**

<b>Produce</b>	<b>Average Price</b>		
Hides	Rs. 15/-	Per	Frasila
Sim-sim	Rs. 3/-	Per	Load
Maize	Rs. 1/-	"	"
Mtama	Rs. /75	"	"
Wimbi (flour)	Rs. 1/-	"	"
Groundnuts	Rs. 3/50	"	"
Beans	Rs. 1/-	"	"
English Potatoes	Rs. 2/-	"	"
Wheat	Rs. 2/-	"	"
Onions	Rs. 12/-	"	"
Chillies	Rs. 20/-	"	"
Ghee	Rs. 18/-	"	"

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI /1/2, Annual Report, 31-3-1917, p. 204.

Groundnuts were the only cash crop that fetched a high price for the people of South Nyanza. As can be observed in the table above, the main sources of income for the households in South Nyanza in 1917 were still livestock products, namely, hides and ghee.

From the 1920s, the administration in Nyanza Province, as indeed in South Nyanza, re-embarked on a cotton campaign. The 1920s were remarkable in promoting cotton growing in South Nyanza. The South Nyanza District Annual Report for 1922 noted that an African agricultural instructor had been principally occupied in instructing the people of Kanyada and Kochia locations how to grow cotton.<sup>75</sup> Before the 1920s, no agricultural instructor had been posted to the locations in South Nyanza to instruct people on cotton production. Non-experts in agricultural production such as chiefs, District Officers and District

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<sup>75</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-12-1922, p. 23.

Commissioners gave instruction. A year later, nevertheless, the households in South Nyanza had yet to incorporate cotton production into their agricultural cycle as a cash crop. This is evident in Table 4: 5 (page 264) in which cotton still does not feature as a cash crop. Instead, groundnuts were still performing much better as a cash crop. Others were traditional produce such as sim-sim, hides and skins.

Despite the low output of cotton as a cash crop, the colonial administration still continued with the cotton campaign for the duration of the 1920s. In 1924, an Agricultural Instructor, Mr N. D. Sprangar, was posted to the district for the first time. He was mainly occupied with instruction on cotton cultivation, but also carried out work with other economic products in the district.<sup>76</sup> The District Commissioner, D.R. Crampton, in his Annual Report for 1924 observed the following of the cotton campaign:

I would like here to remark in my opinion it would be bad policy to try and push cotton to such an extent to be detrimental to other proved economic products such as groundnuts and sim-sim. There is room for the development of all these products but I should be sorry to see too great an insistence on cotton growing if it is to be at the expense of other crops.<sup>77</sup>

Table 4: 7 below, shows the exports from the Lake Ports in South Kavirondo District in 1925.

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<sup>76</sup>KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/3, 31-12-1924, p. 20.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

**TABLE 4: 7**

**EXPORTS FROM SOUTH KAVIRONDO DISTRICT, 1925**

<b>Articles</b>	<b>Quantity Cwts</b>	<b>Amount Shs.</b>
Beans	1,378	9,646
Flour Maize	1,167	12,149
Ghee	2,259	103,488
Cotton seeds	206	1,330
Gold Ibs.	3	8,000
Coffee	6	600
Garlic	47	4,020
Groundnuts	8,792	175,840
Goat skins	394	36,360
Dry fish	27	810
Hides	3,394	169,700
Lime	6,956	27,674
Moong	1,594	23,910
Maize	1,431	5,924
Sim-sim	28,650	573,000
Tusks of Ivory	29	39,150
Wheat	24	332
Wheat flour	66	1,650
Wimbi	3,589	13,356
Fresh fruit	17	204
Mtama	7	28
Seed cotton	528	14,586
Eggs No.	500	20
Goat and sheep alive	220	2,200
Fowls alive	1,000	625
Potatoes	3	15
Tobacco	13	200
Rhino horns Ibs.	40	640
<b>Total</b>	<b>60,587</b>	<b>1,220,345</b>

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report in Nyanza Province, Annual Report, PC/NZA, 1925, P. 32.

It is again evident from the table that up to 1925, cotton had not been established as the major cash crop as had been intended by the colonial administration. The households in South Nyanza still relied on their pre-colonial commodities such as hides, sim-sim and ghee as the chief cash products. But as can be seen in the table, there were signs of increased cotton production compared to previous years. It can also be seen in the table that groundnuts remained the leading cash crop.

The first sustained cotton campaign in South Nyanza was mounted in 1924. In a letter from the District Agricultural Instructor, Mr. N.D. Sprangar, to the Senior Agricultural Supervisor, Nyanza Province, Mr. Sprangar stressed that the year 1924 was the first time the people of South Nyanza had been encouraged to grow cotton on any scale.<sup>78</sup> In the letter, he observes that a few households had grown a little cotton previously, but as there were no buyers in the reserves at the time, they were unable to dispose of their small crop with the result that production ceased. Fearn, Hay and Butterman concur on this point but ignore other factors that contributed to neglect of cotton production in the area which was again noted in Sprangar's letter:

Factors that discouraged people from cultivating cotton included drought and unwillingness of the people to produce a crop, which could not be utilized as food by them.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/1/3, 7-1-1925, p. 1.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p. 1; Fearn, H., An African Economy; Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Buttermen J. M. 'Luo Social Change in Formation'.

The cotton campaign that was undertaken in 1924 as explained by the Agricultural Instructor, Mr. Sprangar, bore fruits, which were reflected in increased cotton production in 1925. This can be discerned in table 4: 7 (page 270) in which earnings from cottonseeds totalled Shs. 1,330, while earnings from seed cotton totalled Shs. 14,586. This was the highest amount the district had earned from cotton production since it was first introduced.

Oral testimony concurred that cotton cultivation was not popular in South Nyanza because of the low prices it fetched, and because people were being coerced to cultivate it.<sup>80</sup> They also confirm that cotton was not popular because it was not edible. In addition, Hay noted that the absence of males (due to migrant wage labour) from Nyanza farms made it difficult to grow cotton, or to improve agricultural production.<sup>81</sup>

As this study of South Nyanza shows, one self-inflicted problem contributing to the failure of cotton cultivation was offered in 1925 by the District Commissioner, D.R. Crampton. As he remarked:

The unprofitableness of cotton as a native crop was solely due to poor cultivation. The natives scratches the surface, sows the seed broadcasting and neglects to thin out the plants or weed, and often fail to pick the crop at the right time. The average

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<sup>80</sup> Interviews with: Timothy Toro, Naman Singa, Ibrahim Ondiek.

<sup>81</sup> Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya, p. 78.



production per acre does not exceed 150 to 200 pounds, whereas he should be able to obtain 400 to 500 pounds to the acre.<sup>82</sup>

The same report observed that sim-sim was the most valuable crop grown by the people of South Nyanza for export. Export figures from the Gulf Ports in South Kavirondo District show that sim-sim comprised nearly a half the value of the total exports. Table 4: 5 and Table 4: 7 reveal sim-sim as the leading cash crop. The report explained this in simple terms of return on labour invested as it noted:

Cotton production had not been successful as had been hoped. It had received a severe set back owing to sudden fall in prices at the end of the year, and people in some areas say they will not grow any further crops (cotton) as sim-sim pays them better.<sup>83</sup>

The same pattern persisted until the end of the 1920s.<sup>84</sup>

## **Groundnuts**

The second cash crop that the colonial administration in South Nyanza urged the people to cultivate was groundnuts. It is instructive to examine how the people of South Nyanza

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<sup>82</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, in Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA, 1925, p. 51.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. p. 51.

<sup>84</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1925, p. 5.

responded to its production. Groundnuts were introduced as a cash crop into South Nyanza in 1908.<sup>85</sup> As noted earlier, the households in South Nyanza were at first reluctant to integrate groundnuts into their agricultural cycle because they thought that it caused venereal disease.<sup>86</sup> The people of South Nyanza later warmed more to this crop. One interviewee recalled that unlike cotton, groundnut was edible and people earned a good income from it.<sup>87</sup> During the First World War, groundnut production increased. According to South Kavirondo District Annual Report for 1917, groundnuts were the leading cash earner for the people of South Nyanza, fetching Rs. 3/50 per load, followed by sim-sim at Rs. 3/-.<sup>88</sup> Table 4: 4 (page 256) shows groundnuts as one of the leading cash crops sold in the district. At this point however, the main sources of income for the people of South Nyanza as shown in the table were still livestock products, namely, hides and ghee. The Nyanza Province Annual Report for 1917 admitted that groundnuts were still grown only on a small scale in South Kavirondo District, and that the households took little interest in cultivating it.<sup>89</sup> By 1920, although groundnut was fetching good prices, it had not yet been fully established as a cash and food crop in South Nyanza. It seems evident that it was because of its association with venereal disease.

This was soon to change. Groundnut production between the years 1920 and 1923 increased almost ten times. In 1920, the value of groundnuts exported from the district

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<sup>85</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report DC/KSI/1/1, 5<sup>th</sup> October 1908, p. 6, Dobbs, C. M. South Kavirondo AG, December, 1908.

<sup>86</sup> Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 149.

<sup>87</sup> Interviews with: Ibrahim Ondiek, Naftali Arua.

<sup>88</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, Annual Report 31-3-1917, p. 204.

<sup>89</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1917-1918, p. 19.

stood at Shs. 29,264, while in 1923 it fetched Shs. 241,540, coming second to sim-sim, which was still the leading cash earner for the people of South Nyanza. Table 4: 5 (page 264) presents the comparative statement of exportation from South Nyanza District into Kisumu during the year 1919-1920 and 1923.

The 1925 District Annual Report showed a slight decline of groundnuts' export value, which stood at Shs. 175,840, less than the figure for 1923, but still groundnuts remained the second leading cash crop; see Table 4: 7 (page 270), showing exports from the Lake Ports in South Kavirondo District. Up to 1930, groundnuts were becoming steadily more popular as the principal cash crop in South Nyanza. It was second to sim-sim by the 1920s.

### **Hickory King Maize**

Hickory King Maize (a variety of flat white dent maize) was the other cash/food crop introduced into South Nyanza and Nyanza more generally by the colonial administration. As Hay has noted in her study of Kowe, white maize, in contrast to cotton, was introduced through a wide variety of channels, some official but most indigenous. She observes that the crop spread gradually but steadily after its introduction around 1917.<sup>90</sup> Hay's observation thus explains the absence of clear colonial documentation on when white maize was introduced into South Nyanza and Nyanza as a whole. A glance at the studies of Nyanza does not shed much light on when white maize was first introduced into Nyanza Province. In a table of agricultural exports from various stations and Lake Ports in the

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<sup>90</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 141.

Nyanza Province, Fearn lists maize as one of the exports in 1909.<sup>91</sup> Butterman does not indicate when white maize was introduced into Nyanza Province.<sup>92</sup> South Nyanza evidence also does not tell us the specific date when white maize was introduced. By 1909, it was however one of the exports from South Nyanza. Table 4: 8, on the next page, lists maize as one of the exports from the district in 1908-1912.

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<sup>91</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy, p.79.

<sup>92</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'.

**TABLE 4: 8**

**EXPORTS FROM SOUTH KAVIRONDO DISTRICT DURING 1908 – 1912**

<b>Nature of Produce</b>	<b>Karungu In 6 months (tons)</b>	<b>Homa-Bay In 5½ months (tons)</b>
Hides	35	18
Calf skins	10½	
Goat skins	10½	
Sheep skins	2	
Kid skins	½	
Sim-sim	21½	48
Groundnuts	¾	½
Chiroko	44½	25½
Maize	-	2½
Mtama	½	11½
Wimbi	4½	11
Wimbi flour	1¾	-
Ghee	9½	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>119</b>

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 1908-1912, p. 3.

After white maize was introduced into South Nyanza, production appeared to have increased. Table 4: 9, on the next page, shows maize as one of the export crops at the Homa-Bay and Karungu Ports.

**TABLE 4: 9**

**EXPORTS FROM SOUTH KAVIRONDO DISTRICT VIA HOMA BAY AND  
KARUNGU PORTS DURING 1910 – 1912**

Item	1911 – 1912			1910 - 1911		
	Tons	Ibs.	Rupees	Tons	Ibs.	Rupees
Hides and Calf skins	90	246	79,828	76	1,259	67,316
Goat skins	-	-	26,957	-	-	21,111
Sheep skins	-	-	894	-	-	1,309
Sim-sim	912	1,429	135,722	479	2,217	117,936
Groundnuts	125	2,278	19,490	72	1,403	10,824
Maize	262	928	10,036	18	222	480
Mtama	35	325	785	-	-	-
Wimbi	135	1,584	4,356	69	2,131	5,145
Chiroko	15	125	1,147	115	379	5,333
Kunde (beans)	7	590	399	29	1,226	1,590
Wheat	5	82	538	6	1,966	840
Ghee	50	1,282	26,922	32	1,526	16,187
Bajree	1	1,379	97	-	2,049	48
Tobacco		144	24		110	12
Total	1,641	1,432	307,375	902	14,488	248,131

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1912, in Nyanza Province Annual Report, 31-3-1912, p. 58.

By 1914, maize was the third leading cash/food crop in South Nyanza after sim-sim and groundnuts.<sup>93</sup> Table 4: 10 below provides a statement of exports from Kendu-Bay from April 1913 to March 1914.

**TABLE 4: 10**

**EXPORTS FROM KENDU BAY IN SOUTH KAVIRONDO DISTRICT DURING  
1913 – 1914**

Articles	Quantity	Value	
		Rs	Cts.
Hides	Ibs 68,925	43,462	41
Goat skin	" 17,969	10,213	50
Sheep skins	" 5,001	1,332	50
Wimbi	" 98,035	3,249	00
Groundnuts	" 166,897	11,726	18
Sim-sim	" 315,947	28,508	18
Chiroko	" 1,550	76	63
Wheat	" 1,383	73	00
Linseed	" 2,539	129	30
Maize	" 763,752	11,611	25
Beans	" 20,820	566	66
Cotton	" 47	80	00
Total	" 1,457,857	110,978	84

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 14-4-1914, p. 31.

<sup>93</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 14-4-1914, p. 31.

Maize production continued during the First World War although it did not fetch good prices. As Table 4: 4, (page 256) shows maize was being sold at Rs. 1/- per load, less than other commodities such as sim-sim and groundnuts.<sup>94</sup> The District Annual Report for 1922 noted that the production of sim-sim, groundnuts, maize and beans had all grown.<sup>95</sup> Within the category of agricultural produce, maize was ranked the third highest commodity in value, fetching Shs. 64,611 after sim-sim, which fetched Shs. 362,496 and groundnuts Shs. 241,540. Table 4: 5 (page 264) provides a comparative statement of exportation from South Kavirondo district into Kisumu during the years 1919-1920 and 1923.

Through the early 1920s, the production of maize kept fluctuating. Sim-sim meanwhile remained the leading cash crop in the area. The District Annual Report for 1925 indicated that the value of maize/maize flour exported from the district was Shs. 18,073, a decline to almost a quarter compared to 1923. However, it still maintained its position as the third cash earner in the district after sim-sim and groundnuts. See Table 4: 7 (page 270).

Clearly it is worth probing why maize was not a more popular crop, given its widespread cultivation elsewhere. According to one oral testimony:

Maize was unpopular because it was difficult to grind into flour unlike sorghum millet. When harvested, it was consumed into various forms. For instance, it could be

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<sup>94</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, Annual Report, 31-3-1917, p. 204.

<sup>95</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-12-1922, p. 51.



boiled, roasted on cob, used to prepare porridge, nyoyo (cooked beans mixed with maize) and kuon (stiff porridge). This meant that it could not last long, unlike sorghum millet.<sup>96</sup>

In South Nyanza, maize was unpopular particularly in areas along the lakeshore, which were (and still are) prone to drought. But was more popular and is still popular in the high grounds not prone to drought.<sup>97</sup>

In a related study on maize production in Tanzania, Iliffe has noted that in Southern Sukumaland, and many other regions, maize spread because its taste was preferred to sorghum millet, it produced higher yields, it was easier to store, and it was simpler to prepare (boiling green maize or boiling maize mixed with beans) for village women or men returning from work. One of its disadvantages, as Iliffe has noted, was that it was susceptible to drought.<sup>98</sup>

To sum up, cotton, groundnuts and maize production was still at an experimental stage by the 1920s. They had not been fully integrated into the agricultural cycle of the households in South Nyanza. Other crops noted in colonial reports were of European or Indian origin. They included wheat, chillies, onions, English potatoes, and rice.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Interviews with: Benson Mikingo.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with: Timothy Toro.

<sup>98</sup> Iliffe, J. A Modern History of Tanganyika, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 313-314.

<sup>99</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI1/1/2, Annual Report, 31-3-1917, p. 205.

The colonial administration also introduced new agricultural implements into South Nyanza at the same time as they introduced cash crops. The administration took cognisance of the ineffective agricultural implements that were in use in South Nyanza and Nyanza more generally. The colonial administration realised that in order to enhance agricultural production in South Nyanza, more effective agricultural implements were required. The section below turns to examine agricultural implements, which were introduced into South Nyanza during the period under review.

### **Changes in Technology**

Before colonisation of South Nyanza in 1903, the most common agricultural tool in the area was the wooden hoe, rahaya. As noted in chapter two, some cultivators in South Nyanza had been able to acquire iron hoes, nya-yimbo, which were manufactured in Samia and sold in Luoland by the Jo-Yimbo (people from Yimbo) who were the middlemen in the iron-hoe trade between the Luo and the Samia.<sup>100</sup> Since nya-yimbo was expensive, few households could afford them. More changes took place in agricultural technology during the first decade of colonial rule. As has already been noted in the previous chapter, the people of South Nyanza acquired iron “jembes” from Mwanza in German East Africa.

These iron “jembes”, together with the pre-colonial agricultural implements such as rahaya and nya-yimbo were used concurrently. Hay believes that by the end of the First World

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<sup>100</sup> Johnson, H. The Uganda Protectorate, p. 790; Onduru, T. A. ‘Some Aspects of Economic Change’, p. 36.

War, iron hoe blades called opanga (English hoe), could be obtained from Indian shops.<sup>101</sup> Evidence from South Nyanza however shows English hoes were being sold in Indian shops before the First World War.

The introduction of machetes (beti) in South Nyanza by the colonial administration further enhanced agricultural production since they were utilised to clear virgin land. It is worth pointing out that they were as yet not wide spread yet in the area.

Ploughs were probably introduced into Nyanza as well as South Nyanza in the 1920s. Table 4: 11 shows sales of agricultural implements in Kisumu during the period 1927-1930. The implements were sold to the Kavirondo Districts.

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<sup>101</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 150.

**TABLE 4: 11**

**AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTS SOLD IN KISUMU DURING 1927 – 1930**

	<b>1927</b>	<b>1928</b>	<b>1929</b>	<b>1930</b>
Separators	67	56	70	22
Churns	41	40	13	1
Ploughs	104	103	209	275
Trek Chains	233	275	521	603
Yokes	110	137	142	229
Colonist Mills	82	133	108	65
Ploughs Shares	129	36	378	469
Mill Stones	3	31	-	2
Harrows	-	-	-	3

**Source:** KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1930, p. 66.

From the table above, it can be seen that a considerable increase of sales of agricultural implements such as ploughs, trek chains and yokes took place, and that from the late 1920s, the people of South Nyanza were increasingly integrating the new agricultural implements into their agricultural cycle. The new agricultural implements, particularly ploughs, were expensive and only a few wealthy individuals could afford them. One interviewee observed:

Ploughs were popular because they were very effective in turning soil. But they were expensive; those who bought them were well to do such as teachers, pastors, well-paid migrant wageworkers and successful farmers, cattle keepers and some well to do

businessmen. Chiefs were also among the first people to buy them. Here in Karachuonyo, Chief Orinda was the first person to have bought a plough.<sup>102</sup>

This oral evidence that Orinda was the first person to buy a plough in Karachuonyo is an indication of the existence of “straddlers” in South Nyanza by 1908 when Orinda was the chief of Karachuonyo.<sup>103</sup> This evidence concurs with Maxon’s finding that colonial capitalism had produced a class of accumulators whom he terms as “petite bourgeoisie”, or “straddlers”.<sup>104</sup> He points out that these came initially, as in Vihiga, from the ranks of those appointed chiefs by the colonial state who were the main beneficiaries in the first decade of colonial rule.

By the close of the 1920s, the people of South Nyanza had incorporated new agricultural implements into their agricultural cycle. The new iron hoes were gradually replacing the wooden one, rahaya, as well as nya-yimbo that used to break more often. The agricultural system of the people of South Nyanza was being transformed both in terms of crops cultivated and the implements that were in use.

## **Infrastructure**

A modern transport system is crucial in moving goods and people over longer distances faster than was possible previously. In any capitalist economy, an effective transport

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<sup>102</sup> Interviews With: Omondi Genga.

<sup>103</sup> Buttermann, J. M. ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’, pp.122-123.

<sup>104</sup> Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways, p. 49.

system is an important component. But this is an area that is least emphasised by historians. Once political institutions, markets and trading centres had been established in South Nyanza, the colonial administration embarked on the construction of roads and ports, which subsequently opened up the area to more intensive colonial domination. This enhanced the articulation of the economy of South Nyanza with colonial capitalism. The section below analyse infrastructure, namely, roads and ports (piers).

Lack of infrastructure in South Nyanza during the initial years of colonial rule obstructed South Nyanza's immediate integration into colonial capitalism. By 1908, as noted earlier, a few roads had been constructed which connected Kisii (the district headquarters) to Karungu, and a road linked Kisii to Kendu-Bay. At the same time piers had been constructed at Karungu, Homa-Bay and at Kendu-Bay.<sup>105</sup> In 1909, a road linking Kisii to Homa-Bay was constructed.<sup>106</sup> By 1921, South Nyanza still lacked a developed infrastructure, particularly roads linking various locations in the district. The District Annual Report for 1921 remarked that the district contained the most remote locations in Nyanza Province.<sup>107</sup>

The 1920s were marked by a spurt of road construction in the district. The 1924 South Kavirondo District Annual Report observed that during the year approximately 150 miles

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<sup>105</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 5<sup>th</sup> October 1908, p. 5; KNA, South Kavirondo District: Political Record Book, DC/KSI/3/5; South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 1908-12, p. 168.

<sup>106</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 1908-1912, 2-4-1909, p. 7.

<sup>107</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA/1/16, 1920-1921 Annual Reports, p. 3.

of motor-roads had been constructed in the various parts of the district that were also bridged and in many cases supplied with permanent iron culverts. The roads included:

Kisii to Karungu; Kisii to Kuja River in South Mugirango; Kisii to Kuja River in Nyaribari; Oyugis to Ranguwe; Mirogi to Homa-Bay; Asumbi to Ongoro's (via Marindi); Riana River (Karungu Road) to Kamagambo and Oyugis to Sondu River.

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/1/3, 31-12-1924, p. 20.

During the same year, 1924, the following tracks were converted into motor-roads, drained and bridged:

Kisii to Karungu, 60 miles; Kisii to South Mugirango, 24 miles (Chief Owino); Kisii to Kuja, 6 miles (Gelegele Road); Asumbi to Karungu Road, 10 miles (via Marindi); Rangwe to Oyugis, 13 miles; Homa-Bay to Mirigi, 15 miles; Chief Ofuo to Riana Road, 8 miles and Oyugis to Sondu River, 30 miles.

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District: Political Record Book, DC/KSI/3/5, 1923-1925, p. 1.

In 1925, the following roads were on the course of construction:

From Kuja River in Nyaribari, through Bassi and Majoge to South Mugirango; From Ranguwe to Chief Obonyo's Camp then to Homa-Bay Port; From Homa-Bay Port to Kasigunga and From Kanyidoto Camp TO Kuja River in Kadem.

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District: Political Record Book, DC/KSI/3/5, 1923-1925, pp. 1-2.

As Hopkins rightly noted, harbour improvements were closely related to railway construction. He asserts that after the colonial administration had constructed the railway, it became apparent that the railway was restricted to a small area on either side of the track. Large numbers of widely dispersed producers had not been brought into the export economy because of the cost of taking their crops to the railway station would still have been too high in relation to the price obtainable. He observed that road building was undertaken by the colonial government, which on the whole planned roads to feed the railway rather than to compete with them, though there was a growing rivalry between the two systems of transport after the Second World War.<sup>108</sup> Hopkins rightly points out that the introduction of motor car transport marked a second massive leap in infrastructural penetration in rural areas after the railway. He argues that road transport contributed to a reduction of freight rates. These reductions, as Hopkins points out, had two main effects. First, in substituting machinery for human power, modern transport encouraged a more efficient combination of factors of production by releasing scarce labour resources for other employment, by increasing mobility, and by spreading information about market

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<sup>108</sup> Hopkins, A. G, An Economic History of West Africa, Longman, London, 1973, pp. 195-196.



opportunities. Second, the fall in the cost of transport was an external economy which accelerated the expansion of the export sector by making production profitable over a wider area and for a large number of farmers, and which permitted the development of new resources.<sup>109</sup>

The above observations by Hopkins also applied to South Nyanza and Kenya more widely. Roads that were constructed in South Nyanza were directly or indirectly linked to the piers at Kendu-Bay, Homa-Bay and Karungu. Dhows and launches transported commodities from the piers to the railhead in Kisumu. As Maxon points out, the system of roads built in South Nyanza before World War 1 was hardly adequate to handle any large volume of exports, the only really satisfactory roads were those connecting Kisii with Kendu and Homa Bay, but these were not kept in any passible condition during the war. He notes that produce was carried to the lake ports by ox or carts, and from there it was sent to the railway terminus at Kisumu via the lake a long and expensive process. He points out that in 1918, forty-one carts, mostly owned by Asians and Arabs, provided transport in the district.<sup>110</sup> As Ominde rightly points out, it is only in the period after the Second World War that road communication came into prominence as a means for the long distance movement of people. He remarks that the evolving trunk connections by road have been greatly influenced by the pattern which the rail communications set.<sup>111</sup> There are no statistics for lorries that operated in the district during the period under consideration. But according to the South Kavirondo District Annual Report for 1944, a local man owned one

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<sup>109</sup> Hopkins A. An Economic History, p. 197.

<sup>110</sup> Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, p. 69.

<sup>111</sup> Ominde, S. H. Land and Population Movement, p. 23.

lorry. The lorry was used for transporting commodities. The report asserts that Indians owned a number of lorries for transporting goods.<sup>112</sup> As Butterman rightly observes in her study of Karachuonyo and Kanyamkago, the prerequisite for the successful transfer of surplus, once institutions and shops had been established, was the creation of material infrastructure.<sup>113</sup>

By the 1920s, South Nyanza had thus acquired a much better infrastructure than in the 1910s. The construction of roads and piers in South Nyanza enhanced mobility and the spread of information among the local population about market opportunities that existed in distant places. The District Commissioner for South Kavirondo, S. O. V. Hodge noted this in 1927:

As communication improved year by year, the Luo of South Nyanza came more and more into contact with other people especially those of Central Nyanza and a spirit of emulation was therefore growing up among them, as they did not wish to be left behind in the onward march of process of change.<sup>114</sup>

By the close of the 1920s, South Nyanza was better connected to other regions as a result of better transport network than previously. The District Commissioner, S. O. V. Hodge, noted: “as communication improved, the Luo of South Nyanza became connected to the

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<sup>112</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/6, 1944, P. 6.

<sup>113</sup> Butterman, J. M. ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’, p.128.

<sup>114</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, 31-12-1927, p. 2.

centres of development”.<sup>115</sup> This meant that South Nyanza was effectively integrated into colonial capitalism.

From the preceding section, it can be concluded that the construction of roads and piers in South Nyanza allowed the area to be more integrated into colonial capitalism towards the close of the 1920s. With more roads in place, South Nyanza was now connected to centres of development. This facilitated trade within and without the district.

### **Missionaries**

Missionaries reinforced the integration of South Nyanza into colonial capitalism in various ways. They played a key role in the promotion of modern agricultural production in the areas in which they established a presence. Agriculture was a primary factor in colonial capitalism. They were also involved in the promotion of Western education, which was also an important element in colonial capitalism. The section below examines missionary activities in South Nyanza during the period under review.

In the previous chapter, it was noted that two missionary bodies established a presence in South Nyanza. These were the Seventh-Day Adventists and the Roman Catholics (Mill Hill Fathers) in 1906 and 1911 respectively. During the 1920s, As Butterman shows, the colonial administration in South Nyanza adjusted to the passing of one generation to the

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid. pp. 1-2.

next, and allied itself with the “new men”, the mission converts who had come of age,<sup>116</sup> particularly the Seventh-Day Adventists whose policy placed a marked emphasis on agricultural production at the expense of migrant labour.<sup>117</sup> As this study of South Nyanza shows, the 1920s were marked by more progressive missionaries operating in South Nyanza than those who had pursued their vocation during the first decade of colonial rule. The 1924 District Annual Report remarked:

The Victorian type of missionary, who considered it was not part of his high vocation to teach the natives anything but doctrinal theology is nearly extinct. His modern prototype must be placed in a totally different category. He is an educational instructor, physical trainer, psychologist and sportsman, as well as a theologian.<sup>118</sup>

As this report indicates, the missionaries who were operating in the area from the 1920s provided more effective education than their predecessors who had been more concerned with theological matters. This implies that they were more effective in promoting the process of change in the area. This conclusion is at variance with Maxon’s findings in his study of the Abagusii. He remarked that one of the factors that explained the poor educational standard attained by the middle of the 1930s could be found in the attitudes and performance of the missions themselves. Neither the Catholic nor the Seventh-Day

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<sup>116</sup> Butterman, J. M. ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’, p. 183.

<sup>117</sup> KNA, A. A. Carscallen, “History of S.D.A. Mission” Political Record Book, KSI/27.

<sup>118</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1924, PC/NZA/1/19, P. 39.

Adventists placed an emphasis on expanding academic education, noted Maxon. Far more important was the need to push evangelisation.<sup>119</sup>

The spread of Christianity and Western education in South Nyanza had a broad impact on the people of South Nyanza. For instance, the spread of Christianity contributed to the decrease in witchcraft accusations and the older superstitions.<sup>120</sup> Up to the 1920s, Western education was provided only by the missionaries in South Nyanza. The colonial government had yet to establish a school in the area. The education as taught by the missionaries encouraged people who had acquired it to seek employment as clerks, teachers, agricultural instructors or pastors, and to despise manual labour.<sup>121</sup>

The mission converts were inclined to consider themselves a class apart and perceived themselves to be entitled to different treatment and also to a certain extent to be outside the authority of “native” law and customs.<sup>122</sup> This elitist perception on the part of the mission converts developed because they had acquired Western culture, for instance, reading, writing, Christianity, or a Western mode of dressing, modern houses and other attributes, which made them look different from those who had not acquired them.

The establishment of a number of “out schools” which were sometimes called “Bush Schools” by both the Roman Catholic and the Seventh-Day Adventist missions in South

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<sup>119</sup> Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, p.110.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. p. 39.

<sup>121</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1925, PC/NZA, p. 40.

<sup>122</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1924, PC/NZA/1/9, p. 39.

Nyanza led to the segregation of the mission converts from non converts.<sup>123</sup> The missions created around these schools came to be known as mission villages, where mission converts gathered, built their houses, cultivated their farms and herded their cattle. The aim of congregating was partly a desire to live in a Christian community, but was also an endeavour to escape from “tribal” authority. This was illustrated by pretensions by some mission converts that government orders conveyed through officials such as headmen were to be passed to them personally through their teachers.<sup>124</sup> Another possible explanation, according to oral testimony, for why the mission converts established their own mission villages was that they saw themselves as a special group, and therefore did not want to interact with non-Christians (jopiny) whom they perceived as sinners.<sup>125</sup>

The immediate effect of the establishment of these “out schools”, which were surrounded by the mission villages, was that as they expanded, they encroached on the land and rights of adjacent people. This led a number of elders who objected to mission villages encroachment on their land to reject the construction of schools near their homes, unless on a vacant piece of land.<sup>126</sup> The expansion of the mission villages created a rift between the Christians and non-Christians (jopiny) over land issues.

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<sup>123</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1924-1932, DC/KSI/1/3, 31-12-1928, p. 19.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. p. 19

<sup>125</sup> Naman Singa.

<sup>126</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1924-1932, DC/KSI/1/3, 31-12-1928, p. 10.

As suggested earlier, the other immediate impact of Western education the Seventh-Day Adventists offered was that the products, the mission “boys”, were becoming independent of “tribal” authority. The District Annual Report for 1921 noted:

The Seventh-Day Adventists mission “boys” appeared inclined to impose on new comers in an endeavour to get support for an attitude of independence of tribal authority.<sup>127</sup>

It is also significant to point out the critical role missionaries played in the promotion of agricultural production in the areas where they established a presence in South Nyanza. As has already been noted in chapter three, the Seventh-Day Adventist mission, which was the dominant church in South Nyanza, emphasised agricultural production. The mission encouraged their converts to be engaged in agricultural production rather than engaging in migrant wage labour.<sup>128</sup> As has already been noted in chapter two, during the pre-colonial period, women handled much of the agricultural work. The establishment of the presence of missionaries changed this practice. As Hay has rightly remarked in her study of Kowe, with the encouragement of the Anglican Church, many men began to share agricultural activities, which had previously been considered women’s work.<sup>129</sup> As this research demonstrates, the same was also true of the Seventh-Day Adventist converts in South Nyanza.

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<sup>127</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-5-1921, p. 13.

<sup>128</sup> KNA, Pastor A. A. Carscallen, ‘History of the S.D.A. Mission’, Political Record Book, Ksi/27.

<sup>129</sup> Hay, J. M. ‘Economic Change in Luoland’, p. 127.

At the same time, the Seventh-Day Adventist Missionaries, as has already been noted in chapter three, gave prominence to agricultural production in their curriculum. Their pupils were mainly taught scripture, reading, writing, arithmetic and agriculture. This meant that pupils who graduated from such schools served as agricultural instructors in the colonial administration in addition to providing other services such as clerks, teachers and chiefs. This went a long way in improving agricultural production in South Nyanza.

By 1930, four mission groups were operating in the district. They included: the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Roman Catholic, the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) and the Nomia Luo Mission (“the Luo Mission that was given to me”). The last two were late entrants in the district.

In sum, the presence of an increased number of missionaries in the district enhanced agrarian change in South Nyanza. In addition to evangelisation, which was their calling, they were also engaged in promoting modern methods of crop production and Western education, which supplemented government efforts. All these enhanced the incorporation of South Nyanza into colonial capitalism.

### **Trade and Marketing**

In order to understand the process through which the economy of South Nyanza was integrated into colonial capitalism during the initial decades of colonial rule, an analysis of



the role that Indian merchants played is important. In an attempt to promote commodity production in South Nyanza and Nyanza as a whole, the pre-colonial economy of South Nyanza had to be restructured. This restructuring of the pre-colonial economy was marked by the penetration of capitalist forces into South Nyanza, largely in the shape of Indian traders. The colonial administration encouraged Asian/Indian traders to establish shops at the trading centres in South Nyanza to foster commodity trade. The section below examines trade and marketing during the period under review.

Asian traders during the first decade of colonial rule had accompanied colonial officials on their tax-collecting rounds, both to sell manufactured goods, and to buy agricultural and livestock products from the people of South Nyanza. Chiefs also permitted Asian traders to sell manufactured goods and to buy commodities from the locations. As Butterman noted, chiefs sometimes actively participated in the creation of markets in their locations.<sup>130</sup> Hay remarked that up until 1920, market places remained primarily famine-related phenomena, and that the principal motives for engaging in trade were either to acquire grain through the sale of stock to compensate for local food shortages, or to profit from famine in other areas by exchanging surplus food for stock.<sup>131</sup> While the observations by Hay and Butterman on the creation of markets are correct in part, they do not extend to all areas. This study of South Nyanza reveals that there were a number of markets, some such as Kisumo, were held daily, whether there was famine or not.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Change in Formation', p. 191.

<sup>131</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 174.

<sup>132</sup> Farler, V. J. P. (Archdeacon), 'Native Routes in East Africa from Pangani to the Masai Country', Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, p. 744.

Hay observed that a group of men became traders as a full time occupation between 1910 and 1920.<sup>133</sup> What such claims seem to suggest is that before 1910 no established group of traders existed. In reality the Luo were keen traders even before 1910. G.A.S. Northcote who wrote, for example, noted in 1907 that the Luo were keen traders.<sup>134</sup> C.W. Hobley who had written on the Luo much earlier in 1898, before colonial rule, had noted the crucial role trade played in the economy of the Luo.<sup>135</sup> Again, the South Kavirondo District Annual Report for 1914 observed that the Luo, with a few exceptions, were exceedingly prosperous traders due to agricultural and livestock production.<sup>136</sup>

Up to the 1920s, the people of South Nyanza were actively involved in trade with their neighbours, the Abagusii.<sup>137</sup> The introduction of donkeys into the area for example promoted trade. Donkeys were not indigenous in South Nyanza or Nyanza as a whole. Rather, the Somali who settled in South Nyanza after the area had been colonised introduced them into the area.<sup>138</sup> Donkeys were indispensable in trade because they were used to transport commodities to and from the market places.

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<sup>133</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 177.

<sup>134</sup> Northcote, G. A. S. 'The Nilotic Kavirondo', The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, p. 59.

<sup>135</sup> Hobley, C. W. 'Kavirondo', The Geographical Journal, p. 369.

<sup>136</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 31-3-1914, p. 5.

<sup>137</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/1/2, Annual Report, 31-3-1917, p. 206.

<sup>138</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, Annual Report, 31-3-1917, p. 206.

Up to the 1920s, the Indians and Goans dominated trade in the townships and at the trading centres in the area.<sup>139</sup> The 1925 South Kavirondo District Annual Report noted:

Trade in the district was almost entirely in the hands of Indian merchants, and most of them had done extremely well.<sup>140</sup>

Indian traders had followed the railway line into the interior of Kenya from the coast. They opened shops at the various railway stations and trading centres. They introduced the rupee as a currency for exchange, which was used in Kenya until 1921.<sup>141</sup> During the first two decades of colonial rule, the colonial administration encouraged the Indian traders to establish shops in the rural areas because they were seen as effective agents who could promote trade and the consumption of imported commodities among Africans. This could in turn encourage production in and the monetisation of rural economies, which would eventually pave the way to integrate rural areas into colonial capitalism.

The Indian traders in Kenya, as elsewhere in Tanzania and Uganda, built steadily on the foundations of commercial enterprise in the interior that were laid towards the close of the nineteenth century. Mangat in his study of Asians in East Africa noted that in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya, the small Indian traders pushed the frontiers of commerce into the countryside, undertaking the purchase of a variety of local products while retailing trade

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<sup>139</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/2, 1913-1923, 31-3-1913, p. 28.

<sup>140</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1925, PC/NZA, p. 33.

<sup>141</sup> Zeleza, T. 'The Establishment of Colonial Rule, 1905-1920', in Ochieng', W. R. (ed.), A Modern History, p. 56.

and provisions.<sup>142</sup> The same happened in South Nyanza and Nyanza in general. Indian traders played an important role in the integration of the Ugandan economy into colonial capitalism. A report in 1919 noted:

The Indian trader is prominent everywhere throughout Uganda where business is to be done either in large or small way, and is a very important factor in the commercial life of the place.<sup>143</sup>

Tanzania reflects the same pattern. The Indian traders' enterprise continued to expand largely because the colonial administration allowed them freedom of enterprise. Apart from the Indian traders who penetrated the interior of Tanzania along the old caravan routes, other Indian traders spread along the advancing railways, as they had done in Kenya, and engaged in similar forms of trade.<sup>144</sup>

In Kenya, this generated antagonism among the European settler population. The growth of European hostility towards the Indians was, however, not restricted to Kenya alone. In Tanzania, hostility also arose steadily towards Indian traders. The factors underlying such hostility lay largely in the growth of economic rivalry, which found expression chiefly around the much-exaggerated picture of the Indian as a 'crafty' trader, and as an undesirable neighbour owing to his unsanitary habits.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Mangat, J. M, A History of the Asians in East Africa, c. 1886 to 1945, Oxford, London, 1969, p. 89.

<sup>143</sup> T. Sleith, Report on Trade Conditions in B. E. A. Uganda and Zanzibar, 1919, p. 49, cited in Mangat, J. M. A History of Asians, p. 92.

<sup>144</sup> Mangat, J. M. A History of Asians in East Africa, P. 93.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. p. 110.

In contrast to Kenya and Tanzania, there was no parallel campaign against the Indians in Uganda, although official policy changed from the earlier encouragement of the Indian role to measures of restriction. As Mangat has noted, however, the arguments used against the Indians generally did not differ much from one territory to another.<sup>146</sup>

Up to the 1920s, trade in South Nyanza was still in the hands of the Indian traders. Most of them were based at the various trading centres. However, the late 1920s and the early 1930s were characterised by a struggle over the control of marketing, which in local terms, was played out over the status of trading centres and produce markets.<sup>147</sup> The 1920s were also marked by the formation of the Local Native Councils. As Kitching has noted, in 1925 and 1926, the colonial administration set up in most of the agricultural districts of Kenya a very limited African local government in the form of the Local Native Councils.<sup>148</sup> These Councils were formed in order to improve communication between the people and the colonial government. The District Commissioner, being the Chairman of the Council, was in a position to expound the government policy to the chiefs, who were nominated members of the Councils. The chiefs were responsible for implementing these policies in their jurisdictions. At the same time, the council's elected members were expected to advise the District Commissioner about local problems and how they could be tackled.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid. p. 110.

<sup>147</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Change in Formation', p. 192.

<sup>148</sup> Kitching, G. Class and Economic Change in Kenya, p. 188.

<sup>149</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', pp. 128-129.

The Local Native Councils were established in South Nyanza in 1925, but only became operational by 1926. One represented the Luo the other represented the Abagusii and the Abakuria.<sup>150</sup> As Buttermann noted, the colonial government used the Local Native Council as organs through which to raise revenue for its scheduled priorities for the district.<sup>151</sup> The Council was composed of young men, who had acquired some mission education. The elders shied away from being members since they were not paid for taking part. The Local Native Councils played a critical role in effecting the process of change in the rural areas. For instance, the rates collected by the Councils were used for the maintenance of infrastructure, paid for emergency famine relief, and for salaries of agricultural and veterinary instructors and other administrative personnel. The District Annual Report for 1927 claimed that the Local Native Councils had contributed to the improvement of the Luo.<sup>152</sup> The Council also provided grants-in-aid to the local schools and for the establishment of medical dispensaries. Projects that encouraged ghee production, hide preparation, and improved seeds, poultry and stock, were all the work of the Local Native Council financed by a special rate levied on the people of South Nyanza.<sup>153</sup>

Up to the 1920s, trade in South Nyanza was still in the hands of the Indian traders, and most of them were based at the various trading centres. By 1930, the Local Native Councils were entrusted with the issuance of trading licenses at both the trading centres and produce markets. As this study of South Nyanza demonstrates, since many Local Native Council

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<sup>150</sup> Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 184.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid. p. 184.

<sup>152</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, 31-12-1927, p. 2.

<sup>153</sup> KNA, Central Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/CN/1/6/1 and 1/6/2, PC/NZA/3/33/8/25, 3/33/8/28 and PC/NZA 4/1/1, cited in Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p.129.

members were aspiring traders, Asian traders' applications for licenses were increasingly turned down. Instead, many aspiring African traders were issued with licenses and started to establish shops.<sup>154</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The period 1914 to 1930 was still marked by experimentation with the new crops and agricultural implements, which had been introduced into South Nyanza. They had not been fully integrated into the agricultural cycle of the households in South Nyanza. The people of South Nyanza were still engaged in the production of their pre-colonial commodities such as hides, skins, sesame and ghee as their chief cash income. Cotton had not been established as a cash crop. The households in South Nyanza were reluctant to engage in cotton production because of low prices and because its cultivation was labour intensive. Agricultural production in the area had not improved much because non-experts on agricultural production were still advising the people of South Nyanza. An agricultural official was posted for the first time to the district in 1924. Towards the close of the 1920s, agriculture registered increased production.

Infrastructural improvement in South Nyanza during the 1920s greatly enhanced the integration of the area into colonial capitalism. By the 1920s, the colonial administration had put in place a better transport network through which the district was now linked to

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid. p. 192.

other centres of economic development. The linkage facilitated transportation of commodities within and without the district.

A further factor that enhanced the integration of South Nyanza into colonial capitalism during the period 1914 to 1930 was the increased presence of missionaries in the area. The missionaries were engaged in promoting modern agricultural production in the areas where they established a presence. In addition, they also promoted Western education, which was crucial in enhancing the integration of the area into colonial capitalism. The 1920s missionaries were more progressive than their predecessors who had established a presence in the area during the first decade of colonial rule. They offered a more effective education.

In addition, the Indian traders who opened up shops at the various trading centres and markets in rural South Nyanza contributed significantly to the integration of the economy of South Nyanza into colonial capitalism. The Indian traders sold agricultural implements such as English hoes, ploughs, trek chains and yokes, which permitted the households in South Nyanza to integrate these implements into their agricultural cycle. The presence of the Indian traders encouraged economic production and monetisation of the economy of the households in South Nyanza.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATION, 1930 TO 1945

#### INTRODUCTION

The period 1930 to 1945 period was characterised by rapid changes in the economy of South Nyanza. Most studies of Kenya's agrarian transformation have not paid much attention to the issue of rural agricultural planning which started in the 1930s. This is an important focus of this chapter. The impact of the Great Depression contributed to increased state involvement in rural Kenya through the initiation of agricultural planning as a way to enhance agricultural production in rural areas. The state planning initiative originated from the colonial state's 1931 decision to press the African population to "take every opportunity" to increase agricultural production. The call for increased production was made much clearer in an August 1931 circular issued by the Chief Native Commissioner.<sup>1</sup>

The period under review was also marked by the emergence of a more prosperous, entrepreneurial African petty-bourgeoisie, who displaced Indian traders at the trading centres and in the townships. The late twenties and thirties were critical years during which socio-economic differentiation emerged among the households in South Nyanza and other

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<sup>1</sup> Maxon, R. M. *Going Their Separate Ways*, p. 71.

densely populated and agriculturally developed regions in Kenya.<sup>2</sup> As Maxon has pointed out, this was the period that witnessed the emergence of “petit-bourgeoisie”, or “straddlers”.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter attempts to demonstrate that the period 1930 to 1945 was marked by rapid changes in the economy of the households in South Nyanza. A remarkable increase in agricultural production as well as in migrant wage labour occurred in the economy of South Nyanza. The chapter also shows that many households in South Nyanza enjoyed more opportunities to engage in trade, which had all along been the domain of the Indians.

### **CHANGES IN PRODUCTION, 1930 TO 1945**

The years 1930 to 1945 were pivotal in the history of South Nyanza. The period was marked by intensive change in the economy of the area. Agricultural production increased as a result of the integration of new crops and implements into the agricultural cycle of the local population. The improved transport system contributed to this process. The period was also characterised by increased engagement in migrant wage labour but this is a topic examined in the next chapter. The era was also marked by more opportunities for the acquisition of Western education as both the missionaries and the Local Native Councils established more schools in South Nyanza. With regard to trade, the households in South Nyanza enjoyed new opportunities to engage in trade as large numbers of aspiring traders were granted licenses.

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<sup>2</sup> Kitching, G. Class and Economic Change in Kenya, p.277.

<sup>3</sup> Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways, p. 49.

The gains the people of South Nyanza made towards the close of the 1920s however were initially disrupted and setback by the outbreak of famine and the Great Depression. It is important to examine how these events impacted on the economy of South Nyanza. The section below turns to analyse the effects of the famine and the Great Depression during the 1930s.

### **Famines of the Early 1930s**

The short-term gains the people of South Nyanza made towards the end of the 1920s were setback during the early years of the 1930s. In 1931, swarms of locusts invaded South Nyanza and Nyanza as a whole and caused serious damage to crops.<sup>4</sup> Swarms of flying locusts (*locusta migratoria migratoriodes*), swept through the province during May 1931, and completely decimated crops. They reappeared during September, and also at the end of the year.<sup>5</sup> Ndege asserts that in 1928, locusts, *schistocera gregaria*, had invaded Kenya.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1931, pp. 4-5; KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1932, pp. 1-2; KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1932, p. 10; KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/3, 1924-1932, Annual Report for 1932, p. 3. See also Hay J.M., 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Butterman, J.M., 'Luo Social Formation in Change'; Onduru, T.A., 'Some Aspects of Economic Change'.

<sup>5</sup> KNA, Central Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1931, pp. 5-8, DC/CN/6/1; KNA, Minutes of the Local Native Council, Meeting of 31-3-1931, pp. 1-2 in KNA, PC/NZA 4/1/1/1; Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1931, p. 4; Hay, J.M., 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 190, Ndege, P. O. 'Struggles for the Market', pp. 9594 cited in Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, Department of Agriculture, Report on the 1931 Locust invasion of Kenya, January 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1931, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Ndege, P. O. 'Struggles for the Market', pp. 94-95.

As this study of South Nyanza shows, there is no evidence of a locust invasion in South Nyanza in 1928.

Locusts again invaded Nyanza including South Nyanza in 1932, but the damage done to crops was not as severe as during previous year.<sup>7</sup> The South Kavirondo District Annual Report noted in 1932:

Locusts and famine that dominated the affairs of the Luo of South Kavirondo during 1931 have played but a small part in their lives during 1932. Famine relief stopped early in the year.<sup>8</sup>

Drought also hit the area during 1931. This combination of droughts and locust invasion during 1931-32 forced households in South Nyanza to place greater emphasis on food crops, and compelled the administration in the district to suspend its cotton campaign as the people tried to recover from their effects. Food crops themselves suffered. The colonial administration responded by encouraging the people of South Nyanza to cultivate root crops, for instance cassava which became popular due to locust invasions. As Butterman has rightly remarked, for the best yields three weedings were needed, making cassava a labour intensive crop. It nevertheless had the advantage that it could be harvested at will, and thus formed an insurance crop.<sup>9</sup> Butterman pointed out that the famine of 1931-32

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<sup>7</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1932, p. 1; KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/3, 1924-1932, Annual Report for 1932, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1932, in Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1932, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 169.

contributed to the widespread adoption of root crops. She remarked that cassava previously introduced became popular.<sup>10</sup>

In South Nyanza, the entire wimbi (finger millet) crop had disappeared by the end of May 1931. The same happened in some locations of Gusiiland. In Central Nyanza, the situation was the same. The destruction of crops led to widespread famine in South Nyanza and Nyanza as a whole.<sup>11</sup> Towards the end of 1931, South Nyanza District imported 1,949 tons of maize meal for famine relief. The Local Native Council met half the cost of the relief maize. The total cost of the relief was Shs. 7,350. The Local Native Council diverted the funds that had been allocated for a secondary school.<sup>12</sup> In the adjacent region of Gusii highlands, Maxon has noted that locust invasion in South Kavirondo destroyed many crops especially in Luo-inhabited areas. He observes that the prices of agricultural produce remained low for most of the year, 1931 was not a year that saw much cash obtained for Gusii crops except from the Luo areas of the district.<sup>13</sup>

The famine that resulted from the locust invasion of 1931 and 1932 came to be referred to locally as Ke-Nyangweso in South Nyanza and in Luoland in general. It acquired that name from the hoppers (Nyangweso), newly hatched locusts that had not grown wings. The famine was also nicknamed ke-Otuoma. Otuoma was a famous Luo harpist from South

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 158.

<sup>11</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1931, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> KNA, Hemsted, R. W. 16<sup>th</sup> November 1931, AGR. 1/2/21/31 NZA; Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', pp. 157-158.

<sup>13</sup> Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, p. 94.

Nyanza who moved from one location to another in Luoland entertaining people during these years of famine. The famine was thus nicknamed after him.<sup>14</sup>

A further consequence of locust invasion was that since it led to crop failure, the households in the province found considerable difficulty in paying taxes. The tax paid by the Luo in South Kavirondo, for example, fell to 46.88% of what had been paid previously.<sup>15</sup> Hence the 1931 tax collection in the province was substantially in arrears. Due to the difficulties, the Nyanza Province Annual Report for 1932 noted that the people showed signs of passive resistance to paying taxes. The report admitted that this was due to the scarcity of money.<sup>16</sup>

Contrary to expectations, the locust invasion resulted in low prices of produce. In an attempt to explain why prices were low, the Nyanza Province Annual Report for 1931 noted that the reduction of wages and crop failure made it difficult for most households in the province to obtain ready cash.<sup>17</sup> In South Kavirondo, the Annual Report for 1932 observed:

Unemployment, fall in wages and commodity prices were more serious factors during 1932 than had been in 1931. The shortage of cash in the district was more evident.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Odinga, O. *Not Yet Uhuru*, pp. 9-10; Hay, J.M., 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 190.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5, 19.

<sup>16</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1932, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1931, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/3, 1924-1932, Annual Report for 1932, p. 3.

Surplus crops, which were available for export, commanded a poor price. Beyond that, many European settlers, as a result of the locust invasion and crop failure, found it necessary to reduce their labour requirements, and they also reduced the rate of wages which they normally paid. The reduction of wages coupled with crop failure made it very difficult for most households in South Nyanza to obtain cash.<sup>19</sup> Unemployment, a fall in wages and commodity prices were felt more seriously during 1932 than they had been in 1931. The shortage of cash in the district was more evident.<sup>20</sup>

One of the effects of the 1931 to 1932 famine was that it forced a number of people from Central Kavirondo, especially the Alego people, to migrate to South Nyanza. The District Commissioner for South Kavirondo commented: “there is no objection to this but the new comers want to run the country.”<sup>21</sup> The famine of 1931-32 contributed to the growth of new distribution centres for the maize meal relief. Some of these centres developed into permanent markets and were named after the famine, Nyangweso. Such markets included Nyangweso in Karachuonyo and Kochia.<sup>22</sup>

The economy of the people of South Nyanza was not only subjected to hardships occasioned by drought and locust invasion in 1931 and 1932, but also by the effects of the Great Depression, that opened in 1929. The depression forced the colonial administration to intervene in the local economy. The colonial state increased its involvement in the

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<sup>19</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1931, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/3, 1924-1932, Annual Report for 1932, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, 1932, in Nyanza Province Annual Report, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Interviews with: Resalaen Nyakado, Benson Mikingo, see also Butterman, J.M., ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’, p. 158.

process of change in rural Kenya through the introduction of agricultural planning designed to increase the productivity of African agriculture.<sup>23</sup>

The world depression of the 1930s delivered a major blow to the people of South Nyanza and peasant Kenyans as a whole because of the fall in the price of commodities such as ghee, beans, maize, hides and sim-sim. The price of maize, which was widely grown by both African peasant farmers as well as European settlers, slumped the most drastically. By 1931, the maize price had dropped to 50 percent of its 1929 value – a fall from about Shs.11.10 to Shs. 5.06.<sup>24</sup> As Maxon noted in his study of Vihiga and Gusii highland:

With some fluctuations and demand, the price of a 200-pound bag of maize remained below three shillings for most of the decade. From October through December 1932, for example, the price of a bag of maize remained at shillings 1/50.<sup>25</sup>

The depression affected the economy of South Nyanza in various ways, forcing the colonial administration once more to encourage African commodity production for export.<sup>26</sup> In South Nyanza and Nyanza more widely, the colonial administration embarked on the second cotton growing campaign. But as Hay has noted, the low level of prices for cotton and other cash crops during the 1930s sabotaged the campaign.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Maxon, R. M. Going their Separate Ways, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Kanogo, T., 'Kenya and the Depression, 1929-1939', in Ochieng, W.R. (ed.), A Modern History of Kenya, pp. 115-116; Hay, J.M., 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 191.

<sup>25</sup> Maxon, R.M., Going Their Separate Ways, p. 58.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 162.

<sup>27</sup> Hay, J.M., 'Economic Change in Luoland', pp. 191-192.



Moreover the negative impact of the depression on the settlers' commodity production forced the settlers to declare a number of African employees redundant. The number of Africans in employment declined for the first time in 1930 continuing into 1931 and 1932. Other employment such as railway work also fell from 15,628 in 1930 to 12,000 in 1933. In the tea sector, employment numbers fell from about 10,000 to about 8,000, while many sisal estates closed down in 1931, rendering thousands of Africans jobless. Those who remained in employment were not shielded from the prevailing economic crisis. Wages were slashed by about 50 percent by 1931 from their 1929 level.<sup>28</sup> Unemployment became a common feature of the depression, and small bands of labourers wandered from place to place looking for work. This contributed to an increase of vagrancy and burglary in the towns. As this study of South Nyanza demonstrates, the slackened demand for migrant wage labour implied that Africans who lost their jobs turned to agricultural production as a source of income. The Nyanza Provincial Commissioner, Mr. H.K. Montgomery noted:

One useful lesson has been learnt by the natives (through the depression), is that for some time and possibly for ever they must look to the land for their money; there is little demand for labour, the price of livestock is lower than formerly, and will probably never rise again to the uneconomic figure at which it stood and the price of bulk food crops is such that there is little or no profit in export.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Fearn, H., *An African Economy*, p. 73.

<sup>29</sup> KNA, H.R. Montgomery, NZA AR 1932.

As Stichter pointed out, prices for African grown produce fell as much, or in some cases, even more than wages, yet production of most African crops increased. She remarked that some scholars attributed this to the fact that produce fell less than did wages. However, she observed that the explanation could only fit the cases of cotton and wattle bark. Stichter noted that between 1929 and 1935 when wages fell about 40 percent, cotton prices fell by approximately one third, that was less than either wages or other crops. This explained the rise of production, noted Stichter.<sup>30</sup> However, production of other Nyanza produce, the prices of which fell more such as maize, sim-sim, beans and chiroko, also increased. See Table 5: 1 below.

**TABLE 5: 1**

**AFRICAN PRODUCE SENT FROM KISUMU RAILWAY STATION AND PIER  
(TONS), 1922-1933**

	<b>1925</b>	<b>1926</b>	<b>1927</b>	<b>1928</b>	<b>1933</b>
Maize	11,617	7,126	3,010	10,623	17,534
Maize-meal	-	-	287	975	4,299
Sim-sim	2,327	2,177	1,950	535	3,678
Rice	-	-	152	125	-
Groundnuts	372	360	794	203	589
Chillies	-	-	7	3	3
Hides	674	1,754	1,023	957	896
Beans	-	-	80	144	359

<sup>30</sup> Stichter, S., Migrant Labour in Kenya, p. 78.

Chiroko (pulses)	-	-	25	671	1,948
Ghee	-	-	-	141	721

**Source:** Stichter, S. P. 78 extracted from Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1926, Native Affairs Department AR, 1925-28, Agriculture Department AR, 1927, p. 289.

During the same period, domestic maize prices fell by approximately 54 percent and yet African production increased. This was attributed to the new availability of labour, and not simply relative prices, which conditioned the level of African production.<sup>31</sup>

The other impact of the Great Depression in South Nyanza, as Maxon has pointed out, was to increase state involvement in the local economy through the introduction of agricultural planning designed to increase production. Such work, observed Maxon, occupied a great deal of time on the part of administrative and agricultural officers, and out of it came blueprints for future development.<sup>32</sup> The colonial state aimed at pressing Africans to increase production. The Provincial Commissioners were urged by the Chief Native Commissioner to formulate development plans based upon a thorough understanding of the areas to be targeted for increased production, including climate, soil, traditional cropping patterns, acreage under cultivation, and the type of crops grown and consumed. This information was to form an integral part of the development plan. In South Kavirondo, a comprehensive 'Development Scheme' for the district was already in place by 1932. The

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 78.

<sup>32</sup> Maxon, R.M., Going Their Separate Ways, p. 71.

1937 programme of work for the Department of Agriculture in Nyanza gave prominence to coffee and wattle, but in addition set goals for the Agricultural Officer to accomplish in the improvement of maize, beans and wimbi (finger millet) crops.<sup>33</sup>

As Maxon has observed, from 1933, the colonial state's agricultural and administrative officials directed considerable efforts towards crop innovation for the purpose of increasing household incomes and the colony's exports.<sup>34</sup> But Berman and Lonsdale have argued that the colonial government aimed at expanding agricultural production of households in order to be able to collect enough taxes, while the colonial state's aim of increasing exports was based on the colonial policy of transferring surplus from the colony to the metropolitan centres.<sup>35</sup>

In sum, the early decades of the 1930s were hard economic times for the households in South Nyanza. Locust invasions of South Nyanza in 1931 coupled with the drought impacted negatively on agricultural production in the area, which led to wide spread famine. This forced the colonial state to suspend the cotton campaign in the area. But the famine of 1931 had its positive impact. It contributed to the growth of new distribution centres, some later developed into permanent markets. The Great Depression that opened in 1929 further affected the economy of South Nyanza. But this too had its positive effect on

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. pp. 71-75.

<sup>34</sup> Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways, p. 75.

<sup>35</sup> Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. 'Coping With the Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State, 1895-1914', in Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. Unhappy Valley.

the households in South Nyanza. The Great Depression forced the state to embark on agricultural planning for rural areas in order to enhance increased agricultural production.

### **Changes in Crop production, 1930 to 1945**

As noted in the foregoing section, the outbreak of the locust invasion and the Great Depression strained the economy of South Nyanza during the initial years of the 1930s. The colonial state now intervened more effectively in the local economy than ever before. Specifically, the colonial administration continued with the campaign for production of cotton as a cash crop. The section below analyses changes in crop production during the period under review.

By 1933, the locust invasion had been contained. The administration saw a need to promote cash crop production to enable the households to obtain cash to meet their tax demands. As a result, the South Kavirondo District Administration re-launched another cotton campaign in the area. In 1932, the district received twenty tons of cottonseed from North Nyanza ginneries.<sup>36</sup> This marked a change of gear.<sup>37</sup> Previously, the colonial officials were mainly concerned with adding crops and agricultural implements to those already in use. But from the 1930s, the trend changed. Colonial officials began to examine the basic economic patterns in the entire district in an attempt to affect the process of change.

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<sup>36</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation Change', p. 158.

<sup>37</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report for 1934, p. 293; See also Hay, J. M. "Economic Change in Luoland", pp. 194-200; Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', pp. 158-168; Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways, pp. 61-75.

The shift in approach to agrarian production was accompanied by a drastic reorganisation of the African agricultural services, which was implemented in 1933. The reorganisation involved, first, the replacement of technically “unqualified” agricultural officers with trained personnel recruited under the Colonial Agricultural Scholarship Scheme, and second, the decentralisation of the department itself. This involved the appointment of a Senior Agricultural Officer in charge of all agricultural activities at the provincial level, instead of having the individual officers directly responsible to the Nairobi office.<sup>38</sup> The Nyanza Senior Agricultural Officer divided the province into ecological zones and developed a programme of work that was implemented in 1933.<sup>39</sup>

In South Nyanza, the cash crop that the administration continued to promote was cotton. Previously, cotton was planted in communal blocks that were located along the roads for easy accessibility by both government officials and the local people. Supervision of the cotton fields fell under the headmen. Planting was supposed to take place during the months of March and April. This coincided, as shown previously, with the months when the people of South Nyanza weeded their food crops. As a consequence the people gave little attention to cotton production, until after they had finished weeding their food crops during the months of May and June, as W. Lyne-Watt, the Agricultural Officer, noted.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Kenya Department of Agriculture, Annual Report, 1933, p. 82, cited in Hay, J. M. ‘Economic Change in Luoland’, p. 195; Maxon. R. M. Going Their Separate Ways, pp. 71-73.

<sup>39</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA 2/480: The D.C.S. Meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> January 1933, p. 1.

Hay J. M. ‘Economic Change in Luoland’, p. 195

<sup>40</sup> KNA, Lyne-Watt, W. “Nyanza Report”, KC DA AR, 1932.

The cotton campaign in South Nyanza was successful between 1933 and 1936. The 1934 South Kavirondo District Annual Report registered a remarkable increase in cotton production, and cotton became one of the established crops. Thenceforth it was the main cash crop grown by the Luo of South Nyanza.<sup>41</sup> Cotton production was boosted in the area by the establishment of a cotton ginnery at Kendu-Bay by Messrs. Small and Company, which was officially opened by the Provincial Commissioner on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1934.<sup>42</sup> This was the first ginnery to be established in South Nyanza. Cotton was mainly grown in the following locations: Karachuonyo, Kanyada, Kochia, Gem and Mumbo, adding up to an area of approximately 5,500 acres under cotton cultivation.<sup>43</sup> In 1934, planting was still on the block system, each adult planting a quarter acre shamba (garden) in a communal block.<sup>44</sup> The greatest increase recorded in commodity production in the mid 1930s was in the crop cotton, rising from 70,000 pounds in 1933-1934 to 860,000 pounds in 1934-1935. This increase in production was obtained at the expense of groundnuts the production of which dropped considerably.<sup>45</sup>

In an attempt to boost cotton production in the district, the District Commissioner, Mr. H.R. Carver, sent twelve chiefs and some influential men from cotton growing lakeshore locations of South Nyanza to Samia, in North Kavirondo, to see how successful cotton

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<sup>41</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report for 1934, p. 293.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 293.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 293.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 293.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

production was in that area. They returned “enthusiastic and determined to persuade their people to cultivate more cotton”.<sup>46</sup> The following year, 1935, a delegation was dispatched to Uganda, to see how cotton cultivation had succeeded there as well. Again the delegation concluded that: “it was clear that Uganda had grown rich through growing cotton”.<sup>47</sup> Such cotton campaigns and tours helped cotton production in South Nyanza to grow. In 1934-35, the cotton yield fell just short of a million pounds of cottonseed, but by 1935-36 had already exceeded two million pounds.<sup>48</sup>

Cotton campaigns were not only undertaken in South Nyanza, but also in North and Central Kavirondo districts. Initially cotton was grown mainly in the western parts of North and Central Kavirondo districts, namely, in the Uganda border area. In the 1930s, cotton production was reintroduced in practically all suitable parts of the three Kavirondo districts.<sup>49</sup> Because of different geographical conditions and seasons across the three districts, the Senior Agricultural Officer demarcated three cotton growing areas in Nyanza Province; No.1 Area: North of River Nzoia; No.2 Area: Between the River Nzoia and the Southern boundary of Central Kavirondo District and No.3 Area: South Kavirondo (South Nyanza) District.

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<sup>46</sup> KNA, Cotton Report, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, February 1934, March 1934, AGR 3/1/4 (2/941) NZA.

<sup>47</sup> Butterman, J. M. ‘Luo Social Change in Formation’, p. 160.

<sup>48</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report for 1935, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/5, 1933-1939, Annual Report for 1935, p. 70.



**TABLE 5: 2**

**COTTON PURCHASE DURING 1934/35 SEASON**

	<b><u>“A” Quality</u></b>	<b><u>“B” Quality</u></b>	<b><u>Total</u></b>
	<b>Ibs.</b>	<b>Ibs.</b>	<b>Ibs.</b>
No. 1 Area	7,371,469	552,588	7,924,057
No. 2 Area	331,233	194,372	525,605
No. 3 Area	488,286	463,283	951,569
Total	8,190,988	1,210,243	9,401,231

About 7, 000 bales

The approximate payment to growers was £55,000.

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report, 1935, pp. 70-71.

By 1936, Nyanza Province rapidly increased cotton production. Table 5: 3 below, shows expansion of cotton production in South Nyanza from 1930 to 1936.

**TABLE 5: 3**

**COTTON PRODUCTION IN SOUTH KAVIRONDO DISTRICT DURING 1930-36**

1930-1931	crop	918,967	Ibs.	Or	approximately 700 bales
1931-1931	"	2,166,352	"	"	" 1,600 "
1932-1933	"	3,940,764	"	"	" 2,900 "
1933-1934	"	6,499,244	"	"	" 4,800 "
1934-1935	"	9,401,231	"	"	" 7,000 "
1935-1936	"	(estimates)	"	"	" 11,000 "

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report, 1935, p. 71.

Due to the increase in cotton production in South Nyanza, and the province more generally, ginneries also expanded. In the No.1 Area, Malakasi and Sio, ginneries were substantially enlarged and remodelled and some Whitworth Middleton double roller gins were installed with great success. In No. 2 Area, the Kibos Ginnery was opened and enjoyed a successful season. The opening of a second ginnery at Rangala in Ugenya was under contemplation at the end of 1935 but was later opened at Ndere in Alego.<sup>50</sup> It was to serve the western end of No. 2 Area. In No. 3 Area (South Nyanza) the Kendu Ginnery had a second very successful season.<sup>51</sup>

By 1935, a rescheduling of the cotton crop for the South Nyanza lakeshore took place. Planting was undertaken after the main food crops had been harvested. Cotton therefore became a short rain-crop, planted in September and harvested in January.<sup>52</sup> Cotton production in South Nyanza reached its peak in 1936. Prices were as high as thirteen or fourteen cents a pound. Due to increased production, plans were in the offing to open a new ginnery at Homa-Bay by Mr. John L. Riddoch, a Kisumu businessman in close collaboration with the district administration.<sup>53</sup> The 1936/37 cotton production reached a record output of 17,840 bales.<sup>54</sup> In an attempt to account for the increased production of cotton in South Nyanza during these years, Van Zwanenberg noted that the price of cotton

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<sup>50</sup> Fearn, H. *An African Economy*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* p. 71.

<sup>52</sup> Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 160.

<sup>53</sup> KNA, K. L. Hunter, *Safari Diary*, 2-4 April, 1936, ADM 12/4/1 NZA; KNA, *Nyanza Province Annual Report*, 1937, p. 69; Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 161.

<sup>54</sup> *Nyanza Province Annual Report*, 1937, p. 69.

fell proportionally less than that of other products after the depression.<sup>55</sup> Butterman by contrast has attributed the increase in production in the 1930s in Karachuonyo location to the new chief of Karachuonyo, Paul Mboya, who actively engaged in the cotton campaign. She noted that Mboya made available free seeds and also gave out prizes for “better farming”. Mboya, Butterman observed, pointed out to the people of Karachuonyo that if they raised cotton production, then they would not have to sell their livestock to meet tax requirements.<sup>56</sup> It seems unlikely that Mboya could have influenced cotton production beyond Karachuonyo. In South Nyanza more generally, the increase in production was as a result a parallel cotton campaign in the 1930s.

Cotton prosperity took a nose-dive after 1936, never to recover its lost glory during the period under consideration. Prices fell as a result of the United States Supreme Court ruling on the unconstitutionality of the New Deal Policy. The following year, American cotton flooded the world market. At the same time, the Spanish civil war of the late 1930s disrupted the market, since Spain had been the chief buyer of second-grade cotton.<sup>57</sup> In South Nyanza, cotton prices fell as low as eight cents a pound. Prices acted as deterrent to close picking and clearing.<sup>58</sup> The 1937 District Annual Report admitted that cotton had fallen from the second position in order of economic importance at an estimated value to the producers of £20,000. The report remarked that it had been cultivated in the areas nearing the highest limit.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Van Zwanenberg, R. M. A. Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya.

<sup>56</sup> Butterman J. M. ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’, p. 162.

<sup>57</sup> KNA, AGR. 1/7/1/4 C3/13, in Butterman, J. M. ‘Luo Social Change in Formation’, 1979, p. 165.

<sup>58</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1937, p. 69, KC CA AR 1937, p. 55.

<sup>59</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI /1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report for 1937, p. 35.

Groundnuts now resumed the first position in crop production in the district, with an export value of £36,319 as compared with the estimated value of the 1937 cotton crop of £20,000. By the 1938/39 planting season, cotton suffered a further setback. A combination of drought as well as low prices “produced apathy” amongst the growers. S. H. Fazan, the Provincial Commissioner, observed that in the lakeshore locations, “owners had often been seen picking their crops with cattle and goats all around them browsing off the leaves and twigs”.<sup>60</sup> The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 caused further decline of cotton production in South Nyanza. As in World War 1, there was a shift in emphasis by the colonial administration from cash crops to food crops that were needed to feed troops.

The administration urged the cultivation of sorghum and maize, which were the main food crops. These food crops were then shipped to the Middle East and other war zones to meet the troops’ food requirements.<sup>61</sup> The colonial government employed emergency powers in 1942 to establish a Maize and Produce Control that enforced a monopoly over both sale and purchase of African grown maize, while European maize was marketed through the Kenya Farmers Association. As Fearn has argued in his study of Nyanza, in theory, both Europeans and Africans received the same fixed price for their maize but in practice, African farmers received considerably less than their European counterparts through a series of deductions from the price paid.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> KNA, S. H. Fazan, NZA AR 1939 (AR 1282), see also Butterman, J. M. ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’, p. 166.

<sup>61</sup> KNA, Speech by the Provincial Commissioner, ‘Minutes of the Local Native Council Meeting’, 27-28 January, 1942, in Ag KSM 1/642, cited in Hay, J. M. ‘Economic Change in Luoland’, pp. 204-205.

<sup>62</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy, pp. 157-162; Hay, J. M. ‘Economic Change in Luoland’, p. 205.

In spite of such discrimination against Africans, maize production continued to rise during the war period as shown in Table 5: 4 on the next page.

**TABLE 5: 4**

**COMPARATIVE TABLE OF EXPORTED PRODUCE (INCLUDING LOCAL SALES) FROM SOUTH KAVIRONDO DISTRICT**

<b>Commodity</b>	<b>1941</b>	<b>1942</b>	<b>1943</b>
Maize (bags)	30,000	60,000	84,000
Wimbi	26,000	20,000	6,000
Beans	7,000	10,000	200
Chiroko	600	1,000	100
Groundnuts	28,000	30,000	10,000
Sim-sim	11,000	11,000	1,000
Potatoes	-	300	2,200
Mtama	18,000	19,000	32,000
Rice	52	150	500
Wheat	-	-	1,000
Total	120,652	151,450	137,600

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/5, 1943, p. 8.

The 1944 South Kavirondo District Annual Report noted that agricultural production had increased considerably in the district. The rise in export production is reflected in Table 5: 5 on the next page.

**TABLE 5: 5**

**AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN SOUTH KAVIRONDO DISTRICT DURING  
1941 TO 1944**

<u>1941</u>	<u>1942</u>	<u>1943</u>	<u>1944</u>
120,652	151,450	137,600	156,400

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District annual report, DC/KSI/1/6, 1944, p. 2.

The 1943 decline was attributed to drought that occurred in the same year.

The households in South Nyanza embraced maize production into their agricultural cycle because it was both a food and cash crop.<sup>63</sup> Maize had the advantage that it matured faster than sorghum millet. It could also be grown during both the long and short rains, thus providing greater security against crop failure in any one season.<sup>64</sup> As Hay observed, in spite of its clear advantages as a cash crop, however, maize had not supplanted sorghum in local diets by 1945.<sup>65</sup> The same could be said of South Nyanza. Interviewees recalled that those who only cultivated maize and not sorghum millet suffered grain shortage during the course of the year.<sup>66</sup> This can be explained from the geographical point of view. In areas that are prone to drought, particularly the lakeshores, maize has low yields, while areas in

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<sup>63</sup> Interviews With: Naman Singa, Timothy Toro, Ibrahim Ondiek.

<sup>64</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', pp. 206-207.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p. 206.

<sup>66</sup> Interviews With: Sina Okelo, Benson Mikingo.

the high grounds with plenty of rainfall maize does well. Maize therefore appears to have been more popular in the high ground regions and that is still the situation at present.

The period from the 1930s to 1945 was also characterised by increased incorporation of new agricultural implements such as English hoes and ploughs into the economy of the households in South Nyanza.<sup>67</sup> It was estimated that about 3,000 ploughs were in use in the province by 1935. A leading firm in Kisumu, importers of Ransomes implements, recorded sales during 1935 as shown on Table 5: 6 below.

**TABLE 5: 6**

**RANSOMES AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTS SOLD IN KISUMU DURING 1935**

<b>Items</b>	<b>No. Sold</b>
Ploughs	862
Plough Shares	212
Trek Chains	276
Harrow Sections	7
Mills	29
Separators	30

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI, 1933-1939, Annual Report for 1935, p. 79.

<sup>67</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1930, p. 66; KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI /1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report for 1935, p. 79.



In addition, other firms handled different makes of plough, including many non-British makes, and almost every trading centre displayed up to a dozen ploughs for sale.<sup>68</sup> A comparison with the sales of the same agricultural implements in 1930, see Table 4: 11 (page 284) shows a tremendous increase in the sales of agricultural implements by 1935, indicating how fast the people of South Nyanza and Nyanza as a whole were incorporating the new implements into their agricultural cycle.

The reasons were twofold: first, the increasing interest in cash crops and second the increased financial resources derived from them played a crucial role in increased sales of agricultural implements between 1930 and 1945, particularly ploughs. The 1935 South Kavirondo District Annual Report noted:

A Luo is not a spendthrift but he spends most of what he gets. A large proportion of his outlay is on clothes, foodstuffs such as sugar and salt, and other perishable material. The more durable things which he buys are mostly implements, ploughs etc. There were clear signs of expanding trade, introducing more wants and needs.<sup>69</sup>

However, since ploughs were expensive, not everybody could afford them. In the 1930s, ploughs cost between Shs. 40/- to Shs. 50/-.<sup>70</sup> One interviewee who purchased one in 1935 recalled that he bought it from the proceeds of groundnuts. He observed that wealthy

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<sup>68</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report for 1935, p. 79.

<sup>69</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4, 1935-1939, Annual Report for 1935, p. 103.

<sup>70</sup> KNA, ARG. 1/7/2/1 3/2015 NZA, cited in Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 170.

people were the only ones who could afford to buy ploughs.<sup>71</sup> Ploughs represented a shift of the accumulation cycle. In the early colonial period, agricultural surplus had led to the acquisition of livestock but they were only used for bridewealth. Now however, as Butterman has noted, from the time ploughs were introduced into South Nyanza, cattle were being harnessed to the purpose of increasing agricultural crops.<sup>72</sup>

Berman has rightly argued that while colonialism reduced and even destroyed indigenous social classes, in many places a class of wealthy farmers began to orient their production to the market, hired wage labour and started to use more modern and productive methods and technology.<sup>73</sup> Stichter has also observed that the growth of peasant cash-crop production within the fixed boundaries of the Kikuyu and Nyanza reserves created the conditions of economic differentiation. She rightly remarked that differentiation was somewhat less among the Luhya and Luo. She explains this by arguing that in Nyanza Province, the persistence of traditional land holding customs, according to which each son was entitled a segment of his father's land, inhibited class formation.<sup>74</sup> This thesis concurs with these findings. Nevertheless as this study demonstrates, the use of ploughs contributed to the process of social differentiation among the people of South Nyanza. The differentiation strained the distributive and reciprocal relationship between individuals. Those who had ploughs were able to extend their productive capacity, thus accumulating more from commodity production. This elevated them to a position among the rich. Their ploughs

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<sup>71</sup> Interviews With: Naftali Arua.

<sup>72</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 170.

<sup>73</sup> Berman, B. 'Structure and Process in Bureaucratic States of Colonial Africa', in Berman B. and Lonsdale, J. *Unhappy Valley*, p. 146.

<sup>74</sup> Stichter, S. *Migrant Labour in Kenya*, p. 102.

could also be hired out at a fee. Hence by 1945, the wooden hoe, rahaya, was slowly phased out by households in South Nyanza as it was replaced by the English hoe that was more effective in agricultural production. New crops and new agricultural implements allowed commodity production in South Nyanza to reach high levels by 1945.<sup>75</sup>

One of the problems that resulted from increased crop production that agricultural officials had to halt was the depletion of soil fertility. The problem was not only confined to South Nyanza, but was apparent in most parts of the province. Farmers were urged by the agricultural officials to consolidate their farms and to implement programs of mixed farming. The colonial administration's concern about the problem of soil fertility in African reserves appeared for the first time in the Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1931 in which it was described as "the main problem with regard to native agriculture".<sup>76</sup> The 1937 programme of work declared that "soil control, care and improvement" was to be given precedence throughout the province. The programme included measures farmers were to undertake, which included: stone terracing, contour lines of grass, live hedges on boundary ditches, reducing cultivation on steep slopes, and the use of windbreakers.

### **Western Education**

It was noted in the preceding chapter that missionaries established a presence in South Nyanza as from 1906. They were principally concerned with evangelisation, Western

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<sup>75</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1944, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> KNA, Department of Agriculture, Annual Report, 1931, p. 72; Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 195.

education and agricultural production. The last two were important components of colonial capitalism. Significant improvement in the provision of Western education occurred in South Nyanza from the 1930s. The colonial state took a more active role in education, which had all along been the domain of the missions. It is thus necessary to examine how and why the colonial state took a more active role in providing Western education in South Nyanza. The missions also continued to provide Western education in the area.

As Maxon has pointed out, this same period was marked by some important changes in the administrative policy towards education. He notes that where the missions had previously held sway, District Education Boards (DEB) were established in 1934 to oversee the management of sub elementary and elementary schools in the district. The District Education Boards took the place of the School Area Committee. Maxon argues that the latter had been rather inefficient in overseeing the running of schools because it had little influence on the allocation of grants to missions. The establishment of the new boards permitted Africans to have a greater say in educational matters. Maxon pointed out that the District Commissioner was the dominant figure in the District Education Board.<sup>77</sup>

Financial stringency limited funds available for the provision of education in the early 1930s at a time when the missions were making increasing requests to the state for money to fund education. But the demand for a government school in South Nyanza grew in intensity. The increasing pressure for a government school forced the Director of Education to address a joint meeting of the Luo and Gusii Local Native Councils in August 1930 in

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<sup>77</sup> Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, pp. 110-111.

which he promised the council members that the Council School would be built as per the request of the Council.<sup>78</sup>

A critical issue to which previous studies such as those of Butterman and Maxon did not pay sufficient attention was the issue of underfunding of education in South Nyanza by the colonial government, which caused the area to lag behind in development.<sup>79</sup> As the District Commissioner for South Kavirondo, Mr. H.R. Carver, in his Annual Report for 1934 observed:

Representations were made to the Director of Education regarding the small sums allowed in grants to education in the district, namely £601 out of a provincial vote of £9,921. The government stated that increasing grants could not be given to South Kavirondo until the missionaries attained the necessary qualifications, which according to the missions could not be attained until they received additional grants.<sup>80</sup>

The report admitted:

This is a deplorable state of affairs and, unless it is remedied, South Kavirondo will remain the most backward district in the province. Schools abound in every location but they are more evangelical than educational. At the moment it is impossible to

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change'; Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya.

<sup>80</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report, 1934, p. 28.

provide boys to be trained for the Native Industrial Training Department for Bukuria, Maseno or Ngong Veterinary School owing to the fact that they have not had the education to reach the standard required at entrance.<sup>81</sup>

It was not, however, all plain sailing before the construction of the school began. A shortage of funds delayed the start of the construction of the school, as the central government was unable to allocate funds for the building of the school in 1932 as had been planned. In addition, mission opposition, particularly from the Roman Catholics, to the construction of the Government School also delayed the start of construction. The general opinion of the European missionaries in the district was that if the government school were to be built, it should be purely a technical school with literary education being a preserve of the Roman Catholics and Seventh Day Adventists.<sup>82</sup>

Mission opposition to the construction of a government school notwithstanding, the colonial state finally approved the establishment of a government school that aimed at providing a full literary education. To this effect, the Director of Education wrote:

The scheme which at present represents the policy of government is to establish Government African Schools where missions' schools fail to meet the requirements

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p. 28.

<sup>82</sup> Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, pp. 107-108.

of the community either through lack of educational efficiency or through inability to break down the barriers of paganism.<sup>83</sup>

It is significant to note that in both these areas, mission education had been found failing in the district. As the District Commissioner for South Kavirondo pointed out in his Annual Report for 1930: "Most village schools received little qualified supervision".<sup>84</sup> The standards of education in the mission schools in the district were generally low and emphasis was placed on religion.<sup>85</sup> Maxon has pointed out that the low standard of mission education was partly because elementary school teachers were not well qualified and poorly supervised, at least before 1935. He notes further that neither the Roman Catholics nor the Seventh Day Adventists placed emphasis on expanding academic education.<sup>86</sup>

In 1934, plans were already in place to construct the Government African School at Kisii, the district headquarters, to supplement missionary education. The funds availed totalled to £6,000. Work started in March and by the end of the year, buildings were almost complete.<sup>87</sup> This was the first government school to be built in South Kavirondo. The joint Local Native Councils of the Luo and the Abagusii provided the funds for the construction of the school. The Local Native Councils controlled local treasuries. The revenue collected

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<sup>83</sup> KNA, Director of Education to Provincial Commissioner, 25 May 1932, KNA, PC Nyanza ed 3/4/1, cited in Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, p. 108.

<sup>84</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo Annual Report, 1930, DC/KSI/1/3, cited in Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, p. 108.

<sup>85</sup> Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, p. 108.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. pp. 109-110.

<sup>87</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report, 1934, p. 28.

was utilised in the development of the area. The total cost for the building of the school was £5,000.<sup>88</sup>

As has already been mentioned, the establishment of the District Education Boards (DEB) in 1934, and particularly its African members, were increasingly concerned in these years with raising the standards of education in the schools under their jurisdiction. The Government African School at Kisii proved to be a role model by providing high standard literary education, contrary to what mission schools were providing. This continued to be the norm despite the fact that the Seventh-Day Adventists and Roman Catholic Missions attempted to block their best pupils from joining the Government African School.<sup>89</sup> The launch of District Education Boards and the Government African School was marked by improvements in standards of education in the district that further enhanced raising African interest in education than was the case previously.

The 1930s were characterised by the growing demand for education, which was marked by increasing demand for more elementary and primary schools and a call for government elementary schools in the district. Many households in South Nyanza, as was also the case in the adjacent region of Gusiland, were unhappy with the quality of education provided by missions that had previously dominated the provision of elementary education in the district. As Maxon rightly point out, no longer was western education rejected, only that provided by missions.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4 1933-1939, Annual Report for 1935, p. 20.

<sup>89</sup> Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, p. 111.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p. 123.



Due to the demands by African members of the Local Native Councils, a resolution was passed in 1944 in favour of the establishment of government elementary schools in the district. W. A. Perreau, who took over as the District Commissioner early the same year, facilitated the move towards this venture, in spite of opposition from the missions. His views on the question of Local Native Council schools were conditioned by his experience as District Commissioner of the Kikuyu district of Kiambu. In a letter to the Provincial Commissioner in 1945, he remarked:

You, perhaps, think I am being too keen on these schools, but I have had an experience of the independents: they are a hot bed of anti-governemnt activity and only arose because government refused to allow these non-deminational schools to function and then were unable to implement their threat to stop them.<sup>91</sup>

As a result of W.A. Perreau's (the District Commissioner) support and guidance, the central government assented to the demands, and the Local Native Council voted £ 1,200 for the construction of two schools in 1945. The war years was characterised by the extension of government non-sectarian Western education in the district, which brought about educational changes in the area.<sup>92</sup>

This study of South Nyanza shows that the increasing role of the government in providing Western education in South Nyanza had a positive impact on the households in South Nyanza in various ways. The 1930s to the 1940s, which were marked by improved

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<sup>91</sup> Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, p. 123.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p. 123.

educational provision by the colonial state, were also characterised by increasing engagement in colonial capitalism by the people of South Nyanza. As has already been pointed out in the early sections of this chapter, the 1930s and 40s were further characterised by increased engagement in agricultural production by the households in South Nyanza. This was demonstrated by increasing agricultural production in the area. As the next section shows, the 1930s and 40s were also marked by increasing African engagement in trade which was eventually marked by Africans displacing Indian dominance in trade at the trading centres and markets in South Nyanza and Nyanza more widely. Finally, as demonstrated in the next chapter, increasing engagement in migrant wage labour by the people of South Nyanza was also noticeable in the 1930s and 1940s. The 1930s and 40s were finally characterised by the emergence of “straddlers” and petite bourgeoisie in South Nyanza and Nyanza more generally as many households engaged to a greater extent in colonial capitalism.

Berman has pointed out that the development and character of the African petit-bourgeoisie in Kenya, and elsewhere in colonial Africa, cannot be understood outside its deeply rooted ambivalent relationship with the colonial state. He argued that this ambivalence, expressed in sharply contrasting and often alternating patterns of collaboration and conflict, encouragement and constraint, attraction and rejection, was felt both by Africans and the colonial authorities and was grounded in some of the most fundamental contradictions of colonialism. Berman remarked that the African petit-bourgeoisie consisted of varying and overlapping combinations of the African agents of the colonial state, merchants, artisans, wealthy commodity producers and elements of traditional ruling classes. He noted that all

enjoyed some degree of wealth, status and power over that of the masses, which derived from their association with the political and economic institutions of colonialism.<sup>93</sup> Kitching in a study of Class and Economic Change in Kenya noted that the late twenties and the thirties were the crucial time when the essential parameters of socio-economic differentiation among households were laid down in the most densely populated and agriculturally developed and commercialised areas of Kenya such as Central Province, Machakos and North, Central and South Kavirondo districts. He argued that in this differentiated access to above average off-farm income (of which wage or salary incomes were the predominant form) played an absolutely crucial role.<sup>94</sup>

Maxon in his study of Vihiga established that by 1930, colonial capitalism had produced some economic differentiation. He noted that this was clearly most notable in the emergence of a small class of accumulators whom he terms “petit-bourgeoisie,” or “straddlers.”<sup>95</sup> He argues that these came initially from the ranks of those appointed as chiefs by the colonial states who were the main beneficiaries in the first decade of colonial control. He points out that chiefs played a crucial role as economic innovators. They were the first to receive new and improved varieties of seeds and tools. Maxon rightly argues that chiefs were involved in some form of “straddling” as they combined salaried employment with commodity production and other forms of money making activities, such as operating a water mill or producing and selling charcoal.<sup>96</sup> These chiefly accumulators

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<sup>93</sup> Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. ‘Coping with the Contradictions’ in Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. Unhappy Valley, p. 197.

<sup>94</sup> Kitching, G. Class and Economic Change in Kenya, p.277.

<sup>95</sup> Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways, p. 49.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. pp. 49-50.

had been joined by a small number of non-chiefly petit-bourgeoisie by the end of the 1920s. The decade provided them with diverse opportunities available within the colonial economy. For instance, wage labour could be combined with commodity production.<sup>97</sup> The practice of combining wage labour with commodity production was due to the low wages the African earned. Van Zwanenberg noted: “A significant portion of workers do not move permanently but only for a time... many of those who work for wages do so only for a limited part of their lives and continued to have homes in the countryside even during the period when they are urban wage earners.”<sup>98</sup> He argued that this was the pattern in the 1920s and 1930s, and one of the important explanations for this state of affairs was the fact that wages were “barely sufficient to support a man, let alone a family.”<sup>99</sup>

By 1945, the bulk of education in the district was still in the hands of missionaries whose success rate appeared low compared with the Government African School if percentage of passes for secondary education was the criterion.<sup>100</sup> The construction of government African sponsored schools improved the quality of education in the district. Their products were better prepared academically than those who went to the Mission Schools, which placed their main emphasis on evangelical education at the expense of academic education.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p. 50.

<sup>98</sup> Van Zwanenberg, R. M. A. colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, p. 39.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p. 39.

<sup>100</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/6, 1944, p. 3.

## **African participation in Trade**

The section below turns to consider African increasing dominance in trade from the 1930s to 1945. It analyses why Africans displaced Indians in trade in rural South Nyanza at the various trading centres, after the establishment of the Local Native Councils.

Kitching, in his study of economic change in Kenya, has pointed out that African-owned enterprises such as shops, water-powered maize mills, carts and lorries owned by Africans became increasingly abundant from the 1930s to 1940s. He notes for instance, in Kikuyuland, administrative reports were full of remarks such as “the number of native dukas (shops) continued of course to multiply.” He observed further that even in a district like South Kavirondo (South Nyanza), where the sort of development which in Central and North Kavirondo had taken place in the late 1920s were more typical of the 1930s, the District Officer could contend himself with the observation that “small native dukas are springing up all over the reserves.”<sup>101</sup>

The period from the 1930s to 1945 was characterised by the most rapid increase in African engagement in trade to have occurred since the start of the colonial rule. As was noted earlier, Asians dominated trade in South Nyanza and Nyanza more generally from the beginning of the colonial era. Then in 1925 Local Native Councils were granted powers to issue trading licenses in the markets and trading centres.<sup>102</sup> This marked the first time that Africans started to play a major role in trade since they received trading licenses from the

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<sup>101</sup> Kitching, G. Class and Economic Change in Kenya, pp. 169-170.

<sup>102</sup> Buttermann, J. M. ‘Luo Social Formation in Change’, p. 184.

Local Native Councils. The pre-1930s trading centres in South Nyanza were mostly reserved for Asian traders. But from the 1930s, newly established produce markets were allocated to African traders. Most of these produce markets were located in the rural areas, far away from the gazetted trading centres. The 1935 Marketing of Native Produce Ordinance for Nyanza Province made provision for the quality control of produce and also fixed physical distances between trading centres and produce markets.<sup>103</sup> Table 5: 7 below provides a list of the details of the market inspection scheme in force during 1934.

**TABLE 5: 7**

**MARKET INSPECTION SCHEME IN SOUTH KSVIRONDO DURING 1934**

<b>Trading Centres</b>	<b>Crops Inspected</b>	<b>No. of Inspectors</b>	<b>Cost Per Month</b>
Kisii	Maize, Beans	2	Shs. 40/-
Homa-Bay	Groundnuts, Sim-sim	1	Shs. 20/-
Kendu-Bay	Groundnuts, Sim-sim	1	Shs. 20/-
Marindi	Groundnuts, Sim-sim	1	Shs. 20/-
Mirogi	Groundnuts, Sim-sim, Maize	2	Shs. 28/-
Rangwe	Groundnuts, Sim-sim, Maize	1	Shs. 20/-
Riane	Groundnuts, Sim-sim, Maize	1	Shs. 20/-
		10	Shs. 188/-

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI /1/4, 1933-1939, p. 6.

<sup>103</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy, pp. 156-159.

The number of inspectors varied according to the supply of agricultural produce to the buying centres. The Inspection Scheme was intended to obtain clean and pure samples of crop produce.<sup>104</sup>

The increasing participation in trade by Africans from the 1930s was noted by the District Officer Mr. C.W. Buxton in 1933:

The present position is that the native during the last five years who had started in a small way trading in cattle, sheep and goats has begun trading in produce and is erecting small shops. He trades in very small margins of profit due to competition from his fellow traders and can never be said to be prey on other natives. He buys produce at some distance from the trade centre and brings it in lots of 5 or 6 bags in his ox cart. At the trade centre or railhead to which he brings his produce, he can meet a European Buying Agent, as is done in the Kikuyu Reserve, who buys direct from him, and forwards the produce direct to the coast.

Now this form of trading is a severe check on any profiteering by Indian traders who have to keep their prices for produce up to meet this competition. If there had been a sufficiency of native traders in South Kavirondo (South Nyanza) during the 1933 groundnuts season, buyers from Kisumu could have been obtained to deal

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<sup>104</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report for 1934, p. 6.

with them and the “ring” formed by certain Indians in the trading centres would have been smashed.<sup>105</sup>

The increasing engagement in trade by Africans in South Nyanza from the 1930s was also taking place in other regions in Nyanza. For instance, Maxon, in his study of Vihiga established that entrepreneurship represented another venue for mitigating Vihiga’s poverty and enhancing economic development for at least some households during the decade.<sup>106</sup>

At this point (prior to the 1930s) when Asian shopkeepers continued to dominate in trade, there were only twenty trading centres.<sup>107</sup> In the 1940s, the pattern changed, African traders began to move into the trading centres as well. For instance, in 1943, the Local Native Council issued thirty-one trading licenses for shops and all were issued to African traders. In the same year, thirty new produce markets reserved for African enterprise had been started in South Nyanza. The Department of Agriculture Annual Report for 1938 noted with concern the increase of African traders in Nyanza and Central Provinces, and recommended that they could remain in “their proper places”, namely, in the small local (produce) markets as opposed to the Trading Centres that were the domain of the Indian traders. Colonial officials were of the view that Africans should not compete with the long

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<sup>105</sup> KNA, Burton, C. W. District Officer, to Provincial Commissioner (H. R. Montgomery) 29<sup>th</sup> December 1933, T & C 1/1/3 (3/953) NZA.

<sup>106</sup> Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways, p. 188.

<sup>107</sup> KNA, Burton, C. W. District Officer, to Provincial Commissioner (H. R. Montgomery) 29<sup>th</sup> December 1933, T&C 1/3/3(3/953), NZA, pp. 194-195.



established Indian traders. Africans were supposed to buy small quantities of produce at the local markets and transport them for sale at the railheads or at the trading centres.<sup>108</sup>

This African take-over of previously Asian dominated business was not only confined to grain trade, but also extended to the dairy industry. From the early days of the colonial rule, South Nyanza had exported ghee in large quantities. In 1913, its value was estimated at Rs. 10,954.<sup>109</sup> The ghee industry expanded in the 1920s and was one of the top cash earners for the households in South Nyanza; see Table 4: 5 (page 264) and Table 4: 7 (page 270). Up to the late 1920s, the Asian traders dominated the ghee industry in South Nyanza.<sup>110</sup>

A shift in the ghee industry from Asian to African domination occurred during the 1930s, at the same time that Africans started dominating trade at the produce markets and trading centres. The Marketing of Native Produce Regulations of 1935, that conferred on the Local Native Councils authority to grant licenses to separator owners, allowed Africans to displace Asians traders from the ghee trade. As early as 1932, one hundred African-owned separators operated in the district. By 1933, out of approximately six hundred dairies, 215 were owned by Africans.<sup>111</sup> In 1937, there were as many as six hundred and thirty native licensed separators in the district.<sup>112</sup> At the end of 1936, out of 560 dairy licenses, in South

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<sup>108</sup> KNA, The Department of Agriculture Annual Report, 1938, p. 120, see also Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', pp. 233-234.

<sup>109</sup> KNA, Crampton, D. R. South Kavirondo, AR 1912-13.

<sup>110</sup> Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', pp. 195-196.

<sup>111</sup> KNA, 'Minutes of a Meeting with the Deputation of the Native Chambers of Commerce', 15-2-1933, T & C 10/1/3 (3/1028) NZA, see also Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation Change', p. 196.

<sup>112</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District: Political Record Book, 1930-1940, DC/KSI/3/5, 1939, p. 2.

Nyanza, only 140 were held by thirty-two Asians.<sup>113</sup> At the end of July 1937, 587 dairies were in existence, all of which were African-owned. Between 1937 and 1939, only five Asians applied for licenses to the Local Native Council and were turned down.<sup>114</sup>

Some Asian traders had sponsored certain African traders as their middlemen in the grain and ghee trade. Mr. Tomkinson, the Provincial Commissioner noted:

There were many Indians who bought separators and churns, and had financed natives to erect dairies in the reserves, which were operated by the natives. It was not always clear whether the Indian owned the dairy and the native was his employer or whether the native owned the dairy and was in the position of having had his equipment advanced to him by the Indian. There were many intermediate relationships between these two.

During 1936, native agitation for the elimination of the Indian traders became acute. It appeared just to hold that, where the Indian claimed to own the premises, he should be required to apply for a lease and that, even if he did not claim to own the premises, the dairy licenses should be made out in the name of the native owner. Applications for lease were made but the Local Native Council could not be persuaded to agree to them. Indians then sold their separators or rather, in nearly all cases, made them over

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<sup>113</sup> KNA, K.L. Hunter, District Commissioner, to Provincial Commissioner, 4-9-1937, AGR 12/3 (2/924) NZA, see also Buttermann, J.M., 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 196.

<sup>114</sup> KNA, District Commissioner, South Kavirondo (K.L. Hunter), to Provincial Commissioner, 24-2-1939.

on terms to their native employees, who were then issued with the license. The dairy went on as before and there was hardly one that had been closed.<sup>115</sup>

By the mid 1930, the economic position of the province and Africans in it had radically changed. The District Annual Report for 1935 observed:

If we look back ten years in the history of this province, we find that the direct revenue derived from the natives then was very much the same as it was now but the source from which they met it were widely different. Administrative Officers can remember the long line of specie boxes on porters' heads taking hut tax to the banks and know that most of that money was sent away by train down country. It would not be great exaggeration to visualize the economic position of the time as a constant drain of money leaving the province and a constant stream of natives going out and fetching it back in the form of wages. That is not a happy state of things for the local trade or local production.

Today the position is quite different. The money does not leave the province. On the contrary, both the National Bank of India, which are the government bankers, and the Standard Bank of South Africa imported more money into the province during the year than they exported. The wages earned by the natives by work inside the province is not less than about £260,000 while agriculture and animal husbandry shows exports on certain tabulated items totalling £177,459. There must be a great many other items

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<sup>115</sup> KNA, S. H. Fazan Provincial Commissioner, to Colonial Secretary, 24-8-1931, AGR 12/3 (2/924).

of which no record is kept. After adding in the wages earned by contracted labourers outside the province it is probable that the total earnings of the natives in the province from production and wages are a little more than a million pounds. After deduction the £202,000 odd pounds, which they paid to government in the hut tax, they still had the balance to spend, and even what they paid to government eventually finds its way into circulation again.<sup>116</sup>

Evidence from South Nyanza shows that by 1945 trade in agricultural and livestock products were in African hands.<sup>117</sup> But what is also evident is that the Asians still controlled the transportation of commodities to the control buyers. Even in the transport sector, however, Africans had already started showing signs of penetration. By 1944, one lorry was owned by an African trader.<sup>118</sup>

In sum, the period from 1930 to 1945 was marked by a shift in the pattern of trade from Asian to African domination. Africans controlled trade at both the produce markets and trading centres in rural South Nyanza.

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<sup>116</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report for 1935, pp. 102-103.

<sup>117</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/6, 1944, p. 6.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

## **The Second World War, 1939 to 1945**

During the initial years of colonial rule, clothes were mainly associated with those who were part of the colonial administration or engaged in migrant wage labour. But by the 1930s, clothes were a general fashion among the people of South Nyanza and the province more generally. The introduction of cotton as a cash crop in South Nyanza enhanced the process of the acquisition of clothes by many women in South Nyanza. Women who were engaged in cotton production did so not only to meet tax requirements but also to buy manufactured products such as dresses, which were becoming *de rigueur* for the inhabitants of South Nyanza during the 1930s.<sup>119</sup> The South Kavirondo District Annual Report for 1939 observed:

Jaluo (a Luo) is often quite a wealthy man as a result of wages earned at work, returns from cash crops, and the profit from the dairy products. He indulges his fancy for spending mainly in the very things he formerly was notable for not possessing, namely clothes. The Jaluo before colonial rule, lived stark naked as a rule, a healthy and suitable enough form of living for a people used to living by water in a hot climate, nowadays they are perhaps the most overdressed natives in Kenya and are most prone to aping European fashion in clothes.<sup>120</sup>

The outbreak of the Second World War, 1939 to 1945 further accelerated the process of change in South Nyanza. As was the case in the First World War, the households in South

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<sup>119</sup> Butterman, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 164.

<sup>120</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Political Record Book, 1930-1940, DC/KSI/3/5, 1939, p. 2.

Nyanza once again became involved in the war directly or indirectly. The war impacted on the people of South Nyanza and Nyanza more widely in various ways. This is examined in detail in the next chapter.

Not all who joined the war went voluntarily, as the study by Hay demonstrates.<sup>121</sup> Provision for conscripted labour continued and was the most unpopular of all war duties. The Provincial Annual Report for 1944 admitted that despite its unpopularity, the quotas were almost fulfilled, 12,844 being the figure for 1943.<sup>122</sup>

The Second World War had various effects. First, the people of South Nyanza were called upon to increase food production to feed the troops. In spite of the large number of men recruited to serve in the war, production of agricultural produce still increased. For instance, the Nyanza Province Annual Report for 1942 noted that the export of cereals from August, when the crops began to come to the market, to the end of the year was approximately 40,000 bags, a record figure.<sup>123</sup> In South Nyanza, the District Annual Report for 1943 recorded an increased acreage under cultivation, but that adverse weather conditions had culminated in the failure of the short rains for the second year in succession. As a result, exports of agricultural produce fell by nearly 14,000 bags. Table 5:4 (page 323) thus shows the 1943 decline in short rain crops such as wimbi (finger millet), beans, sim-sim and chiroko (pulse).<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 193.

<sup>122</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1944, p. 2.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. p. 2

<sup>124</sup> KNA, South Nyanza District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/5, 1943, p. 8.

During the war, agricultural production increased at the same time, the absence of men notwithstanding. This is shown in Table 5: 5 (page 327). This contradictory situation can only be explained from a gender perspective. As most men left the reserves to participate in the war, more agricultural work fell on women and the few men who remained at home. Women had to produce more food crops to meet war demands as well as domestic needs.

The households in South Nyanza were also required to supply livestock to feed the troops. South Nyanza contributed about 100 head of cattle per month.<sup>125</sup> One interviewee recalled:

The colonial administration confiscated livestock and food crops from the households and used to feed the troops. When jonanga (The colonial officials in the context used here) came to the village, the people just ran away. The officials then confiscated livestock and also entered granaries and took food crops.<sup>126</sup>

The Nyanza Province Annual Report for 1942 remarked that in 1942, approximately 14,000 head of cattle were sold to the colonial administration to feed the troops. The Report acknowledged that since the beginning of the war, 27,000 head of cattle had been sold. The report noted with concern that such a contribution constituted a sacrifice on the part of the owners. It cautioned:

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<sup>125</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo Political Record Book, 1930-1940, DC/KSI /3/5, 1939, p. 2.

<sup>126</sup> Interviews With: Timothy Toro.

It would not be right to leave this without uttering a word of caution. The position should be kept permanently under review lest serious economic damage results from an excessive consumption of stock, which is really capital.<sup>127</sup>

In South Nyanza, the Annual Report for 1943 noted that more cattle were demanded as the district was given the high quota of 11,000 head. By the end of the year, the Supply Board had bought 11,411 head of cattle. It was not likely that such a high figure could be maintained for long.<sup>128</sup>

South Nyanza suffered the greatest drain of livestock of all the other four districts that constituted Nyanza Province. For instance, it has been noted that from the beginning of the war up to the end of 1942, a total of 27,000 head of cattle had been sold to the Supply Board and out of that, South Nyanza alone supplied 11,411 head of cattle up to 1943. This meant that the other four districts had only supplied about 15,000 head of cattle, amounting to about 3,700 per district.

The households in South Nyanza and Nyanza as a whole also contributed to war funds. Two special funds were started, the Nyanza Ambulance Fund and the Nyanza Central War Fund. By the end of 1940, the monies subscribed to the Ambulance Fund had reached £4,243 and to the Central War Fund £1,970. The proceeds of the fund were sent to England

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<sup>127</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1942, p. 3.

<sup>128</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/5, 1943, p. 2.



through the Kenya Central War Fund, but Ambulance Fund monies were spent in Kenya providing for one Mobile Surgical Unit and six ambulances.<sup>129</sup>

In 1941, the earnings of Nyanzan people fell not far short of £900,000. This figure was exceeded in 1942. The record export of produce and special remittances expanded the amount of money in circulation in the province. The result was some degree of inflation. The price of livestock in particular doubled and caused concern to butchers in the townships.<sup>130</sup> The Provincial Commissioner for Nyanza commented on increased prices of goods in 1940:

The prices of most things which the people of the province used to buy had gone up since the war and it could be difficult to prove that his extra earnings had kept pace with the amount of ocular evidence of prosperity and there was more money circulating in the reserve than usual.<sup>131</sup>

In sum, it is noted that when the war broke out, the people of South Nyanza and Nyanza generally engaged in the war because of the opportunities such as financial gains they received from the war efforts. Many households in South Nyanza increased their agricultural output due to the war demands, the manpower drain notwithstanding.

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<sup>129</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1940, PC/NZA 1/35, p. 6.

<sup>130</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1942, p. 4.

<sup>131</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1940 PC/NZA 1/35, p. 7.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the increased agricultural production that occurred between 1930 and 1945 was the result of the spread and incorporation of new crops and agricultural implements into the economy of the households in South Nyanza. The overall impact of this was to confirm the principal position of agriculture in the local economy. Secondly, the expansion of agriculture led to the establishment of a network of local markets and trading centres in South Nyanza. This, coupled with the cessation of pre-colonial raiding, promoted to a certain extent economic integration within and without South Nyanza. The integration opened up more opportunities for the local population. For instance, the livestock trade was entrenched in the area and the adjacent regions. Trade in agricultural produce was equally significant. The trade was more advanced and secure than that of the pre-colonial era. Security was provided by the colonial state.

From the 1930s, the emphasis that was placed on agricultural production affected the sexual division of labour in South Nyanza. It was possible that both men and women worked harder on their farms during the colonial period than in the pre-colonial era in order to meet the new colonial demands. But since most men engaged in migrant wage labour outside the district, it implied that more agricultural work fell on women than before. Women had to perform agricultural duties such as clearing bushes, which were previously done by men. This mostly applied to women whose husbands went out on migrant wage labour. But one needs to avoid generalisation here. Some husbands who engaged in migrant

wage labour were able to remit money to their wives at home to hire local labour for agricultural production. Such women then did not perform men's duties on farms.<sup>132</sup>

The increasing state involvement in the provision of Western education in South Nyanza from the 1930s enhanced the integration of the households in the area into colonial economic order. Western education was part and parcel of the integration into colonial capitalism. The more the households in South Nyanza acquired Western education the more they appreciated the values and advantages of colonial capitalism. There was a direct correlation between Western education and engagement in colonial capitalism

This chapter has shown that commodity production and migrant wage labour went hand in hand rather than one precluding the other. One of the consequences of increased agricultural production from the 1930s was engagement in migrant wage labour during the corresponding period. This can be explained from the point of view that from the 1930s, most households in South Nyanza had been incorporated into colonial capitalism through the process of peasantisation and proletarianisation.

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<sup>132</sup> Interviews With: Maritha Onduru, Rusalina Onduru.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **WAGE LABOUR PERSPECTIVES, 1920 TO 1945**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

By 1920 the majority of households in South Nyanza were increasingly engaging in migrant wage labour. However, labour from the area was not entirely voluntary. Taxation was still the major push factor that forced most men from South Nyanza to engage in wage labour. As this chapter shows, by 1922, most households in South Nyanza were now voluntarily engaging in wage labour. The major contributing factor to this was the establishment of infrastructure that connected South Nyanza to other regions of economic activity. This enabled the households in South Nyanza to become acquainted with existing labour opportunities elsewhere. By the 1930s, wage labour had become a way of life for a majority of households in South Nyanza.

Existing general accounts of Kenya's colonial labour history such as those of Van Zwanenberg and Tignor have rightly argued that taxation was a major factor that compelled Africans to leave their rural areas to go and engage in migrant wage labour. These studies have also emphasised that population pressure in areas in which agricultural resources were increasingly becoming scarce, forced households in such areas to seek migrant wage labour

to meet colonial demands.<sup>1</sup> While this study of South Nyanza concurs with these findings, evidence from South Nyanza shows that other pressing needs such as the desire to acquire Western imported goods, school fees and money for bridewealth equally forced households in South Nyanza to engage in migrant wage labour. Other general studies of Kenya's colonial migrant wage labour, for instance those of Kitching and Stichter, have taken into account regional variations in response to colonial wage labour opportunities. These studies have stressed that in the years prior to World War 1, Kenya's labour supply came principally from the most densely populated areas of Kiambu, central and north Kavirondo districts.<sup>2</sup> Regional studies of Nyanza such as those by Fearn, Hay and Maxon have also emphasised regional variations in the response to migrant wage labour. They stress that areas which experienced population pressure when they were colonised such as north and Central Kavirondo districts entered migrant wage labour before the First World War.<sup>3</sup> This study of South Nyanza corroborates these findings, but also establishes that even within South Nyanza, there were variations in entry to colonial migrant wage labour.

This chapter attempts to demonstrate that the establishment of infrastructure in South Nyanza was crucial in accelerating the incorporation of the households in South Nyanza into migrant wage labour. The construction of roads that connected South Nyanza to the main centres of economic activity encouraged the people of South Nyanza to engage in wage labour opportunities that were available in various parts of the Protectorate. This

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<sup>1</sup> Tignor, R. M. The Colonial Transformation of Kenya; Van Zwanenburg, R. M. A. Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya.

<sup>2</sup> Kitching, G. Class and Economic Change in Kenya; Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya.

<sup>3</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy; Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland'; Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways.

study also illustrates that the establishment of centres of economic activities within reach of the households in South Nyanza contributed to their engagement in migrant wage labour. The chapter demonstrates that by the 1930s, migrant wage labour had become a way of life for a majority of households in South Nyanza.

### **CHANGES IN LABOUR PATTERNS, 1920 TO 1930**

Towards the close of the First World War, the labour shortage persisted. This forced the colonial state to introduce the infamous kipande registration system that came into force in 1920. The kipande system seems to have provided a key to an increase in and a more regular supply of labour from the reserves. As Hay has pointed out, the system was patterned after South African pass laws and required each male over the age of 16 to be registered and to carry the registration certificate (kipande) wherever he went.<sup>4</sup> The kipande also doubled as a work record. It aimed at providing white settlers with a reliable labour supply from the reserves. Popularly known by the Swahili word kipande, the identity document, as Maxon emphasises, was detested by Africans, not only as it served to facilitate their working for the white settlers, but also because it clearly demonstrated their second-class status.<sup>5</sup>

The kipande system was aimed at systematising labour control measures. Once a person was registered as a worker, he could not be deregistered. The kipande was used as an

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<sup>4</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland: Kowe', pp. 161-162.

<sup>5</sup> Maxon, R. M. 'The Years of Revolutionary Advances, 1920-1929', in Ochieng', W. R. (ed.), A Modern History of Kenya, pp. 72-73.

instrument by which the colonial administration could monitor labour supply from the reserves. The system enhanced the enforcement of labour contracts between the employers and the employees. The kipande system allowed employers to trace deserters and to repossess them. For instance, Zeleza has noted that in 1921, out of 2,790 reported desertions, 2,364 were traced and returned to their employers.<sup>6</sup> The onus of tracing deserters fell on the chiefs and their respective headmen. The kipande system also subverted workers rights in various ways. For instance, it restricted workers' freedom to change their employers. The system was also punitive in the sense that it contributed to the standardisation of low wages since it made it impossible for workers to bargain with one employer for a higher wage, since his new wage was to be pegged to his first wage recorded on his kipande.<sup>7</sup>

Studies such as those by Hay, Wolff, and Zeleza have argued that the kipande system restricted the workers freedom to change their employers.<sup>8</sup> Data from South Nyanza indicates that this was not the case. As this thesis demonstrates, a number of interviewees who changed employers even thrice in a year did not mention any restrictions encountered because of the kipande system.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Zeleza, T. 'The Establishment of Colonial Rule, 1905-1920', in Ochieng', W. R. (ed.), A Modern History of Kenya, p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', pp. 161-162; Wolff, R. D. Britain and Kenya, p. 119; Zeleza, T. 'The Establishment of Colonial Rule, 1905-1920', in Ochieng', W. R. (ed.), A Modern History of Kenya, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> Interviews with: Benson Mikingo, Nicholas Ateng, Naftaly Arua, Caleb Oduar, Laus Owaga.

In an attempt to extract more labour from the reserves, the colonial government published the Northey circulars of 1919. The circulars that emanated from the Governor, Sir Edward Northey, instructed district administrators to “induce” an adequate supply of labour from the reserves. The circulars notified chiefs and headmen that it was “part of their duty” to assist in labour recruitment in their respective jurisdictions. A further order of 1920 provided for a compulsory requisition of paid African porters, with no more than sixty days of service per year to be required from any one man.<sup>10</sup> As Hay candidly argued, the rationale behind these separate measures was the assumption by the colonial administrators that Africans were spending leisure time in the reserves and were unwilling to respond to the economic motivation provided by colonialism.<sup>11</sup> Berman and Lonsdale in a study of ‘The Development of the Labour Control Systems in Kenya’ observed that the ideological underpinnings of the labour system were completed by the rationalisation of coercion through what Barnett calls the ‘theory of organisation of native labour’ which was influential within the entire imperial tradition:

There are three assumptions in this line of thought: first, native labour by its nature is recalcitrant, and therefore requires authoritarian treatment; second, native labour lacks initiative, and therefore requires very detailed directives and instructions; and

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<sup>10</sup> Wrigley, C. C. ‘Patterns of Economic Life, 1902-1945’, in Harlow, V. and Chilver, E. M. (ed.), History of East Africa, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965, p. 237.

<sup>11</sup> Hay, J. M. ‘Economic Change in Luoland’, p. 162.



third, native labour can, within certain limits, be improved, and the ‘civilizing’ functions of authoritarian methods in some way legitimise those methods.<sup>12</sup>

Quoting John Ainsworth, the Nyanza Provincial Commissioner, who reported that those societies that supplied the most produce also supplied the most labour. Stichter observed that outlying less populous districts such as Nyeri, Meru, Kamba, Giriama and South Kavirondo (South Nyanza) had not entered the labour market despite taxation since they were able to expand sales of produce or stock to meet colonial demands.<sup>13</sup>

Table 6: 1 below shows regional variations on labour participation in Nyanza Province, 1912-1929.

**TABLE 6: 1**

**LABOUR PARTICIPATION IN NYANZA PROVINCE DURING 1912 – 1929**

		Monthly average reported in employment (except 1912-13)	Estimated able-bodied adult male population	% in employment	
1912-13	Central	16,414	45,024	36.5	19.5
	North	9,939	72,360	13.7	
	South	4,707	41,808	11.3	
	Total	31,060	159,192		

<sup>12</sup> Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. ‘Crises of Accumulation, Coercion and the Colonial State: The Development of the Labour Control System, 1919-1929’, in Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. Unhappy Valley, p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya, p. 43.

1921	Central	15,361	44,844	34.3	27.5
	North	15,220	46,361	32.8	
	South	4,817	37,532	12.8	
	Total	35,398	128,737		
1922	Total	44,952	129,990		34.6
1924	Total	45,719	126,720		36.1
1926	Central	21,867	54,215	40.3	39.1
	North	27,332	52,038	52.5	
	South	9,610	44,259	28.7	
	Total	58,809	150,512		
1927	Central	20,317	51,936	39.1	34.3
	North	22,449	50,240	44.7	
	South	8,972	48,640	18.4	
	Total	51,738	150,816		
1928	Central	21,713	59,207	36.7	33.8
	North	24,043	53,254	45.1	
	South	9,597	51,282	18.7	
	Total	55,353	163,743		
1929	Central	22,696	61,720	36.8	34.7
	North	24,474	55,454	44.1	
	South	11,616	52,070	22.3	
	Total	58,786	169,244		

**Source:** KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Reports, 1912-13, 1922, 1926-1929,

Extracted in Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya: Capitalism and African Response, 1895-1975, Longman, London, 1982, pp. 54-55.

Stichter contended that part of the explanation for these regional variations, as reflected in Table 6: 1 lay in the varying population densities. She observed that in 1915-1916, John

Ainsworth estimated the approximate number of acres of land per head in each district to be 2.7 in Central Kavirondo, 4.1 in North Kavirondo, 7.1 in South Kavirondo, 9.1 in Lumbwa (Kipsigis) district and 10.6 in Nandi.<sup>14</sup> Stichter noted that these reflect an exactly inverse correlation to the rate of labour participation. She accepted that part of the explanation also lay in the existence of powerful and co-operative chiefs. Central Kavirondo district for example had some powerful Luo chiefs. She also observed that in some cases, certain chiefs could be perceived to be powerful, yet not able to produce large amounts of labour. This, she noted was the case among the Luhyia (North Kavirondo) before World War 1. Evidence from this study reveals that one further critical influence in South Nyanza was the presence of the Seventh-Day Adventists mission in the area, which contributed to low-level incorporation of many households into migrant wage labour.

By 1920, most of labour from the area was still not voluntary, but forced. The area District Commissioner, Mr. Barker noted in his Annual Report for 1920 that the total number of those who had left the district to work during the year (the last 3 months, as very few went out prior to January 1st) was not far short of 5,000 men.<sup>15</sup> He also admitted:

There was no use in blinking the fact that the majority of this labour was not voluntary – it was ordered out by the chiefs and elders, under instructions from me in the hope that once the young men had taken the plunge and find that they did not die

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<sup>14</sup> Stichter, S. *Migrant Labour in Kenya*, pp. 55-56; KNA, Nyanza Province AR, 1915-1916, Annex, p. 62.

<sup>15</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-5-1920, p. 122.

en masse, and were not starved and ill-treated there would be a more or less steady flow of voluntary labour in the future.<sup>16</sup>

Table 6: 2 below shows labour return for the year 1919-1920.

**TABLE 6: 2**

**LABOUR REGISTERED FOR WORK OUTSIDE AND INSIDE THE DISTRICT**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Inside</b>	<b>Outside</b>	<b>Total</b>
1919-1920	322	234	556

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-5-1920, p. 122.

The South Kavirondo District Annual Report for 1921 acknowledged that it was difficult to get labour from the Luo, chiefly owing to opposition, sometimes openly avowed, of the elders. The report noted that those who had left before Christmas departed as a result of constant pressure.<sup>17</sup>

It is evident that by 1921, men from South Nyanza who engaged in migrant wage labour preferred a six month contract.<sup>18</sup> This indicates a change in the pattern of the number of months men from the area were engaging in migrant wage labour. Between 1915 and 1917,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 122.

<sup>17</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report for 31-3-1921, p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 36.

most men from South Nyanza were engaged in migrant wage labour on three to five month contracts.<sup>19</sup> The change can be explained by the way households' financial needs were increasing, in response to which they went out on longer contracts. Table 6: 3 below shows labour returns for the year 1920-21.

**TABLE 6: 3**

**LABOUR REGISTERED FOR WORK OUTSIDE AND INSIDE THE DISTRICT**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Inside</b>	<b>Outside</b>	<b>Total</b>
1920-21	141	3,148	3,289

**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, 31-3-1921, p. 36.

Table 6: 3 above shows a massive increase in migrant labour outside the district compared to Table 6: 2. The increase could be attributed to the effects of the depression of 1919-1920. This, of course, was in addition to increasing financial obligations many South Nyanza households had to meet.

It was not only livestock wealth that enabled most households in South Nyanza to avoid migrant wage labour. Other factors, that have already been noted, also played a role. Arrighi in a study of labour supplies in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) concluded that the comparatively small effort-price of cash income earnable through the sale of produce was

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<sup>19</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report for 31-3-1917, p. 235.

in fact the main factor that restrained African engagement in the labour market. He recognised that this was traceable to low population pressure on the land.<sup>20</sup> These findings by Arrighi corroborate Stichter's which as has already been noted.<sup>21</sup>

Up to 1920, taxation was the push factor that forced a majority of men from South Nyanza to engage in migrant wage labour. This is evident on administrative reports. For instance, the South Kavirondo District Annual Report for 1921 noted:

In January and February, with the approach of Hut Tax, the Jaluo were beginning to go out more freely but the falling demand has checked the tendency, and even the Kisii, without the constant reminders, which are only possible with a steady demand, were not coming in to look for work as before.<sup>22</sup>

In a related report, it was noted that the Jaluo and border "tribes" had gone out to work in order to pay tax.<sup>23</sup> A similar report the following year, 1922, observed:

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<sup>20</sup> Arrighi, G. 'Labour Supplies in Historical Perspective: A Study of Proletarianization of the African Peasantry in Rhodesia', in Arrighi, G. and Saul, J. S. Essays on the Political Economy of Africa, Monthly Review Press, New York, London, 1973, p. 193.

<sup>21</sup> Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya, pp. 55-56.

<sup>22</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-3-1921, p. 36.

<sup>23</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District: Historical and Customs of Kisii and Luo between 1911 and 1924, DC/KSI/3/2, 1920-1921, Annual Report, 1921, p. 238.

The Luo had not offered for work outside the reserve to any appreciable extent except during Hut Tax collection which approximately 2,947 contracted themselves for work in order to realise their hut and poll taxes. It appears almost impossible to get the Luo of this district to enter the labour field except under dire necessity.<sup>24</sup>

This was in sharp contrast to the other two Kavirondo districts, Central and North Kavirondo, which had entered migrant wage labour by the first decade of colonial rule. Maxon, in a recent study of Vihiga, which was part of North Kavirondo District, concluded that by the second half of the 1920s, wage labour had become an economic fact of life for many Vihiga households. He noted that in 1926, more than 29,000 men from North Kavirondo were in employment outside the district, almost 50% of the able-bodied male population between 15 and 40 years of age.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, Francis, in a study of Koguta, observed that in Central Kavirondo large-scale labour migration began in the second decade of colonial rule.<sup>26</sup>

The humanitarians in England condemned the use of compulsory labour in Kenya and vehemently opposed the Northey circulars. This led to a strong-worded dispatch from the Secretary of State, Winston Churchill in 1921 that instructed the administration in Kenya to

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<sup>24</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913 – 1923, Annual Report, 31-12-1922, p. 58.

<sup>25</sup> Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways, p. 45.

<sup>26</sup> Francis, E. 'Migration and Changing Division of Labour', Africa, p. 200.

stop recruiting labour for private employers.<sup>27</sup> In Nyanza Province, Archdeacon W.E. Owen of the Church Missionary Society constantly criticised the use of forced labour, and more particularly the use of children and women as labourers. Owen succeeded in keeping the issue of forced labour alive in British politics. In an attempt to put a stop to what he perceived as the abuses of the forced labour system, he wrote constantly to the provincial administration criticising the use of forced labour. He also wrote to the British press and to the Labour Government in 1930 in which he complained against the use of old men, women and children in forced labour. The Labour Circulars of 1919 encouraged the use of women and children as labourers. The circulars stated that when farms were close to the reserves, women and children could be encouraged to seek employment.<sup>28</sup>

Owen noted that chiefs were unable to find able-bodied men for Public Works since “such large drafts were taken out of the reserves,” they had therefore had recourse to compelling women and girls to undertake the work. During 1921 and 1922, Owen maintained a lengthy correspondence with the local administration in Nyanza, complaining of the illegal use of women and children for cutting grass, which they were then required to ferry for long distances for poor pay and with inadequate provisions for the journey. Van Zwanenberg pointed out that when wage levels were not rising fast enough to increase the labour supply to the level of demand, the use of female and child labour was one method of increasing the supply. He observed that the evidence does not make clear the manner in which child

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<sup>27</sup> Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, cmd. 1509, ‘Despatch to the Officers Administering the Government of Kenya Colony and Protectorate Relating to Native Labour’, quoted in Hay, J. M. ‘Economic Change in Luoland’, p. 166.

<sup>28</sup> The Labour Circulars Printed in HCSP, vol. 33, 1920, cmd. 873, quoted in Tignor, R. L. The Colonial Transformation of Kenya, p. 167.



labour was obtained, but that it does point to the fact that the flow of child labour was increasing.<sup>29</sup> Evidence from the administration supported Owen's complaints of the use of child labour. In 1925, for instance, the Nyanza Provincial labour officer, Mr. P. de V. Allen, noted in his Annual Report:

An increasing number of Kavirondo juveniles are employed on the sisal estates in the Thika, Donyo Sabouk and Fort Hall Districts, also in the fuel and ballast camps on the main line... The number of immature boys on the Thika-Nyeri construction, main line camps and sisal plantations appears to me to be steadily increasing.<sup>30</sup>

More evidence that gives credence to Owen's criticism of the use of child labour is contained in the Nyanza Province Annual Report for 1925:

The Joluo (the Luo) were gradually ceasing to become agricultural labourers, and such that were available for this work were mainly young boys who were idle and inefficient in the extreme. They (the Luo) generally seemed to prefer working in sisal factories, at docks and not on farms.<sup>31</sup>

The protests by Archdeacon Owen contributed to some positive reforms in the use of forced labour in Nyanza Province. Owen himself attested to the fact that the labour

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<sup>29</sup> Van Zwanenberg, R. M. A. Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, p. 145.

<sup>30</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA, 3-10-1917, p. de V. Allen to C.N.C. 28-7-1925, quoted in Van Zwanenberg, R. M. A. Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, p.145.

<sup>31</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA, 1925, P. 35.

situation in Nyanza had improved since the early 1930s. He summarised the changes that had occurred between 1920 and 1934:

Then forced labour for private employers was fairly common, now it does not exist; then forced labour on the roads was universal in the reserves and women and children formed the majority of those in the road gangs, now it is a rare thing to see women or children at work on roads and much of the labour which used to be forced and unpaid is now voluntary paid labour.<sup>32</sup>

Evidence from South Nyanza reveals that compulsory labour continued to be in use in the 1920s. The 1925 Nyanza Province Annual Report noted that over 1,200 “natives” were compulsorily recruited from the Luo of South Kavirondo District for work on the Uasin Gishu Railway with the approval of the Secretary of State.<sup>33</sup> The report observed:

There is no reason to suppose that the natives resent compulsion on a definitive Government work, but it opened the way for bribery by the chiefs and the retainers, and it is mainly objectionable on these grounds.<sup>34</sup>

Wolff has noted that during the 1920s, the colony’s labour supply situation improved steadily, reaching levels of available labour that were satisfactory to the European

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<sup>32</sup> The Manchester Guardian, 25-4-1934, quoted in Van Zwanenberg, R. M. A. Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, p. 151.

<sup>33</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA, 1925, P. 35.

<sup>34</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA, 1925, P. 36.

employers.<sup>35</sup> This concurs with Hay's findings in her study of Kowe. She has argued that the fact that there was no marked decline in the labour supply after 1922, when the coercive element had largely been removed suggests that coercion had not been a major factor that forced labour out of the reserves. She noted that after 1922, a fair amount of freedom returned to the labour market, while the settlers' dire predictions of a disastrous shortage never eventuated. On the contrary, an ever increasing number of young men left the reserves in search of work, partly because of an increased acquaintance with, and desire for consumer goods, and partly because the general prosperity of the 1920s made possible higher wages for agricultural workers.<sup>36</sup> Hay also admitted that after 1922, labour migrants were able to engage themselves to employers of their choice.

Hay's view that after 1922 migrant wage labourers were able to engage themselves to employers that they knew, concurs with findings from South Nyanza. According to the Nyanza Province Annual Report for 1925, there was a growing tendency for the "native" to seek his own employment without being engaged either with Labour Agents or private recruiters. Labour Agents now operated more in the capacity of forwarding agents than recruiters. It observed:

The natives now days know quite well that they cannot be forced out to work, and were sufficiently alive to the situation to obtain very good terms and conditions for

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<sup>35</sup> Wolff, R. D. *Britain and Kenya*, p. 113.

<sup>36</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', pp. 166-167.

themselves. Ill-treatment of labour was a thing of the past, for the very good reason that an employer who does not treat his labour fairly would get none.<sup>37</sup>

In a related report, Mr. John Riddoch, one of the labour recruiters in Nyanza Province, wrote to the Provincial Commissioner in Kisumu in 1925:

Some three years ago... we perceived that the natives from Nyanza Province had learnt to distinguish between different localities and conditions of work and between different employers. This meant that they wanted to work for employers whom they liked or of whom they had had good reports, and it became increasingly difficult to persuade them to work in localities and with employers disliked by or unknown to them.<sup>38</sup>

As the 1920s progressed, the number of South Nyanza households who were engaging in migrant wage labour continued to increase. Table 6: 4 below shows labour returns for South Kavirondo for the year 1922.

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<sup>37</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA, 1925, PP. 35-36.

<sup>38</sup> 'Labour Agents Permits', 1925, quoted in Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya, pp. 82-83.

**TABLE 6: 4**

**COMPARATIVE DISTRICTS ENGAGEMENT IN MIGRANT WAGE LABOUR**  
**DURING 1926**

Contracted for work Outside the District	=	6,837
Contracted for work Inside the District	=	189
Sent to Kisumu to be contracted	=	717
Approximate number who went out on their own	=	1,000
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Total	=	8,743
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**Source:** KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-12-1922, p. 59.

The rate of wages paid in 1922 within the district was Shs. 8/- and Shs. 10/- per month without posho (maize meal) or 15 cents per day with maize meal. The rate of wages outside the district was Shs. 10/- to Shs. 16/- with maize meal.<sup>39</sup>

The 1922 labour returns as shown in Table 6: 4 above demonstrate that about 1,000 men had departed on their own on migrant wage labour. This, as has been noted, shows that the people of South Nyanza were becoming familiar with the labour market. Compared to Table 6: 2 and 6: 3, Table 6: 4 illustrates that more men from South Nyanza took part in

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<sup>39</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-12-1922, p. 59.

migrant wage labour in 1922. It is evident that in the 1920s more wage labour opportunities were opened up in a number of places in the country. The new centres of employment included Uasin-Gishy Railway, Kilindini pier and the Magadi Soda works.<sup>40</sup>

Table 6: 5 confirms that in South Nyanza many households were engaging in migrant wage labour in the 1920s. The table illustrates the total population for each district according to registration, the number of able-bodied male and the number out at work according to the registration rate each month during 1926.

**TABLE 6: 5**

**COMPARATIVE DISTRICTS ENGAGEMENT IN MIGRANT WAGE LABOUR**  
**DURING 1926**

	<b>Central Kavirondo</b>	<b>North Kavirondo</b>	<b>South Kavirondo</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Lumbwa</b>	<b>Nandi</b>
Total	337,158	323,617	275,240	936,015	63,130	-
Males	67,769	65,047	55,323	188,139	12,689	-

Number of Males out at Work

<b>January</b>	-	-	-	53,210	7,346
<b>February</b>	-	-	-	52,242	7,746

<sup>40</sup> Tignor, R. L. The Colonial Transformation of Kenya, p. 178; Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya, p. 37; KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-12-1922, p. 28.

<b>March</b>	20,783	25,177	8,525	54,485	8,425
<b>April</b>	19,639	26,355	9,147	55,141	7,931
<b>May</b>	22,296	27,411	9,496	59,203	8,197
<b>June</b>	21,110	27,134	9,945	58,189	8,313
<b>July</b>	21,970	26,551	9,535	58,056	8,144
<b>August</b>	21,987	26,285	9,638	57,910	8,982
<b>September</b>	21,689	26,657	9,706	58,052	8,480
<b>October</b>	22,474	29,272	10,022	61,768	8,482
<b>November</b>	23,162	29,213	10,129	62,504	8,452
<b>December</b>	23,558	29,266	9,950	62,783	8,911

**Source:** KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA/21, 1926, p. 50.

The figures for Nandi District could not be tabulated because they were unclear. Table 6: 5 above compared to Table 6: 4 shows increasing labour engagement by most households in South Nyanza. Compared to the other two Kavirondo districts: Central and North, South Kavirondo (South Nyanza) still shows the lowest participation rate in migrant wage labour. It is evident that by 1926, Labour Agents were still recruiting labour from South Nyanza. The 1926 Nyanza Province Annual Report admitted that South Kavirondo was the only district in which active professional recruiting was carried on in any extent, while people from the other districts chose their own employers without the aid of recruiters.<sup>41</sup> As Stichter has remarked in South Kavirondo, participation rates in migrant wage labour

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<sup>41</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA/21, 1926, P. 51.

remained below 25 per cent throughout the decade. She noted that even during the depression the Luo here had ‘not offered themselves for work outside the reserve to any appreciable extent except during the collection of tax when 2, 947 men were signed on...’ Only this dire necessity, it appeared, would bring them out into the labour market. She observed that administrators deplored the spirit of ‘passive resistance’ and the legacy of the cult of Mumbo in the area, and tended to resort to compulsion.<sup>42</sup> This study concurs with Stichter’s findings. But it is significant to point out that the households in South Nyanza were increasingly engaging in migrant wage labour as the 1920s progressed, though not at the high rate that Central and North Kavirondo districts were engaging.

Most households in South Nyanza continued to engage in migrant wage labour throughout the 1920s. Table 6: 6 on the next page, indicates increasing engagement of men from South Nyanza in migrant labour during 1929. The table shows the approximate total population for each district, the approximate number of able-bodied males and the number out at work, each month of the year.

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<sup>42</sup> Stichter , S. Migrant Labour in Kenya, p. 57.



**TABLE 6: 6**

**COMPARATIVE DISTRICTS ENGAGEMENT IN MIGRANT WAGE LABOUR**

**DURING 1929**

	<b>Central Kavirondo (including Kisumu- Londiani)</b>	<b>North Kavirondo</b>	<b>South Kavirondo</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Lumbwa</b>
Totals	583,853	344,865	323,820	1,052,516	65,590
Able-bodied males	63,720	55,454	52,070	169,244	16,372

Number of males out at work

<b>January</b>	21,603	23,793	10,592	56,059	6,771
<b>February</b>	21,616	23,426	10,860	65,909	6,770
<b>March</b>	21,724	23,757	11,110	56,591	6,820
<b>April</b>	22,519	24,309	11,778	56,906	6,729
<b>May</b>	23,516	26,496	12,350	62,164	6,860
<b>June</b>	24,173	26,355	12,337	63,170	6,956
<b>July</b>	24,687	26,080	12,372	61,559	6,831
<b>August</b>	23,567	24,368	12,650	59,975	6,825
<b>September</b>	22,901	23,689	11,867	58,407	6,802
<b>October</b>	22,676	25,693	11,603	57,572	6,024
<b>November</b>	22,315	23,957	11,154	57,420	6,576
<b>December</b>	21,911	24,277	10,992	57,250	6,531

Source: KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1929, p. 52.

Remarking upon the increasing participation of South Kavirondo (South Nyanza) households in migrant wage labour, the Nyanza Province Annual Report for 1929 indicated that the South Kavirondo (South Nyanza) district had kept above the 10,000 levels the whole year for the first time on record.<sup>43</sup>

Among the factors which expanded the participation by most households in South Nyanza in migrant wage labour by the 1920s was infrastructural improvement in South Nyanza in the 1920s<sup>44</sup> and gold mining activities in South Nyanza from 1924. Fearn, in a detailed study of gold mining in Nyanza, noted that from 1904, it had been known that gold existed in the neighbourhood of Lake Victoria.<sup>45</sup> He documented gold mining to the south of South Nyanza border, in the Lolgorien area, from 1925. The Nyanza Province Annual Report for 1924 remarked that during January and February there had been a considerable incursion of gold-seekers into the southern portion of South Kavirondo District in which nearly 3,000 claims were pegged out and registered. The report noted that prospectors complained of the difficulty of obtaining labour, and that the labourers in some cases had difficulty in getting their wages.<sup>46</sup> More gold mining in South Nyanza and Nyanza generally took place in the 1930s and 1940s. This will be discussed in the second section of this chapter.

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<sup>43</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1926, P. 53.

<sup>44</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, 31-12-1927, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Fearn, H. *An African Economy*, p. 123.

<sup>46</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA 1/19, 1924, p. 15.

Another significant economic undertaking in Nyanza Province in the 1920s that also contributed to increasing engagement in migrant wage labour by most households in South Nyanza and Nyanza generally was the establishment of tea plantations in 1925 in Kericho district.<sup>47</sup> Fearn noted that three tea companies had been established in Kericho district by 1930, specifically, The African Highlands Produce Company Limited which had opened six tea estates and had 3,200 acres under tea, the Kenya Tea Company Limited which had opened five tea estates, where 2,700 acres were under tea and the The Buret Tea Company, which had about 1,000 acres under the crop.<sup>48</sup> One other tea company, which also operated in Kericho, was the Kenya Tea Company (Brooke Bond).<sup>49</sup> As Fearn observed, the tea estates did not encourage squatting, but sought to attract labour on a more permanent basis by the provision of housing facilities and also offered rations of meat and milk for their employees.<sup>50</sup>

The tea plantations in Kericho were the major European industry in Nyanza Province, and the principal agricultural pursuit of Europeans in the province. The tea plantations were strategically located in relation to the people of South Nyanza since Kericho district bordered on South Nyanza, which allowed people from South Nyanza to travel to Kericho to seek employment. The tea estates in Kericho also benefited adjacent regions such as the Gusii highlands. As Maxon noted, the Abagusii engaged in migrant wage labour in the tea estates.<sup>51</sup> The construction of the Sondu-Kericho road in 1921 linking South Kavirondo

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<sup>47</sup> Van Zwanenberg, R.M.A. Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, p. 177.

<sup>48</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy, p. 98.

<sup>49</sup> Van Zwanenberg, R.M.A. Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, p. 177.

<sup>50</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy, p. 104.

<sup>51</sup> Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways, p. 97.

with Kericho allowed the people from South Nyanza to travel to Kericho with ease.<sup>52</sup> The tea plantations attracted labour from South Nyanza because jobs were readily available. One interviewee who worked at the Kericho tea estates in the 1930s recalled: “When a job seeker went to Kericho tea estate, he secured a job the following day.”<sup>53</sup> Orvis has rightly argued that job opportunities in the tea estates were readily available because tea picking was the least attractive work compared to other employment sectors.<sup>54</sup>

As has already been noted, as more job opportunities became available in the 1920s, there developed a shift in the labour preference by the Luo.<sup>55</sup> The shift in attitude can be explained from the perspective of the pre-colonial division of labour. As noted in chapter two, women mainly undertook agricultural production. Men were responsible for looking after cattle, even though they engaged in some minimal agricultural work. In a related study of the Kikuyu, Central Kenya, Tignor found out that in the 1920s, the Kikuyu were gravitating towards certain occupations and shunning others. He noted that the work they found least attractive was sisal cutting and labouring in railway fuel camps and ballast breaking camps. These tasks, according to Tignor, tended to be performed by the Luo.<sup>56</sup>

Up to 1930 the majority of migrant wage labourers from South Nyanza took up contracts for the short duration of three months. Labour migrants from South Nyanza and Nyanza

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<sup>52</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Political Record, DC/KSI/3/5, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Interviews with: Omingo Oduma.

<sup>54</sup> Orvis, S. ‘The Kenyan Agrarian Debate: A Re-appraisal’, *African Studies Review*, vol. 36, No. 3, 1993, pp. 23-48.

<sup>55</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA, 1925, p. 35.

<sup>56</sup> Tignor, R.L. *The Colonial Transformation of Kenya*, pp. 175-176.

more widely could and often did arrange to be away during the slack periods of agricultural activity. As early as 1910, the Nyanza Provincial Annual Report remarked that in order to secure labour from the Kavirondo, recruitment was to be carried out between the planting seasons, during the months from June to September or October.<sup>57</sup>

Heyer, in a study of Rural Development in Tropical Africa, observed that a high proportion of adult males engaged in migrant wage labour as African areas became more crowded and the pressure to work became more severe. She noted that it became increasingly difficult to obtain enough cash to pay Poll Tax and to meet other needs through household production alone as population pressure increased and opportunities for market production failed to keep pace.<sup>58</sup> This was true of north and Central Kavirondo districts, but not South Kavirondo. Apart from taxes, what appears to have pushed the people of South Nyanza to engage in migrant wage labour, desires for cloth and other imported Western items as well as the desire to get cash for bridewealth were also influential.<sup>59</sup>

### **Changes in Labour Patterns, 1930 to 1945**

In the foregoing section, it is noted that the outbreak of the First World War was a turning point in migrant wage labour for households in South Nyanza. From the 1920s, a further expansion in migrant wage labour occurred because of new employment opportunities such

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<sup>57</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, 1910, p. 50.

<sup>58</sup> Heyer, J. 'Agricultural Development Policy in Kenya from Colonial Period to 1975', in Heyer, J., Roberts, P. and Williams, G. (eds.), Rural Development in Tropical Africa, p.

<sup>59</sup> Interviews with: Enos Adhaja, Mzee Agoi, Joseph Nyakwayo.

as the establishment of tea estates in Kericho. The construction of infrastructure in South Nyanza also made migrant wage labour more attractive. A further expansion of labour engagement by households in South Nyanza occurred from 1930 to 1945. The factors that played a significant role in this included the Nyanza gold rush and the outbreak of the Second World War. The section below turns to examine how these factors and others expanded labour engagement by households in South Nyanza.

The period 1930s to 1940s was characterised by several changes in labour patterns. For instance, the colonial labour market was much freer than it had been in previous decades. Wrigley acknowledged that government priorities were now revised to some extent, in the context of the colony-wide financial crises of the early 1930s, after which potential African contributions of export crops began to seem more significant than the constant supply of African labour for European plantations.<sup>60</sup>

It has been noted that towards the close of the 1920s, most households in South Nyanza had been increasingly engaging in migrant wage labour. But all these gains were setback by the outbreak of the Great Depression of 1929 to 1934. The depression had a range of effects on the people of South Nyanza and Kenya as a whole. It caused hardship for African employees who had become dependent on wage earnings.<sup>61</sup> Railway employment, for instance, fell from 15,628 in 1930 to 12,000 in 1933. On the tea estates in Kericho, employment declined from 10,000 to 8,000. Many sisal estates closed in 1931 releasing

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<sup>60</sup> Wrigley, C.C. 'Patterns of Economic Life', in Harlow, V. and Chilver, E.M. (eds.), History of East Africa, vol. ii, 1965, p. 251.

<sup>61</sup> Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya, p. 94.

thousands of labourers.<sup>62</sup> Those who remained on employment were confronted by drastic wage deductions, wages falling 15 per cent to 50 per cent from the 1929 to 1931. Between 1929 and 1935, the overall reduction in wages amounted to about 40 per cent.<sup>63</sup>

South Nyanza was equally affected by the depression. The 1931 Annual Report for South Nyanza noted that the number of people attested on contracts of service stood at 1,236. The report observed that for the previous year the figure was 6,399.<sup>64</sup> Elsewhere the pattern was the same. The Labour Office wrote:

There was a large decrease in the number of indentured labourers engaged in the Kavirondo Reserve. According to particulars furnished by the Chief Registrar of Natives, the average number of labourers attested at Kisumu, Kakamega and Kisii, monthly compared with previous years was approximately as shown on Table 6: 7 below.<sup>65</sup>

**TABLE 6: 7**

**INDENTURED LABOURERS IN NYANZA PROVINCE DURING 1929 – 1931**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Average No. Attested Months</b>
1929	1,519
1930	1,859

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p. 95.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 95.

<sup>64</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report for 1931, in Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1931, p. 44.

<sup>65</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1931, p. 44.

1931	790
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**Source:** KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1931, p. 44.

The Nyanza Province Annual Report for 1931 acknowledged that only 5,114 “natives” were attested at Kisumu compared to 11,623 during 1930,<sup>66</sup> a drop of about 50 per cent. Maxon in a study of the Abagusii, a region that was adjacent to South Nyanza, observed that the depression caused difficulty for the Abagusii. He noted that both labour and agricultural export fell sharply in the early 1930s in Gusiiland as a result of the depression.<sup>67</sup>

As a result of the locust invasion in the early 1930s, many European farmers reduced their labour force and also cut wages. These measures affected a number of households in South Nyanza who lost their jobs due to financial difficulties.<sup>68</sup> They also created a shortage of money in the district.<sup>69</sup> The Nyanza Province Annual Report for 1931 noted that as a result of the reduction of labour by many European farmers, the supply of labour exceeded the demand.<sup>70</sup>

The economic difficulties that the households in South Nyanza and Nyanza in general faced during the early years of the 1930s eased as a result of gold-mining operations that had a positive effect on local economies. The gold mining provided labour opportunities

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<sup>66</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1931, p. 44.

<sup>67</sup> Maxon, R. M. Conflict and Accommodation in Western Kenya, pp. 93-94.

<sup>68</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1931, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/3, 1924-1932, Annual Report for 1932, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1931, p. 5.



for hundreds of households.<sup>71</sup> In South Nyanza, apart from the new job opportunities provided by the gold mines, the 1930s and 1940s were also marked by expanded agricultural production.<sup>72</sup> The Nyanza gold rush, European plantations and the outbreak of the Second World War boosted wage employment opportunities for the people of South Nyanza and Nyanza more widely between 1930 and 1945.

Gold mining activities commenced in South Nyanza in 1924, but the gold rush in Nyanza Province only really started in 1931 as a result of the discovery of gold in Kakamega in North Kavirondo District in 1931. Hoping to save themselves from the problems occasioned by the Great Depression, crowds of Europeans abandoned their farms and shops and scrambled to stake out claims in North Kavirondo.<sup>73</sup> Although the gold mining industry did not provide lasting benefits to the people of South Nyanza or indeed Nyanza in general, it nevertheless provided a significant source of employment opportunities for the local population during the decade.<sup>74</sup> Fearn noted that from 1934 the mining industry in Nyanza Province was mainly conducted by large mining companies, most of them registered in London, who acquired mining rights from the earlier prospectors and Kenyan syndicates.<sup>75</sup> He noted that there were three phases of gold mining in Nyanza: the years of prospecting, 1931 to 1934; the years of development by larger companies, 1934 to 1944; and the years of diminished output and the decline of the industry, 1944 to 1953.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland,' p. 218.

<sup>72</sup> Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1944, p. 219.

<sup>73</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland,' p. 219.

<sup>74</sup> Maxon, R.M. Going Their Separate Ways, pp. 97-98.

<sup>75</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy, p. 126.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* p. 126.

Initially, when gold prospectors laid claim to land, it generated a hostile reaction from the local population who complained about the “destruction” of crops and fields by the gold prospectors. The people even believed that the colonial government intended taking land from the local population that would eventually render them landless. This forced the colonial government to introduce the new Mining Ordinance of 1931 that stipulated that land within a “native reserve” could only be prospected if the miner obtained a special permit from the Native Lands Trust Board. As Fearn argued, in practice, this meant simply securing the agreement of the Provincial Commissioner.<sup>77</sup> Schedules of compensation were computed; the miner was to pay Shs. 2/- per acre per month for cultivated land that they disturbed, with additional payments for damage to crops or to trees.<sup>78</sup>

The local population felt that the payments were not adequate compensation for the economic and social disruptions occasioned by the large presence of European prospectors and African job seekers. But it soon dawned on them that the advantages of gold mining on their land outweighed the disadvantages. The new industry created new employment and trade opportunities as well as trade for the local population. About 600 Europeans were employed in the mining industry in Nyanza Province, and at its peak in 1935 it employed about 15,000 Africans.<sup>79</sup> The categories of labour employed at the mines included clerks, office assistants, lorry and motor drivers, blacksmiths, carpenters, masons and other skilled

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. pp. 127-131.

<sup>78</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA/2/5, 1935, p.

<sup>79</sup> Hay, J.M. ‘Economic Change in Luoland’, p. 222.

labour, police and watchmen, headmen, surface labourers (which accounted for the bulk of employees), cooks and other domestic workers, fuel cutters and sweepers.<sup>80</sup>

The 1934 South Kavirondo District Annual Report recorded the following gold mining companies operating in the district: Webbs Mines (Watende Mines), Kenya Consolidated Goldfields Limited which, struck a rich goldfield at Kitere, Messrs Filmer and Company, which produced gold in a small way near Kehancha and Mr. Englebrecht a one man outfit at Suna.<sup>81</sup> The gold mines attracted a large volume of labour. The South Kavirondo District Annual Report for 1934 noted a considerable increase in the number of people presenting themselves for work during the year. The report noted that whereas in 1933 only 62 men had left the reserve on contracts, 920 were contracted for 1934. Wages were in the neighbourhood of Shs. 8/- a month.<sup>82</sup> The 1934 South Kavirondo District Annual Report remarked that the year was characterised by the expansion of gold mining in the area. It noted that K.G.G. Company and the Watende Mines absorbed a portion of the unemployed in the district. But the company was paying wages of about Shs. 6/- a month, which was less than what other companies paid.<sup>83</sup>

It is clear that the gold mines were paying better wages than most employers. The 1935 Nyanza Province Annual Report noted:

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p. 222.

<sup>81</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report for 1934, pp. 34-35.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. p. 263.

<sup>83</sup> South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report for 1934, p. 263.

In spite of being no great increase in the demand for native labour in any sphere of industry, there was a distinct shortage on many estates. This was particularly obvious on coffee estates during picking season. The good wages paid on the mines and tea estates made it difficult for the small farmers to attract labour unless they had an established connection. Many employers connected with the coffee and maize industry were in very straightened circumstances while others, having come to an end of their resources, were compelled to relinquish farming activities.<sup>84</sup>

The report recognised that the supply of labour for the goldfields was sufficient. The average number of labourers employed in the mining industry in the province was 13,600; at Lolgorien, there were 800 employees. As Fearn noted in relation to the ethnic make up of the labour force in each area of the gold fields, it was largely composed of labour from the adjacent areas. For instance, the Luhyia of North Nyanza provided the greater number of workers in the Kakamega area. The ethnic group of the neighbourhood, the Luo, principally served the mines in Kisumu area. The adjacent gold fields of Kisii and Lolgorien were supplied by mainly Kisii labour. Fearn however observed that the classification of the African labour force according to these major ethnic groupings does not permit an accurate analysis of the labour force by the local population.<sup>85</sup>

The lowest rate of wages for underground labourers was Shs. 12/- a ticket while surface men received Shs. 10/-. Rations were provided except for alluvial workers who lived at their own homes. The rations consisted of maize meal flour with sugar, beans, choroko

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<sup>84</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1935, p. 29.

<sup>85</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy, pp.

(pulses), meat, fresh vegetables and salt. Such rations contributed to the general contentment and efficiency of the labourers.<sup>86</sup>

By 1938, gold was second in value on the lists of Kenya's exports. Table 6: 8 below shows the yearly growth in production.

**TABLE 6: 8**

**UNREFINED GOLD PRODUCTION IN NYANZA PROVINCE DURING 1933 –**

**1938**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Ounces</b>	<b>Actual Value £</b>	<b>Estimated Value £</b>
1933	14,147	67,665	-
1934	15,939	83,617	-
1935	29,178	162,904	-
1936	48,635	269,947	-
1937	68,677	379,626	-
1938	86,960	-	488,600

**Source:** KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1938, p. 68.

The 1938 Nyanza Province Annual Report noted that the rise in the price of gold had been a great boon to the mines and created great hopes for the mining companies.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>86</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1935, p. 31.

<sup>87</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1938, p. 70.

The gold mining industry thus provided a significant source of employment during the decade.<sup>88</sup> It also created benefits in the form of increased revenue, improved means of communication, and labour opportunities and other economic advantages for the people of Nyanza it also offered the impoverished settler the hope of alleviating his unfortunate position.<sup>89</sup>

Apart from the mining sector that absorbed local labour in Nyanza Province, the other sector that also attracted a large volume of labour was the European plantations. As has been noted, tea plantations were started in Kericho in 1925. These plantations were expanded in the 1930s and absorbed more labour within the province. The 1935 Nyanza Province Annual Report noted that one of the most important spheres of employment were the tea plantations in Kericho district. The Nyanza Province Annual Report for 1935 observed that a total of 4,949 adults and 4,548 children were employed on an average throughout the year at the tea estates.<sup>90</sup> The numbers of child labourers at the tea estates was almost equal to those of adults. The use of child labour in the tea estates was encouraged by the policy of the tea companies in which a labourer could be accompanied by his family.<sup>91</sup> The tea companies, as has already been noted, wished to attract permanent labour. The wages that were paid by the tea companies for an adult was from Shs. 8/- to Shs. 12/-. The companies also paid substantial bonuses to the employees. The report

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<sup>88</sup> Maxon, R.M. Going their Separate Ways, pp. 97-98.

<sup>89</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy, pp. 141-142.

<sup>90</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1935, p. 30.

<sup>91</sup> Fearn, H. An African Economy, p. 54.

observed that a conspicuous feature of the tea estates was that sufficient labour was available.<sup>92</sup> This concurs with oral evidence; most respondents who worked at the tea estates in Kericho concurred that they attracted a lot of labour from South Nyanza.<sup>93</sup> The Kericho Tea Estates also attracted labour from Gusiiland. But the Abagusii appear to have started engaging in the tea estates in large numbers at a fairly late date. Maxon has pointed out that it was not until 1934 that there was any significant numbers of Abagusii men involved in work outside the district. He observed that the main target for those proceeding outside South Kavirondo on contract were the tea estates in Kericho to the east.<sup>94</sup>

Sisal plantations also attracted labour from South Nyanza and Nyanza more widely. The sisal industry was boosted in 1935 by a sudden rise in the price of sisal from £9 a ton at the beginning of the year to £27 a ton at the latter months which prompted a fresh demand for labour.<sup>95</sup> Sisal plantations also attracted labour from Gusiiland after the rise in sisal prices and exports in 1935.<sup>96</sup> The wages that were paid by the sisal estates were Shs. 10/- to cutters and Shs. 8/- to other labourers, plus rations.<sup>97</sup>

In Nyanza Province, only one sisal plantation operated, the Chemelil Sisal Estate, which by 1935 employed about 400 labourers.<sup>98</sup> Other sisal plantations were located in some parts of

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<sup>92</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1935, p. 30.

<sup>93</sup> Interviews with: Enos Adhaja, Ibrahim Ondiek, Mzee Agoi.

<sup>94</sup> Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways, p. 97

<sup>95</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1935, p. 30.

<sup>96</sup> Maxon, R.M. Going Their Separate Ways, p. 97.

<sup>97</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1935, p. 30.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. p. 30.

the country. In the Coast Province the largest one was the Taita-Taveta sisal plantation.

One interviewee, who worked there in 1940, recalled:

In 1940, I went to Taita-Taveta to work at the sisal plantation. We were being paid wages Shs. 10/- per month. In addition, we were provided with rations, which consisted of maize meal, beans and occasionally beef. The wages were insufficient to even cater for a single man, let alone a family. I worked for one year then returned home. Because of the low wages, I was not able to purchase a single item. After staying at home for a year, I then went to Nairobi to look for a job.<sup>99</sup>

From the 1930s, most households in South Nyanza were placing more emphasis on wage labour and less on crop production. The 1933 South Kavirondo District Annual Report observed:

The main point of difference between 1913 and 1933 related to the value of exports and the amount of the tax. Taking a rupee at 1/4 the ascertained value of exports through the customs at the three ports amounted to Shs. 678,608/- for 2216 tons, whereas in 1932, 3,776 tons were exported valued at Shs. 583,800/-. In 1913, the tax amounted to Shs. 334,620/- so adding Shs. 160,000 for cattle sales the cash for exports exceeded the tax by over Shs. 5000,000/- whereas in 1932 the value of

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<sup>99</sup> Interview with: Benson Mikingo.



exports including cattle fell short of the amount actually collected in tax by Shs. 600, 000/-.<sup>100</sup>

The effect was that many households in South Nyanza were invariably searching for wage labour.<sup>101</sup> This finding also concurs with Hay's study of Kowe. She has argued that the overall effect of innovations between 1930 and 1945 was to reduce the investment of labour in agriculture and food preparation and to reinvest it in wage employment for men and in trade for women.<sup>102</sup>

As this study reveals, the 1933 South Kavirondo District Annual Report noted that the economic awakening that was taking place in the 1930s was probably due to a genuine desire for progress rather than to the necessity of finding money for tax. This research demonstrates that the mid 1930s were years of prosperity for a majority of households in South Nyanza and Nyanza more widely. The 1936 Nyanza Province Annual Report, when assessing the economic conditions of the province, estimated that the total wages earned outside and brought back into the Province was £327,000. The earnings from the crops grown in the province and exported was about £184,000, while that which was earned from the export of hides, skins and dairy produce amounted to about £97,500. Those formed the principal items of the peoples' income.<sup>103</sup> From rents of land, they earned £3,600. The total

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<sup>100</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Administration Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report for 1933, p. 10.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. p. 10.

<sup>102</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Luo Women and Economic Change', in Hafkin, J. N. and Bay, G. E. (eds.), Women in Africa, p. 107.

<sup>103</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1936, p. 17.

earned in round figures was about £612,000. The report noted that this did not include all the livestock sold. More than 13,000 head of cattle were exported to settlers from Kavirondo and a large number were exported from Kipsigis, yet the total imported from the Maasai, Tanganyika (now republic of Tanzania) and Nandi into Kavirondo was much greater. The total outgoing on balance was estimated at £20,000.<sup>104</sup>

The report noted that compared to 1935 there was an improvement of about £20,000 in wages earned, about £62,000 in crops produced and about £46,000 in sale the of animal products. The improvement in wages earned was due to railway works in the province, while the improvement in crop production was due to expansion of cash crop production as well as to better quality and better prices. The improvement in sales of animal products was due to the increase in prices. The report remarked that the people of Nyanza were learning every year to be better workmen and better producers.<sup>105</sup> Wagner also made similar findings in his study of North Kavirondo, a region adjacent to Nyanza Province. He noted that in 1932 about 20 per cent and in 1937 about 30 per cent of the adult male population of the district (and probably an even higher percentage among the Maragoli) was at any given time of the year, away from the reserves due to migrant wage labour.<sup>106</sup> Studies on Nyanza such as those of Hay, Butterman, and Francis all concur that 1930 to 1945 were years of prosperity as many households were engaged in migrant wage labour.<sup>107</sup> Evidence from

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid. p. 17.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. pp. 17-18.

<sup>106</sup> Wagner, G. The Bantu of North Kavirondo vol. ii Economic Life, Oxford University Press, London, New York, Toronto, 1956, p. 94.

<sup>107</sup> Hay, J.M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 183, Francis, E. 'Migration and Changing Divisions of Labour', Africa, pp. 201-202.

this study shows that prosperity was not only sustained by wage labour, but, as was noted in the previous chapter, was marked by increasing agricultural production.

The most notable expenses that many households in South Nyanza and Nyanza in general had to meet by the 1930s were still the hut and Poll Taxes as well as the local native rate. The people in the province paid £204,233 in tax and £25,000 in rates. Other government or Local Native Council charges by way of fees and fines made the total earnings of the government approximately £244,000. The free money that remained for the people to spend as they wished was estimated at £368,000, which was equivalent to Shs. 21/- per household since the census figures showed 361, 719 households of an average strength of 3.23 persons.<sup>108</sup>

In the 1930s, labourers did not necessarily seek out employers who were paying higher wages, but those who treated them fairly. The 1936 Nyanza Province Annual Report noted:

There was no general shortage but the increased earning capacity of native by production in his own reserve as well as the higher wages earned on the mines and sisal plantations were pointing the moral that the comparatively small-owner farmer could be forced before long to raise wages and make the labourers worth the rise. There were some employers who had an established reputation as good masters for whom the natives could go on working even though a better wage could be had elsewhere. These had no shortage. Others were already feeling the pinch, with the

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<sup>108</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1936, p. 18.

result that the average minimum wage, which in 1935 was stated to be between Shs. 6/- and Shs. 8/- was now definitely Shs. 8/.<sup>109</sup>

In a related report of 1937, the Labour Officer wrote:

Native production in the reserves has been blamed for the shortage of labour, but the fact remains that the really good employer who takes a serious interest in welfare of their employees never appear to be short of labour, even though their conditions are not all that might be desired, which goes to show that labour can be obtained and that everything depends on the attractions offered and the way in which the natives are handled. The Kavirondo has had a fair amount of success with agricultural crops in his reserve and realising that he will be welcome by all the employers, he is in a position to choose his place of work where he imagines that conditions of employment will suit him best. A pleasant change for him from the depressing years when he had great difficulty in finding work at all and had to be thankful for what he got. This helps to explain the independence of the native today, about which some employers have complained. He is independent and knows it, and if he considers that he is not well treated, he will ask to be signed off and try somewhere else.<sup>110</sup>

Some significant factors emerge from this report. Firstly, labour shortages that were sometimes experienced by some employers were the result of some labourers avoiding

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<sup>109</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1936, p. 48.

<sup>110</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1937, p. 44.

such employers due to ill treatment. Secondly, by the 1930s African labourers were already familiar with the job market. Employers who treated labour unfairly were avoided and suffered labour shortage. Thus, in Nyanza Province, a labour shortage was experienced in 1937 in the European settled areas of Songhor and Koru. The shortage was as a result of increased independence of the households in Nyanza because of the income they generated from cotton production, greater demand from large concerns which included the Public Works Department and the Railway, employers unwillingness to pay overtime for extra “tasks” and, the system of indefinite leave. This system of “indefinite leave” was described as early as 1921 by Colonel Watkins, the Acting Chief Commissioner, who complained to the Convention of Associations that it had become a common practice to sign a man on for six months’ work and then spread it over a year. Watkins remarked: “it meant a tremendous waste of time because a boy, after a few days work, was sent off by his employer in the reserves and would become known as that particular settler’s man.” Watkins was given strong supporting evidence for his allegations by Mr. Soames, a settler in Nyeri and also by Archdeacon Owen. As Van Zwanenberg remarked, the system became known as indefinite leave, and while the method was illegal, it was also almost impossible to eradicate.<sup>111</sup> This system allowed a number of employers to disregard contracts.<sup>112</sup>

In the 1930s, most South Nyanza households had voluntarily entered migrant wage labour. Taxation was no longer a factor that forced the people of South Nyanza to go on migrant wage labour. Here a striking difference can be seen between South Nyanza and Vihiga, a

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<sup>111</sup> Van Zwanenberg, R. M. A. Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, pp. 204-205.

<sup>112</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1937, p. 45.

region that was also within Nyanza Province. In a study of Vihiga, Maxon observed that the majority of households in Vihiga had entered wage labour due to economic necessity, most importantly because of a shortage of land. He noted that this produced the conditions characteristic of semi-proletarianization, that is, the inability of households to obtain a basic consumption needs from agriculture forced males into migrant labour during the decade and especially in the 1940s.<sup>113</sup> This was not the case in South Nyanza. Most interviewees who took up migrant wage labour in the 1930s recalled that they wanted cash to pay bridewealth and to buy western imported goods.<sup>114</sup>

It is evident from this study of South Nyanza that by the close of the 1930s, most households had drastically transformed themselves into active participants in migrant wage labour. The 1939 South Nyanza District Annual Report noted:

It was the custom of early district reports to write descriptions such as ‘the apathetic Luo, ...the natural laziness of these people... the inherent lethargy of the Jalu made him a backward unprogressive type of native’. Such derogatory remarks were perhaps once true of the Jalu of South Kavirondo when you consider their extraordinary remoteness from civilization and the demoralizing nature of a most unhealthy climate. The interesting thing to observe is how rapidly they have conquered these obstacles and become the progressive industrious people they are today. The Luo of South Kavirondo had lagged behind their kinsmen in Central Kavirondo Luo for the reasons namely, lack of communication and unhealthy environment. Several influences

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<sup>113</sup> Maxon, R.M. *Going Their Separate Ways*, p. 99.

<sup>114</sup> Interviews with: Benson: Mikingo, Naftali Arua, Caleb Oduar.

however had had, far reaching effects on the development of the South Kavirondo Luo. Firstly, was their extraordinary response in reply to the demand for labour. They are to be found in every kind of work from houseboy to road mender, from askari (police) to fundi (technician), from Shamba (farm) labourer to a teacher. There were in all 34,000 Luo (Central and South Kavirondo combined) out at work in Kenya. Secondly, there was the rapid expansion of roads and communications and the consequence infiltration of new ideas and new methods to breakdown the old conservatism of the lakeshore. The Luo of South Kavirondo had attained the status of an industrious and much travelled people.<sup>115</sup>

As this study of South Nyanza demonstrates and as has already been noted, by 1930, most households had been captured by colonial capitalism. This was achieved through the process of peasantization and proletarianization. In South Nyanza as was the case in Nyanza in general, wage labour together with commodity expanded noticeably from the 1930s. As Orvis remarked, this sowed the seeds of socio-economic differentiation based on off-farm employment.<sup>116</sup> In a study of Central Province, Ng'ang'a also noted that there was an emergence of petit-bourgeoisie in the area that resulted in economic differentiation.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Political Record Book, 1930-1940, Annual Report for 1939, pp. 1-2.

<sup>116</sup> Orvis, S. 'The Kenya Agrarian Debate: A Re-Appraisal', African Studies Review, p. 28.

<sup>117</sup> Ng'ang'a, D. M. 'What is Happening to the Kenyan Peasantry', Review of African Political Economy, pp. 7-16.

## **The Impact of the Second World War, 1939 to 1945**

When the Second World War broke out in 1939, the people of South Nyanza and Nyanza at large were once again called upon to take part. The households in South Nyanza responded positively. Recruitment for military purposes was carried out in South Nyanza from May until the outbreak of the war, when it became apparent that over recruitment had occurred. A total of 300 pioneers and numerous police arrived at the recruitment office at the district headquarters at Kisii.<sup>118</sup>

As in the First World War, the people of South Nyanza were required to increase food production to feed the troops and were also recruited to serve in the war. When war broke out, Harold Macmillian wrote:

The immediate task of the Colonial Office and the Colonial Government could be summed up in a single sentence—the mobilization of all the potential resources of the Colonial Empire, both of men and materials, for the purposes of war. We therefore need to increase colonial production for war purposes on an immense scale.<sup>119</sup>

The total number of Nyanzan men who had enrolled in the forces up to the end of December, not counting those who were already in the army when the war broke out, was 9,308. In the original enrolment 1,085 went to the King's African Rifles, 2,880 to the

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<sup>118</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report for 1939, p. 35.

<sup>119</sup> Macmillan, H. *The Blast of War, 1939-1945*, London, 1967, quoted in Zeleza, T. 'Kenya and the Second World War, 1939-1945', in Ochieng', W.R. (eds.), *A Modern History of Kenya*, p. 145.



pioneers, 3,060 to the Military Labour Service, 134 to the engineers, 34 to the Military Police the rest were irregulars and oddments. The cost of an accepted recruit to the military was between Shs. 34/- and Shs. 35/-.<sup>120</sup>

The immediate impact of the war on South Nyanza and Nyanza generally was the large-scale recruitment into the war and civil service. The 1939 South Kavirondo District Annual Report observed that at the inception of the formation of the Pioneer Corps, over 300 Luo volunteers were quickly sent out from South Kavirondo. Towards the East African Military Labour Service, South Kavirondo contributed nearly 1,200 recruits, while cattle for the war were contributed by the people of South Kavirondo at the rate of hundreds per month.<sup>121</sup> As Hay noted, during the Second World War, the British administrators of Central Kavirondo demanded greater sacrifices from the people and gave little in return. She observed that whatever attempts were being made to develop the economy were dropped, as the administrative staff spent most of their time collecting manpower statistics, recruiting for the King's African Rifles, the pioneers (the compulsory labour corps), and the police.<sup>122</sup> The people from the province who were recruited for the military or the police or as labourers for war services during the period 22nd August to 6th September comprised: 436 for the King's African Rifles (K.A.R.) included 30 recruited at Kericho; 1,580 pioneers; 55 for the E.A.A.S.C.; 78 drivers, 43 drivers' mates, 15 storemen and 18 others for E.A.A.S.C.; 350 police for Maseno; 97 labourers sent to Mombasa. This totalled 2, 672.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1940, PC/NZA 1/35, pp. 4-5.

<sup>121</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Political Record Book, 1930-1940, DC/KSI/3/5, 1939, p. 2.

<sup>122</sup> Hay, J.M. 'Economic Change in Luoland,' p. 224.

<sup>123</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA, 1939, p. 95.

By 1942, the colonial administration in Nyanza Province had fully recruited the local population for war and civil service. About 30, 000 had been recruited for the military and approximately 110,000 were recruited for civil service outside the reserves.<sup>124</sup> On the basis of the heavy recruitment from the province, the 1942 Nyanza Province Annual Report warned that any further recruitment was bound to endanger the structure of the society, and adversely affect agricultural production in the area.<sup>125</sup>

The people of South Nyanza and Nyanza more widely joined the war effort in large numbers because the majority came to realise that the conditions in the military service were much better than they had been during the First World War. A number of war volunteers were attracted by the opportunities such as payment of family remittances that were sent to the reserves, as well as a cash grant of some £ 25 to each soldier on demobilisation.<sup>126</sup> By the end of 1942, the administration in the province had recruited enough conscripts. In addition to those recruits at the Maseno depot, nearly 30,000 men served elsewhere in the army alongside approximately 110,000 in civil employment outside the reserves. That left roughly 262,000 adult males in the reserves, of which it was estimated that 60,274 were totally ineffective for reasons of ill health and disablement, only the balance being capable of engaging in agricultural production.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1942, p. 2.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

<sup>126</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/5, 1943, p. 3 see also Hay, J. M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 193.

<sup>127</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1942, p. 2.

By the end of 1942, a large percentage of the manpower in South Nyanza and indeed Nyanza as a whole had been mobilised to serve in the war. This meant that the area was drained of its labour resources. The Nyanza Province Annual Report for 1942 recorded pictures of the manpower situation in the Province as was narrated to the Provincial Commissioner by an old man of Alego:

If an elephant is killed, he said, every one set to at the flesh with their knives, and the supply of meat seems inexhaustible. Nevertheless, there comes a time when the bones though not yet laid bare at last begin to appear. There is truth as well as amusing imagery in this simile. In the case of Nyanza manpower we are, if not right down to the bone, at least getting there close to it.<sup>128</sup>

One effect of the employment of the people of Nyanza in the military and civil services was the increased circulation of money in the province from the wages earned. In 1941, it was computed that the earnings of Nyanza people fell not far short of £900,000. The report noted there could be no doubt that this figure was exceeded in 1942. In addition, the record export of produce, the pay out of family allotments and special remittances, the record number of Nyanza people at work and the rise in the average wage rate, boosted the amount of money in circulation in the reserves. This resulted in some degree of inflation in the area.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>129</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1942, p. 4.

The recruitment of the people of South Nyanza and Nyanza in general to the military and civil service created a shortage of labour supply in the reserve as well as in other sectors of the colony. The 1944 Nyanza Province Annual Report observed that employers such as the Tea Estates in Kericho and the District Council, who discharged some labour early in 1943 on account of food shortage, had been unable to recover their numbers. As Fearn noted, on the tea estates, the shortage became so serious towards the end of the war and immediately afterwards, that the African Highland Produce Company tried to solve the labour shortage by employing immigrants from the Belgian Congo.<sup>130</sup>

Out of a total of 12, 844 Nyanza conscripts recruited during 1944, only 1,079 were destined to employers within the province. This suggests that the province did not possess an ample supply of voluntary labour. Indeed the reverse was the case. Evidence demonstrates that conscription had upset all the connections that had been built over the years; the farmers of Nyanza had lost all their advantages that they enjoyed due to their proximity to the reserves.<sup>131</sup> The labour shortage in the province led to increased use of juveniles between the ages of fourteen and sixteen as labourers on the farms in the province.<sup>132</sup> During the initial decades of colonial rule, child labour had been confined to forced labour on road construction, but in the 1930s and 1940s, they were being employed as wage labourers on farms.

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<sup>130</sup> Fearn, H. *An African Economy*, p. 152; KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1942, p. 4.

<sup>131</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1944, pp. 7-8.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

The Second World War contributed to the re-introduction of forced (conscript) labour which had been discouraged in the 1920s. The use of conscript labour became the most unpopular of war duties, but despite its unpopularity, the quotas were almost fulfilled. For instance, in 1944, 12,844 men were recruited from the province during the year.<sup>133</sup> At times, according to the area in which conscription took place, it was found difficult to obtain the labour, indicating that the drain on the population had been too intense.<sup>134</sup> The 1945 South Kavirondo District Annual Report noted that labour had been very difficult to obtain. It noted that Macalda Mines and Homa Lime had reported a constant shortage of labour.<sup>135</sup> There was lack of supervision and competition for the labourers' services; this meant that the vicious circle continued.<sup>136</sup>

As Hay has noted, the family allowances and take-home pay of the servicemen pumped cash into the reserves and thus gave a new boost to trading activity towards the end of the war.<sup>137</sup> While these observations of Hay could be true, it should not be lost sight of that in the 1940s, improved agricultural production in Nyanza also boosted cash flow in the area. At the same time, the 1930s and 1940s were marked by improved employment opportunities that contributed to cash flow in the province.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

<sup>135</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/7, 1945, p. 5.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>137</sup> Hay, J.M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 226, See also KNA, Central Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/CN/1/3/1, 1947, p. 2.

The engagement of the households in South Nyanza in migrant wage labour impacted on the pre-colonial households in a range of ways. The section below turns to examine the impact of migrant wage labour on the households in South Nyanza. This examination is important in order to assess the changes that occurred in the households as a result of engagement in migrant wage labour.

### **The Impact of Migrant Wage Labour**

The engagement of many households in South Nyanza in migrant wage labour had a range of impacts on the local population. As early as 1915, the Provincial Commissioner, Mr. John Ainsworth, admitted that due to the numerous ways in which the people of Nyanza were being connected with colonialism through migrant wage labour, individual thoughts were fast changing to an extent that it threatened ethnic unity and control. He noted:

On a daily bases there was evidence of young men who had returned from various places of employment, or who were attached to missions, or who, from other sources obtained ideas of independence, asserted themselves as regarded individual points of views, and showed disposition to defy tribal authority, or, in other cases, undermine it.<sup>138</sup>

It is evident that ethnic unity was not only threatened by those who were engaged in migrant wage labour, but also by those who had converted to Christianity. The main agents

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<sup>138</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, 1915, p. 10.

of change were the young generation who were less conservative than the older generation who opposed change. The young generation wanted to alter some of the traditional customs and introduce new ones that met the more advanced (Western) ideas that they had acquired from the places where they were employed.<sup>139</sup>

Cooper in an article, 'Africa and the World Economy' has rightly pointed out that wage labour enabled young men to buy cattle, found their own homesteads, and slowly accumulated productive capital independently of the patriarchal control of elders, who themselves were trying to harness young men's earnings to their own accumulation.<sup>140</sup> Zeleza, in a study of Kenya, has contended that the expansion of peasant commodity production and the associated pressures from the colonial state made lineage hierarchies crumble. He observed that the unmarried, propertyless young men gradually lost their dependence on elders for access to means of production and women. Now they could create their personal income by selling their own labour power. They had less and less need of elders in putting together a bride price, and gradually escaped their control.<sup>141</sup> Evidence from South Nyanza concurs with Zeleza's findings. A majority of young unmarried men from South Nyanza engaged in migrant wage labour in order to acquire wealth to be independent from the pre-colonial control of the head of the family and the sub-chiefs. The 1925 Central Kavirondo District Annual Report acknowledged that the sub-chiefs and the family head had no say in or control over the money acquired through wage labour.<sup>142</sup> Such

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid. p. 10.

<sup>140</sup> Cooper, F. 'Africa and the World Economy', African Studies Review, p. 43.

<sup>141</sup> Zeleza, T. 'The Establishment of Colonial Rule', in Ochieng', W.R. (ed.), Modern History of Kenya, p. 59.

<sup>142</sup> KNA, Central Kavirondo District: Political Records; Historical and Customs, DC/CN 3/1, 1925, p. 14.

money belonged to the person who earned it. The consequence of this, however, was that the chief and his headmen were left with merely their dignity and personal influence, being bereft of their original powers.

The 1930s represented a kind of transition period with regard to the sexual division of labour, and it was clearly the women who bore the brunt of the transition. Hay made these observations in her study of the impact of migrant labour on the people of Kowe.<sup>143</sup> She noted that towards the late 1930s, and during wartime, more and more absentee labourers began to “work with money”, and sent their wives money with which to employ someone to help with clearing, hoeing, or weeding. In a related study on the impact of migrant wage labour on the households in Koguta, in Central Kavirondo District, Francis also established that from the 1930s more agricultural work fell on women whose husbands took up migrant wage labour.<sup>144</sup> As has already been noted, the 1930s marked the beginning of the period in which a majority of migrant wage labourers began to take part in migrant labour for a year. Previously, the majority used to return home during the peak of agricultural activity to help with farm work. As has already been noted, since the second decade of colonial rule, a majority of men from South Nyanza went out to labour on a contract of six months. This meant that agricultural work fell more on women who remained at home.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Hay, J.M. ‘Economic Change in Luoland’, p. 230.

<sup>144</sup> Francis, E. ‘Migration and Changing Divisions of Labour’, *Africa*, p. 202.

<sup>145</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, PC/NZA, 1916, 31-3-1916, p. 11; KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-3-1917, p. 235; KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report for 31-3-1921, p. 36.



Migrant labour drained South Nyanza and Nyanza more widely of its labour power. The record for the area contains numerous complaints from colonial administrators who lamented that it was being drained of the best of its youthful cultivators. In 1922, a European woman employer remarked about the Luo youths:

They make excellent cattle boys, but are not much good for other work, such as picking coffee or growing maize, which they consider beneath their dignity and fit work for women.<sup>146</sup>

The 1944 Nyanza Province Annual Report noted:

It was found difficult to obtain the labour indicating that the drain on the population had been too intense.<sup>147</sup>

Berman has noted that there were some areas that were deliberately maintained as underdeveloped labour reserves to supply migrant labour for the cash-crop areas and mines.<sup>148</sup> Studies of Nyanza have shown that the province was a labour pool. For instance, Hay in her study of Kowe has pointed out that the growing export of labour from the province might be thought to have increased the burden of agricultural work for women. She noted that as early as 1910, administrators lamented the fact that Nyanza was

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<sup>146</sup> Close, E. A Woman Alone in Kenya, Uganda and The Belgian Congo, Constable and Co., London, 1924, p. 166, quoted in Hay, J.M. 'Economic Change in Luoland', p. 173.

<sup>147</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1944, p. 2.

<sup>148</sup> Berman, B. 'Structure and Process in the Bureaucratic States of Colonial Africa', in Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J. Unhappy Valley, p. 146.

becoming the labour pool for the entire colony.<sup>149</sup> As this study demonstrates, this also applied to South Nyanza. The region was neither an area for white settlers nor on any main trade route. It was peripheral to the colonial centre of Nairobi. This rendered the area to be a reservoir of migrant labour.<sup>150</sup>

As the desire to earn cash increased, a tendency developed in which children and juveniles engaged in migrant wage labour. They were employed in tea and sugar plantations.<sup>151</sup> Van Zwanenberg has pointed out that the tea companies were the largest employer of juvenile labour in the territory. He argued that it was obvious that child labour was widespread in Kenya, but it is extremely difficult to arrive at any accurate assessment of the number of children involved. He remarked that Owen, who provides much of the evidence, was concerned only with their employment in communal labour during the twenties. It was only in the late thirties that his attack widened to include denunciations of child labour in general employment situations.<sup>152</sup> The 1925 Nyanza Province Annual Report noted that the Joluo (the Luo) were gradually ceasing to become agricultural labour, and those that were available for this work were mainly young boys who were idle and insufficient in the extreme.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Hay, J. M. 'Luo Women and Economic Change,' in Hafkin, J. N. and Bay, G. E. (eds.), Women in African, 98.

<sup>150</sup> Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 117.

<sup>151</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1935, p. 29.

<sup>152</sup> Van Zwanenberg, R. M. A. Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, p. 154.

<sup>153</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, PC/NZA, 1925, p. 35.

Snyder noted that migrant wage labour contributed to African women being marginalised during the colonial period. She observed that colonial officials tended to visualise women in terms of a Victorian image of what a woman (a lady's) should be instead of observing women's functions.<sup>154</sup> The colonial administration envisioned women's responsibilities as largely limited to nurturing and conserving society, while men engaged in political and economic activities. Colonialism, Snyder observed, equated "male" with "breadwinner" and, as a result, introduced technologies to men and recruited men for paying jobs that often took them off the farms. Colonialism favoured men with opportunities for wage labour, education and access to resources. Evidence from South Nyanza and Nyanza more generally demonstrates that women were not permitted to engage in migrant wage labour. Francis in a related study found out that Luo men did not like their wives to engage in trade, because they thought that could encourage them to become involved in promiscuous activities.<sup>155</sup>

Those who engaged in migrant wage labour were seen as well off and were called jopango. One interviewee remarked:

Households, which were engaged in migrant wage labour, are still better off unlike those who did not.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Snyder, M.C. and Tadesse, M. African Women and Development, p.

<sup>155</sup> Francis, E. 'Migration and Changing Divisions of Labour', in Africa, p. 208.

<sup>156</sup> Interviews with: Pius Adoyo Owiti.

Arrighi acknowledged that the process of growing African dependence on exchange with the capital sector tended to be cumulative. He observed that as cash payments became an essential part of society, traditional transactions, such as marriage payments, began to assume a cash value, further increasing the necessary character of participation in the money economy.<sup>157</sup> In a related study, Guyer in an article, 'Household and Community in African Studies,' found out that monetisation through wage labour allowed young men to earn their own bridewealth.<sup>158</sup> Most interviewees concurred that they engaged in migrant labour in order to earn cash to pay for bridewealth.<sup>159</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Up to 1920, a minority of households in South Nyanza were engaging in wage labour. However, the establishment of infrastructure in South Nyanza from the 1920s facilitated increasing engagement of the households in the area in wage labour. As more roads were constructed that connected South Nyanza to centres of economic development, the area was opened up which enhanced the number of men from South Nyanza that became engaged in migrant wage labour from the end of the 1920s as they became familiar with the labour market. Men from South Nyanza were now able to seek their own employers.

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<sup>157</sup> Arrighi, G. 'Labour Supplies in Historical Perspectives', in Arrighi, G. and Saul, J.S. Essays on the Political Economy of Africa, p. 200.

<sup>158</sup> Guyer, J.I. 'Household and Community in African Studies', African Studies Review, Vol. 24, No. 2/3, June/Sept. 1981, pp. 87-127.

<sup>159</sup> Interviews with: Benson Mikingo, Naftali Arua, Laus Owaga.

Almost all the men from South Nyanza and Nyanza generally who engaged in migrant wage labour retained a link with their rural homes that was crucial in both the social and economic sense. The linkage was maintained because on the economic front, wages paid were not enough to sustain a household. Therefore, they maintained links with their rural homes for economic security. Social links also provided wage labourers with social security. It should be noted that migrant wage labour did not challenge the predominance of agriculture in many households in South Nyanza and indeed Nyanza in general.

Evidence from South Nyanza shows that even within the region, there were variations in the scale of entry into migrant wage labour. It should never be assumed that there was uniformity with regard to wage employment. A range of factors determined entry to migrant wage labour. Locations that had progressive chiefs, for instance, in Karachuonyo, Orinda and Mboya saw the local population either engaging in migrant wage labour or being involved in cash crop production. Karachuonyo was also fortunate to have had a head start in being engaged in colonial capitalism because of its proximity to Kisumu via the lake.

The establishment of centres of economic activities from the 1920s within reach of the households in South Nyanza enhanced engagement of the households in the area in migrant wage labour. Such centres of economic activities included the Kericho tea plantation and the gold mines in South Nyanza and Nyanza generally. Tea estates and gold mines did not require any formal education for one to be employed. This allowed a large number of

households to seek employment at such centres. From the 1930s and 1940s, migrant wage labour had become part of the economic activity of most households in South Nyanza.

The outbreak of the Second World War contributed to increased engagement of the households in South Nyanza and Nyanza more generally in migrant wage labour and of course employment in the military. As has already been noted, by 1942, about 30,000 Nyanzan households had been recruited for the military and about 110,000 were recruited for the civil service outside the reserves. The war contributed to the re-introduction of forced labour which had been discouraged in the 1920s. The engagement of the households in South Nyanza in military and civil service resulted in increased circulation of money in the area from the wages earned.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### **The Paradigm of Change in South Nyanza, 1880 to 1945**

The aim of the study was to analyse the historical process of economic and social change in South Nyanza between 1880 and 1945. The study commenced in 1880 as a baseline to examine the economy of South Nyanza and the changes that occurred during the pre-colonial period. This analysis was to provide a background to understanding the process of change during the colonial period. As the study demonstrates, economic change was a continuous process both during the pre-colonial and colonial period. In this chapter, an attempt is made to provide a summary of patterns of economic change in South Nyanza during the period under review. As the study shows, during the pre-colonial period, the processes of change were determined by natural phenomena such as cattle epidemics, population increase and environmental factors such as the occupation of fertile agricultural areas. The acquisition of new technology, for instance, effective agricultural implements such as nya-yimbo, equally influenced the process of change in South Nyanza.

The major economic change in South Nyanza during the pre-colonial era was a shift from pastoralism to agricultural production as a primary economic activity. As Allan has pointed out, during periods of disaster, when the livestock numbers are drastically reduced to provide households with adequate food supplies, the pastoralists must shift to crop

production. As he argued, in this, lies the “seed” of change.<sup>160</sup> This finding by Allan is partially confirmed by the evidence from South Nyanza. The cattle epidemics that broke out in South Nyanza and Nyanza more generally prior to the epidemics of the 1880s and 1890s probably forced the people of South Nyanza to shift from pastoralism to crop production as a primary economic activity. In addition, factors such as the presence of tsetse fly that was prevalent in the area, which inflicted nagana on cattle possibly played a critical role in the shift to crop production. The occupation of high grounds that were favourable for agricultural production was also a factor that enhanced the shift in economic activity from pastoralism to crop production by a majority of households in South Nyanza. The adaptation of the iron bladed hoe, nya-yimbo by a limited number of cultivators in South Nyanza played a minor role in the shift since the use of the iron hoe was not widely spread in the area. Its exorbitant price precluded a large number of households from purchasing it.

The shift in economic activity from pastoralism to crop production impacted on gender relations in various ways. The immediate impact was that women whose labour was free prior to the shift in economic activity had to be involved more in the new economic activity-crop production. Men still continued with their economic responsibility of looking after cattle. But as the study has demonstrated, both men and women were involved in the new economic activity, though women bore more responsibility for crop production than men.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Allan, W. The African Husbandman, p. 319.

<sup>161</sup> Hobley, C. W. ‘Kavirondo’, The Geographical Journal, p. 369.



The economy of South Nyanza was subjected to further changes when the area was colonised by the British in 1903. The establishment of colonial rule in South Nyanza brought to an end a state of flux that had marked the pre-colonial era. A new administrative order was now put in place based on settled life. The pre-colonial economy of South Nyanza was now integrated into colonial capitalism. The colonial state realised that in order to effectively incorporate the pre-colonial economy of South Nyanza into the colonial economy, the colonial state needed to introduce taxation, which was to be paid in cash. In order to generate cash in the new political dispensation, the households in South Nyanza engaged in cash crop production, wage labour or the sale of livestock.

The establishment of colonial rule in South Nyanza halted wars and hostilities that had been a common feature of the relations between the maximal lineages during the pre-colonial period. These wars were mainly perpetuated by the youths. The colonial administration disarmed the youths and restored order in the area. The youths whose labour became free as a result of the new political order now engaged in the new economic opportunities provided by colonialism. Most of them turned to migrant wage labour within and without the district. Others engaged in cash crop production, livestock keeping and entrepreneurial activities to generate cash to meet new demands created by colonialism. The youths were able to face the challenges of colonialism and were accommodative to the changes in contrast to the older generation who resisted change due to their conservative ideas.

As the study has shown, the establishment of effective colonial administration in South Nyanza expanded agricultural production in the area. Households in South Nyanza were forced by prevailing colonial circumstances to increase commodity production to generate cash to meet colonial demands such as taxation, imported goods and Western education. Of all these demands, the need for tax money took precedence.<sup>162</sup> Initially, the colonial state employed substantial coercion to force the people of South Nyanza to engage in commodity production or wage labour. The most common forms of state intervention were taxation, forced labour and compulsory crop production. The imposition of Hut Taxes on the people of South Nyanza was widely used not only to supply essential revenue for the colonial state, but also to generate an immediate need for money. The colonial administrative policy of intervening in the local economy was marked by the introduction of cash crops into South Nyanza. These crops included cotton, groundnuts and white maize.

During the initial decades of colonial rule, efforts by the colonial administration to implement agricultural change in South Nyanza were impeded by a range of factors. Foremost was a lack of knowledge by the colonial officials of the geographical conditions of the area which contributed to the failure of new crops introduced into South Nyanza. The other critical factor that also militated against the introduction of new crops was the lack of agricultural personnel to advise the households in South Nyanza on how to engage

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<sup>162</sup> Buttermann, J. M. 'Luo Social Formation in Change', p. 145.

in such production. Up to the time of the outbreak of the First World War, only one Assistant Agricultural Officer was appointed for the entire province.<sup>163</sup>

As this study of South Nyanza has shown, the reason that was often mentioned by the colonial officials that obstructed effective changes in agricultural production were the large herds of livestock that many households owned. The majority of households were able to meet their financial obligations from the proceeds of livestock. This, according to colonial officials, prevented a number of people from engaging in serious cash crop production.<sup>164</sup> Contrary to these official claims however, statistics on agricultural production indicate that production continued to rise in South Nyanza.<sup>165</sup> The other factor that militated against agricultural production in South Nyanza during the initial decades of colonial rule was the lack of infrastructure. The colonial administration embarked on the construction of roads and ports in the area from 1908. The construction of the transport system in the area enhanced extraction of commodities from South Nyanza.<sup>166</sup> The construction of roads and ports in South Nyanza meant that produce could easily be transported from the rural areas to the markets and trading centres from where they were ferried to the three ports in South Nyanza: Kendu-Bay, Homa-Bay and Karungu. From these ports, the produce was shipped to Kisumu and eventually to the world market.

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<sup>163</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province, East Africa Protectorate, PC/NZA/1/5, 1910, p. 34.

<sup>164</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/1/2, 1913-1923, 10-4-1915, p. 5.

<sup>165</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/1, 5<sup>th</sup> October 1908, p. 5.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

In order effectively to extract resources from South Nyanza, the administration established a number of townships and trading centres at strategic locations throughout the district. The aim was to facilitate trade in the district. The establishment of markets and trading centres was also to facilitate control over the collection and sale to the mercantile companies of commodities in scattered villages in rural South Nyanza. During the initial decades of colonial rule, Asians, particularly Indians, dominated trade in the area.<sup>167</sup>

To increase agricultural production in the area, the colonial administration introduced more effective agricultural implements such as the iron bladed hoe (English hoe). The administration permitted the Indian traders to import iron bladed hoes of Birmingham manufacture. The hoes were to replace the inferior German hoes that had been in use in the district for a while. The iron bladed hoes soon replaced the pre-colonial wooden hoe rahaya that was widely used by a majority of households in South Nyanza.

The imposition of colonial rule on the people of South Nyanza was marked by the development of a new economic system, migrant wage labour, in which a number of households became engaged. Most of young men whose labour became free as a result of colonial rule left their rural homes temporarily to engage in this new economic activity. As Stichter rightly noted, in the two decades between 1903 and 1923, a massive social change took place in Kenya. The number of Africans on migrant wage labour jumped from 5,000 to approximately 120,000.<sup>168</sup> The same was true of South Nyanza. The increase in labour engagement was due to the influx of settlers and the development of administration and

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<sup>167</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 31-3-1913, p. 28.

<sup>168</sup> Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya, p. 30.

infrastructure. Three major forces transformed the people of South Nyanza into wage labourers: taxation, colonial demands (such as clothing and education) and finally administrative coercion.

The immediate impact of engagement in migrant wage labour was that the young men became independent from the pre-colonial control by the elders. Their new economic power allowed them to meet colonial demands without relying on the elders. As this study has demonstrated, the outbreak of the First World War marked a milestone in the history of migrant wage labour in South Nyanza. The war expanded the scale of migrant wage labour by the households in South Nyanza. The war increased labour demands among the people of South Nyanza. About 10,000 men from the district had been recruited for war services by 1917.<sup>169</sup>

The large numbers of men of South Nyanza recruited into the war had a negative impact on agricultural production in the area. Crop production suffered as a large number of men left rural areas to engage in military service.<sup>170</sup> Given that the recruits were able-bodied men, this meant that women were the ones who actively engaged in agricultural production. Of the few men who remained, many were unable-bodied and could not effectively engage in agricultural production, due to the same disabilities that disqualified them from being recruited into the military services.

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<sup>169</sup> KNA, Northcote, G. A. S. 'History of South Kavirondo District', KSI/28.

<sup>170</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1917-1918, p. 19.

As this study has demonstrates, by 1915, the economy of South Nyanza had been partially incorporated into colonial capitalism. As Berman rightly noted, control over peasant agriculture was initially partial and sporadic. This he noted, led to coordinated efforts by merchant capital and the colonial state to control the inputs, quantity and price of agricultural commodities. Direct coercion in the form of compulsory planting of cash crops continued to be used, especially for crops such as cotton where the low prices paid provided little economic incentive for the households to engage.<sup>171</sup> The period 1915 to 1945 was crucial in the process of agrarian change in South Nyanza. The period was marked by the promotion of cash crops into South Nyanza by the colonial administration. At the same time, the administration also promoted the use of new agricultural implements in the area to increase crop production.

The rejection or acceptance of new crops by the households in South Nyanza was influenced by their economic and social values. A case in point is cotton. In South Nyanza and Nyanza in general, the introduction of cotton as a cash crop was unsuccessful because most households did not appreciate its economic value. The majority of households were discouraged from engaging in cotton production because of the low prices it fetched. A number of households were convinced that cotton had no economic profitability. They felt that cotton production interfered with the production of their food crops. Cotton planting was supposed to take place during the months of March and April, the months, which

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<sup>171</sup> Berman, B. 'Structure and Process in the Bureaucratic States of Colonial Africa', in Berman, B. and Losdale, J. Unhappy Valley, p. 148.

coincided with the weeding of their food crops. This forced a number of people to give preference to the food crops at the expense of cotton.<sup>172</sup>

The methods involved in the cotton production were a further factor that discouraged the people of South Nyanza from engaging in cotton production. Its production was more complex compared to that of traditional food crops. It required special methods of planting, several weedings, harvesting, and ultimately uprooting of the stalks, which was labour intensive. In addition, the majority of households did not see any reason in engaging in the production of an inedible crop, which was heavily labour intensive and at the same time conflicted with the agricultural cycle of their food crops. The fact that colonial officials forced people to engage in cotton production further acted as a deterrent to its production.

In contrast to cotton, white maize was readily integrated into the agricultural cycle of the people of South Nyanza. Unlike cotton, maize was both a food and cash crop that influenced the majority households in South Nyanza to engage in its production. Furthermore, maize production was not as complex as cotton. Maize could be easily intercropped with sorghum millet. It also fetched higher prices compared to cotton. Maize finally had the advantage over sorghum millet in that it matured faster and could therefore come in handy in alleviating famine before the staple food crop sorghum millet was harvested.

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<sup>172</sup> KNA, Lyne-Watt, W. 'Nyanza Report', KC DA 1932.

While the acceptance or rejection of new crops was determined by their economic and social values, the acceptance of agricultural implements was determined by their prices and effectiveness in agricultural production. These are some of the factors mentioned by the interviewees. The households in South Nyanza readily accepted the introduction of the iron bladed hoe (English hoe) into the area because it was of superior quality to the pre-colonial rahaya and nya-yimbo. The pre-colonial agricultural implements were less effective and broke easily. The use of the English hoe was wide spread in South Nyanza to the extent that by 1945 it was replacing the pre-colonial rahaya and nya-yimbo. This was because it was not too expensive and therefore a majority of households could afford it.

In contrast, the ox-drawn plough was expensive for an average household to the extent that only a few wealthy individuals could afford them. In South Nyanza and Nyanza in general, those who managed to purchase ox-drawn ploughs were either engaged in wage labour or were successful cattle keepers. Successful farmers were also able to purchase ox-drawn ploughs. That explains why by 1945 ox-drawn ploughs were not yet wide spread in South Nyanza.

In South Nyanza, some groups or individuals played a key role in bringing about the process of change in the areas where they settled. They enhanced the integration of such areas into colonial capitalism by encouraging agricultural production. One such group was the Seventh-day Adventists missionaries. This group encouraged their converts to engage in agricultural production rather than in migrant wage labour. The other groups that also influenced change in the area included those who went out temporarily on migrant wage



labour. Such individuals introduced new crops as well as agricultural implements to their homes that they had acquired from places they had been to. The other category of individuals who were instrumental in bringing about the process of change were the entrepreneurs. They were able to introduce new crops and agricultural implements to their homes.

Economic change in South Nyanza not only involved the introduction of new crops and agricultural implements into the local economy, colonial officials also played a key role in the process. It was noted in chapter four that the state intervention in the local economy was more prominent after the Great Depression of 1929 and 1930. As Maxon noted, the impact of the Great Depression led to increased state involvement in the rural Kenya through the initiation of agricultural planning as a way to increase production in African agriculture. Such initiatives occupied considerable time of administrative and agricultural officials.<sup>173</sup> But as he rightly concluded:

The huge influence of the colonial state in the agrarian transformation that marked the experience of Vihiga and Gusiiland, it is clear that it was the most integral factor. Whether one considers the “success” or “failure” of the state initiatives, it was the households of the regions that had the last word. From exercising an exit option to embracing new varieties of maize seed, it was Western Kenya peasant households whose actions fundamentally determined the direction of rural development.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Maxon, R. M. Going Their Separate Ways, p. 71.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.* p. 272.

The same was true of South Nyanza. It was the households who determined the success or failure of the state initiatives on agricultural production. The hypothesis can be supported by the failure of cotton as a cash crop despite all the efforts of the state to promote its production.

As the study demonstrates, from the 1930s, a majority of households in South Nyanza placed more emphasis on agricultural production than ever before. This affected the sexual division of labour in the area. It is true that both men and women worked harder on their farms during the colonial period in order to meet colonial demands. But since most men went out on migrant wage labour, it meant that women had to bear the burden of more agricultural work than ever before. In addition, they had to look after livestock that had been men's responsibility during the pre-colonial period.

The outbreak of the First World War marked a critical stage in migrant wage labour in South Nyanza. During the war, there was an expansion in migrant wage labour engagement by the households in South Nyanza both within and without the district. After the war, the 1920s were characterised by further expansion in migrant labour engagement by the households in South Nyanza. A range of factors contributed to the increase in labour engagement. Foremost was the fact that a number of households in South Nyanza had become familiar with the labour market. With this knowledge, they were able to identify where employment opportunities existed. The other factor was that improved transport system (roads and piers) in South Nyanza opened up the area which was now connected to the centres of economic activities where the people of South Nyanza could seek wage

employment. The gold-mining activities in South Nyanza and other parts of Nyanza from the 1920s equally contributed to the expansion of migrant wage labour. Even more wage labour opportunities were opened up in a number of places in the country such as the Uasin-Gishu Railway extension, the Kilindini harbour and the Magadi Soda works.<sup>175</sup> Finally, the establishment of tea estates in Kericho in the 1920s contributed significantly to the expansion of labour engagement by many households in South Nyanza.

As the study demonstrates, the 1930s to 1945 were marked further by increase in labour engagement by a number of households in South Nyanza. The 1930s and 1940s were also marked by expansion in agricultural production.<sup>176</sup> A number of households in South Nyanza benefited from labour opportunities created between 1930 and 1945 as a result of the gold rush, the establishment of European plantations and the outbreak of the Second World War. From the 1930s, a majority of households in South Nyanza placed more emphasis on migrant wage labour and less on agricultural production. From the 1930s, economic necessity generally came to replace direct legal coercion as the need for cash income extended beyond tax payments to include means of consumption which now had to be purchased as commodities, whether they be food, clothing, western education, farming implements or most important, the need to get cash for bride wealth. This was in sharp contrast to the prevailing situation in 1913 when the majority of households in South

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<sup>175</sup> Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya, p. 37, KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/2, 1913-1923, Annual Report, 31-12-1922, p. 28.

<sup>176</sup> KNA, Nyanza Province Annual Report, 1944, p. 219.

Nyanza were still rich in livestock and agricultural produce which discouraged most people from leaving the reserves to engage in migrant wage labour.<sup>177</sup>

As this study shows, by 1930, capitalism had had a considerable impact on the households in South Nyanza. The impact continued to expand with considerable speed and scope as the colonial demands took a strong hold on most households. The majority of households engaged more in migrant wage labour while others engaged in cash crop production. From the 1930s, many households in South Nyanza had been captured by world capitalism through the process of proletarianization and peasantization. The response of the people of South Nyanza to colonial capitalism can be conceptualised in their positive response to market forces in the sectors of migrant wage labour and commodity production.

As this study of South Nyanza demonstrates, the 1930s to 1945 were years of prosperity for a majority of households. There were more people engaged in migrant wage labour and more earnings were registered from both agricultural and livestock produce. Studies on Nyanza such as those by Hay, Buttermann, and Francis concur that the 1930s to 1945 were years of prosperity as majority of households were engaged in migrant wage labour.<sup>178</sup> Prosperity was equally registered in the agricultural sector. There was increasing crop production in the area. As the study shows, the 1930s to 1940s can best be described as the “golden” years in the history of South Nyanza.

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<sup>177</sup> KNA, South Kavirondo District Annual Report, DC/KSI/1/4, 1933-1939, Annual Report for 1933, p. 10.

<sup>178</sup> Hay, J. M. ‘Economic Change in Luoland’, p. 183; Buttermann, J. M. ‘Luo Social Change in Formation’, p. ; Francis, E. ‘Migration and Changing Division of Labour’, *Africa* pp. 201-202.

As most youths in South Nyanza engaged in migrant wage labour, they were able to earn income and acquire their own properties. This altered the pre-colonial social relations between the youths and the elders, in which the former had depended on the latter for the provision of properties and women. But with the introduction of wage labour, youths no longer depended on the elders. The youths subsequently escaped the control of elders and became independent.<sup>179</sup>

As Stichter rightly noted, the articulation of the pre-capitalist economy with the world capitalist economy meant that the former was neither ‘preserved’, nor was it completely ‘dissolved’ under the impact of capitalism. It was a recast in an entirely new form, that of exporter of labour. Lineage relations of production were modified in varying ways, either in the direction of capitalist exchange or in the direction of ‘traditional’ obligations in the service of the (forced) labour market.<sup>180</sup> This was also true of South Nyanza. The pre-colonial economy of South Nyanza was subjected to powerful forces of transformation. The articulation of the pre-colonial economy of South Nyanza with colonial economy produced partial transformation, destruction and preservation of some components of the economy. For most households in South Nyanza, neither the wages received from migrant labour nor the prices received from the peasant commodity produce were sufficient to sustain the family.

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<sup>179</sup> Zeleza, T. ‘The Establishment of Colonial Rule’, in Oching’, W. R. (ed.), A Modern History of Kenya, p. 59.

<sup>180</sup> Stichter, S. Migrant Labour in Kenya, p. 28.

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#### **ORAL INTERVIEWEES**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Date</b>
Benson Mikingo	Kochia	22-12-2003.
Caleb Oduar	Kanga	28-12-2003.
Dadiel Ojijo	Karachuonyo	3-2-2004.
Enosh Adhaja	Kasipul	24-12-2003.

Elphas Mbeche	Karachuonyo	1-1-2004.
Hellena Odindo	Sakwa	1-1-2004.
Ibrahim Ondiek	Karachuonyo	15-12-2003.
Jadino Alele	Kasipul	19-12-2003.
Japheth Obuya	Karachuonyo	12-12-2003.
Joseph Nyakwaya	Kasipul	19-12-2003.
Joshua Pamba	Kasipul	23-12-2003.
Johnson Onyango	Sakwa	1-1-2004.
Lucas Owaga	Kanyada	29-12-2003.
Lucas Adhiambo	Kanyidoto	31-12-2003.
Magdalina Micholo	Kasipul	26-12-2003.

Maritha Onduru	Karachuonyo	2-1-2004.
Mzee Agoi	Kasipul	17-12-2003.
Naftaly Arua	Kamagambo	28-12-2003.
Naman Singa	Karachuonyo	14-12-2003.
Nicholas Ateng	Gem	26-12-2003.
Nicodemo Micholo	Kasipul	26-12-2003.
Nyamkore Adel	Kanyidoto	31-12-2003.
Ochuoga Awino	Sakwa	1-1-2004.
Omingo Oduma	Karachuonyo	2-1-2004.
Omondi Genga	Karachuonyo	15-12-2003.
Pius Adoyo Owiti	Kasipul	23-12-2003.
Rebecca Achola	Gem	26-12-2003.

Resalaen Nyakado	Kochia	22-12-2003.
Rosa Anyango	Kanyamwa	31-12-2003.
Rusalina Onduru	Karachuonyo	2-1-2004.
Sina Okello	Kanga	28-12-2003.
Stanslau Nyagwaya	Kanyada	29-12-2003.
Timothy Toro	Kasipul	18-12-2003.
Zedekia Auma	Gem	26-12-2003.

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### **Conference Paper**

Onduru, T. A. 'Globalisation of a Rural Economy: Case study of South Nyanza, Kenya, 1870 to 1920', A Paper presented at an International Conference: Re –Thinking Worlds of Labour: Southern Africa Labour History in International Context, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, 28<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2006.



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