



TIMOTHY AYIEKO ONDURU

ECONOMIC CHANGE: AFRICAN RESPONSE TO COLONIAL CAPITALISM

A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH NYANZA, KENYA, 1880
TO 1945

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DEDICATION

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

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 book 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 work. Professor Bonner provided constructive suggestions that shaped this study to its 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.

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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. This study 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 the 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.¹ Records of other missionaries and explorers who visited the interior of East Africa include those of Krapf, Ludwig and New.²

This study fills 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 also

¹Wakefield, 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.

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.

²Krapf, J. L. *Travels and Missionary Labour in East Africa*, Truner and Co. Peternoster Row, London, 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.

utilises other primary sources such as oral information gathered from the field, as well as archival sources, which were accessed at the Kenya National Archives in Nairobi. The archival records utilised in the 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.

During the colonial period, South Nyanza formed part of South Kavirondo District (originally called Ugaya District). In the context used here, the area refers to the geo-political 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, this study aims to analyse the process of change that occurred in South Nyanza during pre-colonial and colonial times. The bulk of this book centres on the colonial period. During the pre-colonial era, this 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 book 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 work 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 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 1900.³ As this work 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 centres of economic activity. Secondly, the area was peripheral to the centres of economic development, for instance, Kisumu.

³ 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.

South Nyanza was sparsely populated, possessed plenty of livestock and was rich in agricultural produce. This book 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.⁴ 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 work 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 colonial economy.⁵ As this study demonstrates, the location of South Nyanza far from Kisumu slowed such a process. The households in South Nyanza were unable to immediately 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 work 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 book 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

⁴ 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.

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

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 work assesses the process of change on the households and the economy of South Nyanza during the pre-colonial and colonial period.

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, Buttermann and Francis has focused on the impact of the process of change on the gender, generational and political structures.⁶ 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 is therefore a departure from the previous case studies.

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 is therefore a significant source of information for scholars who are interested in micro-economic studies of rural Kenya.

⁶ 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; Buttermann, J. M. 'Social Formation in Change; Karachuonyo and Kanyamkago', Ph. D. thesis, Syracuse University, 1979; Francis, E. 'Migration and Changing Division of Labour', Africa.

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'.⁷ 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 and exploitation. 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, was transferred from the African sector to European, and partially to the Asian, sectors, which is another way of describing the essence of colonialism.⁹ 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 Africa, 'the relations of

⁷ 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.

⁹ 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.

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'.¹⁰

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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³ As Bernstein pointed out:

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.¹⁴

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

¹⁰ 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*.

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

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

¹³ Berman, B. 'Structure and Process in Bureaucratic Society', *Unhappy Valley*.

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