

## Differentiation and Integration in Western Kenya

# CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN AFRICA



MONOGRAPHS UNDER THE AUSPICES OF  
THE AFRIKA-STUDIECENTRUM - LEIDEN

*Editorial Board:*

J. F. Holleman, *Leiden*

Ali A. Mazrui, *Michigan*

I. Schapera, *London*

MOUTON · THE HAGUE · PARIS

JAN J. DE WOLF

# Differentiation and Integration in Western Kenya

*A Study of Religious Innovation and  
Social Change among the Bukusu*

MOUTON · THE HAGUE · PARIS

Publications in collaboration with the Afrika-Studiecentrum, Leiden:\*

*Communications*

1. M.L. Daneel: The God of the Matopo Hills. An Essay on the Mwari Cult in Rhodesia. 1970
2. M.L. Daneel: Zionism and Faith-Healing in Rhodesia. Aspects of African Independent Churches. 1970
3. P.M. van Hekken & H.U.E. Thoden van Velzen: Land Scarcity and Rural Inequality in Tanzania. Some Case Studies from Rungwe District. 1972
4. Robert Buijtenhuijs: Mau Mau: Twenty Years After. The Myth and the Survivors. 1975
5. Jan Hoorweg: Protein-Energy Malnutrition and Intellectual Abilities. 1976

*Change and Continuity in Africa*

1. Robert Buijtenhuijs: Le Mouvement 'Mau-Mau'. Une révolte paysanne et anti-coloniale en Afrique noire. 1971
2. M.L. Daneel: Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches. Volume I: Background and Rise of the Major Movements. 1971
3. Network Analyses: Studies in Human Interaction. Edited by Jeremy Boissevain and J. Clyde Mitchell. 1973
4. M.L. Daneel: Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches. Volume II: Church Growth. Causative Factors and Recruitment Techniques. 1975
5. J.F. Holleman: Issues in African Law. 1974
6. H.L. van der Laan: The Lebanese Traders in Sierra Leone. 1973
7. B.E. Harrell-Bond: Modern Marriage in Sierra Leone. A study of the professional group. 1975
8. Jan Kaayk: Education, Estrangement and Adjustment. A study among pupils and School Leavers in Bukumbi, a Rural Community in Tanzania. 1976
9. Law and the Family in Africa. Edited by Simon Roberts. 1977
10. Jan J. de Wolf: Differentiation and Integration in Western Kenya. A study of Religious Innovation and Social Change among the Bukusu. 1977

\* *The Afrika-Studiecentrum cannot in any way be held responsible for the views or opinions expressed in these books.*

ISBN 90 279 7672 4

Cover design by Jurriaan Schrofer

© 1977, Mouton & Co. B.V., The Hague, The Netherlands

*Printed in the Netherlands*

*To my parents*



## Acknowledgments

This study was conducted under auspices of the Afrika-Studiecentrum at Leyden. I am especially grateful to Professor Holleman, the director of research at that time, who assisted with the initial draft for the project.

In addition I am indebted to several persons for contributing to the succes of my fieldwork. First of all I would like to mention the Medical Officer of Health in Bungoma in 1968, Mr. John Mahieu, whose professional care and friendly hospitality helped me recover from a motor-accident just before the start of my research. Mr. David Welime helped me with my initial contacts at Kimilili. Among the other people at this place were my host, Mr. Pascal Nabwana O.B.E., and my assistant, Mr. Vincent Wanjala. At Sirisia I was especially grateful to Senior Chief Jonathan Barasa, who helped me find an excellent assistant in Mr. Jackson Wepukhulu. Ex-chief Jeremiah Kukubo extended his hospitality to me in one of his compounds. There are many others whom I cannot single out individually. Hardly ever was I refused co-operation with my investigations, although at times my questions must have been rather tiresome.

An earlier draft of this book was prepared as a Ph.D. thesis presented at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University. Here I was especially helped by my academic supervisor, Professor Ph.H. Gulliver, and Dr. D. Parkin, both of whom continued to show an interest in my work and encouraged the preparation of the present book. During the final stages of the writing of my thesis I was in the employ of the Afrika-Studiecentrum. While in Africa, however, and during another year in Europe I was given a generous grant by Wotro, the Dutch Foundation for Tropical Research.

Finally I wish to thank Mr. V.A. February of the Afrika-Studiecentrum who was responsible for correcting the imperfections in my use of the English language.



## Table of contents

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>List of tables</b>	<b>XI</b>
<b>List of maps</b>	<b>XIII</b>
<b>List of abbreviations</b>	<b>XV</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 The area	1
1.2 The approach to the problem	10
<b>2. Families</b>	<b>16</b>
2.1 Introduction	16
2.2 Control over resources and economic stratification	18
2.3 Family types and the influence of Christianity	39
2.4 Conclusion	54
<b>3. Communities</b>	<b>57</b>
3.1 Introduction	57
3.2 Communities and reputations	58
3.3 Churches at the grass roots	68
3.4 Self-help projects	81
3.5 Local politics	85
3.6 Conclusion	94
<b>4. The wider society</b>	<b>97</b>
4.1 Introduction	97

x *Table of contents*

4.2 Government	99
4.3 Politics	105
4.4 Religious organizations	111
4.5 Conclusion	117
5. Political role differentiation	122
5.1 Introduction	122
5.2 The traditional political system	127
5.3 The establishment of an administration	133
5.4 Maintenance of law and order under Wanga rule	138
5.5 Tribal associations and economic development	147
5.6 Conclusion	157
6. Religious innovation and political action	159
6.1 Introduction	159
6.2 Introduction of Christianity through education	161
6.3 The Quaker faction in Malakisi politics	169
6.4 The Bukusu Union	177
6.5 Party politics and ethnicity	191
6.6 Conclusion	197
7. Conclusion	200
Bibliography	210
Index	212

## List of tables

1. Distribution of size of holding and number of people supported in Elgon Nyanza	24
2. Reported size of farm of simple family units in North Kulisiru Sub-location	24
3. Land utilization in Elgon Nyanza	24
4. Acreage of temporary crops in Kabuchai Division	25
5. Average number of livestock per holding in Kabuchai Division	25
6. Average acreage of permanent crops in Elgon Nyanza	26
7. Average monthly rainfall in Bungoma District	27
8. School fees paid in Kulisiru in 1969	31
9. Teachers' salary-scales in Kenya in 1969	36
10. Interval between marrying first and second wives	41
11. Recorded marriages of men in Kulisiru and average age of men at first marriage by decades	42
12. Population by age and sex in Kulisiru and Bungoma District in 1969	43
13. Summary of family case studies	48
14. Mean number of years of education of sons of good Christians and sample in Kulisiru	52
15. Mean number of years of education of daughters of good Christians and sample in Kulisiru	52
16. Minimum difference between the mean number of years of education of children of good Christians and sample in Kulisiru at the 5% and 1% level	53
17. Status of fathers of children with skilled and professional jobs in Kulisiru	54
18. Decade in which married people in Kulisiru joined a denomination	73

xii *List of tables*

19. Age and religious status of men in Kulisiru	73
20. Formal affiliation at some time and full membership in 1969 by sex and denomination in Kulisiru	74
21. Age of <i>bakasa</i> in North and South Kulisiru Sub-locations	87
22. Age of land adjudication committee members in North and South Kulisiru Sub-locations	92
23. Age of KANU committee members in North and South Kulisiru Sub-locations	94
24. Age of people with multiple leadership positions in Kulisiru	95
25. Pattern variables and social contexts	206

## List of maps

1. Western Province	2
2. Bungoma District, Administrative Divisions	3
3. Bungoma District, Communications	4
4. Bungoma District, Altitude and Rainfall	5
5. Kulisiru, Administrative Divisions	19
6. Kulisiru, Spread of Christianity	20



## List of abbreviations

<b>ADC</b>	<b>African District Council</b>
<b>BU</b>	<b>Bukusu Union</b>
<b>CEE</b>	<b>Common Entrance Examination</b>
<b>CMS</b>	<b>Church Missionary Society</b>
<b>CPE</b>	<b>Certificate of Primary Education</b>
<b>CSC</b>	<b>Cambridge School Certificate</b>
<b>DC</b>	<b>District Commissioner</b>
<b>DYM</b>	<b>Dini ya Msambwa</b>
<b>EAIISR</b>	<b>East African Institute of Social Research</b>
<b>EAS</b>	<b>East African Standard</b>
<b>FAM</b>	<b>Friends' African Mission</b>
<b>HSC</b>	<b>Higher School Certificate</b>
<b>KADU</b>	<b>Kenya African Democratic Union</b>
<b>KANU</b>	<b>Kenya African National Union</b>
<b>KAPE</b>	<b>Kenya African Primary Examination</b>
<b>KAU</b>	<b>Kenya African Union</b>
<b>KES</b>	<b>Kitosh Education Society</b>
<b>KJSE</b>	<b>Kenya Junior Secondary Examination</b>
<b>KPU</b>	<b>Kenya People's Union</b>
<b>Legco</b>	<b>Legislative Council</b>
<b>LNC</b>	<b>Local Native Council</b>
<b>MHM</b>	<b>Mill Hill Mission</b>
<b>MISR</b>	<b>Makerere Institute of Social Research</b>
<b>PAG</b>	<b>Pentecostal Assemblies of God</b>
<b>PEFA</b>	<b>Pentecostal Evangelical Fellowship of Africa</b>
<b>SA</b>	<b>Salvation Army</b>



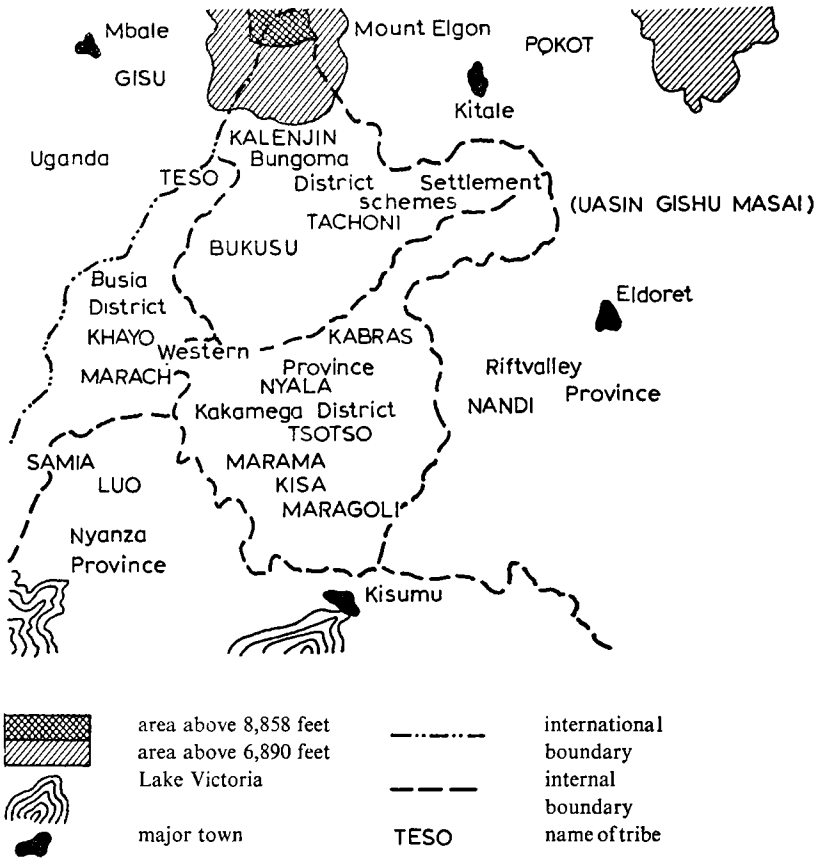
## Introduction

### 1.1 *The area*

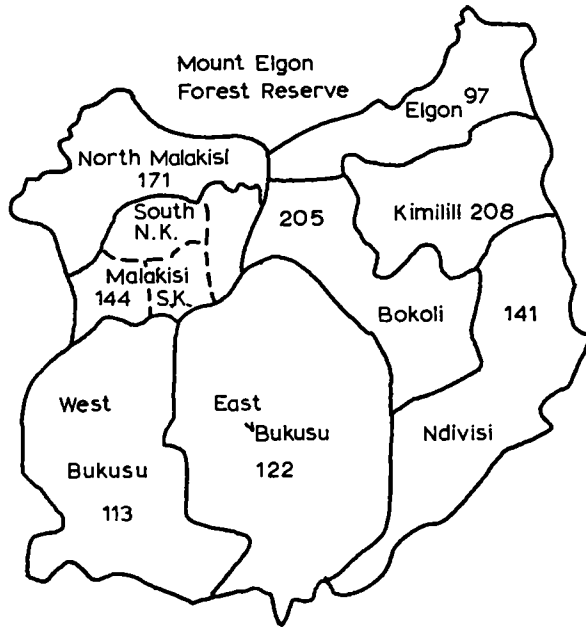
This book is a study of religious innovation and social change among the Bukusu, whose home is the Bungoma District in the Western Province of Kenya (Map 1). Apart from the Bukusu there are other much smaller ethnic groups in the same district. The foothills of Mount Elgon are predominantly inhabited by Kalenjin, sometimes also referred to as Elgon Masai. In the north-east near Kimilili they have their own location where they are definitely in a majority, although there are also Bukusu in that area. In the north-west the Kalenjin do not have a location of their own where they constitute the dominant group. In this area relations between Bukusu and Kalenjin have been a constant source of trouble. On the other hand relations with the Tachoni who live in the south-east of the district, and also in the north of Kabras Location, have generally been amicable. The Tachoni speak a Luhya dialect which is not very different from the one used by the Bukusu. The other neighbours with whom the Bukusu had peaceful relations included the southern Gisu, or Masaba, the Kabras, and the Nyala. Their traditional enemies were the Wanga, Khayo, and Teso (Wagner 1949, p. 27).

Administratively Bungoma District is divided into eight locations (Map 2). The number of inhabitants ranges from 21,000 to 58,000. These locations are further divided into 44 sub-locations. In 1963 the Naitiri and Ndalul Settlement Schemes were carved out from the White Highlands and joined the Bungoma District. In 1969 there were 40,000 people in these new territories, out of a total district population of 345,000 people (Kenya 1970). Although many people living here are Bukusu from Bungoma District, I only took those schemes into account in so far as they influenced life in the old African 'reserve'. In the rest of this introduction I shall limit myself to a description of this area.

2 Introduction



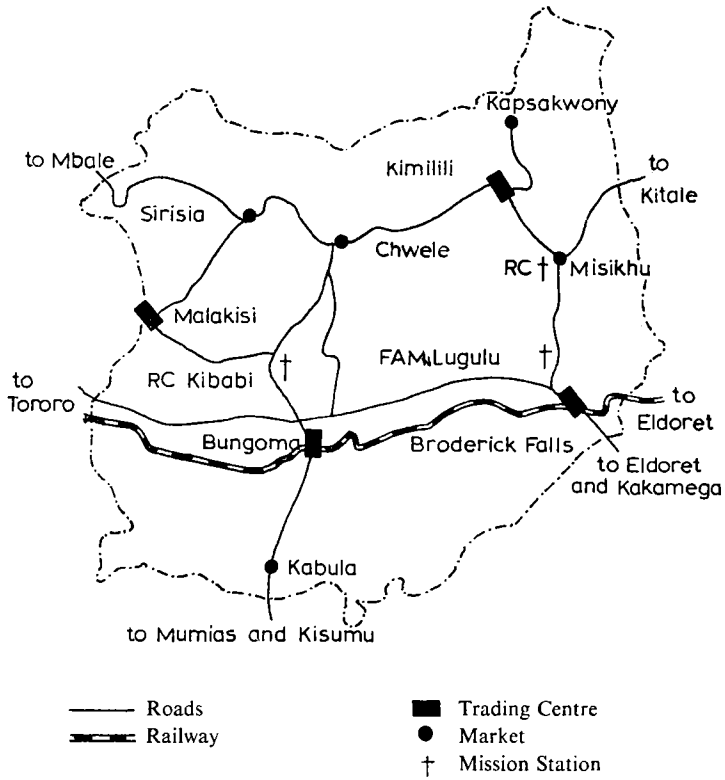
Map 1. Western Province Scale 1 : 1,000,000



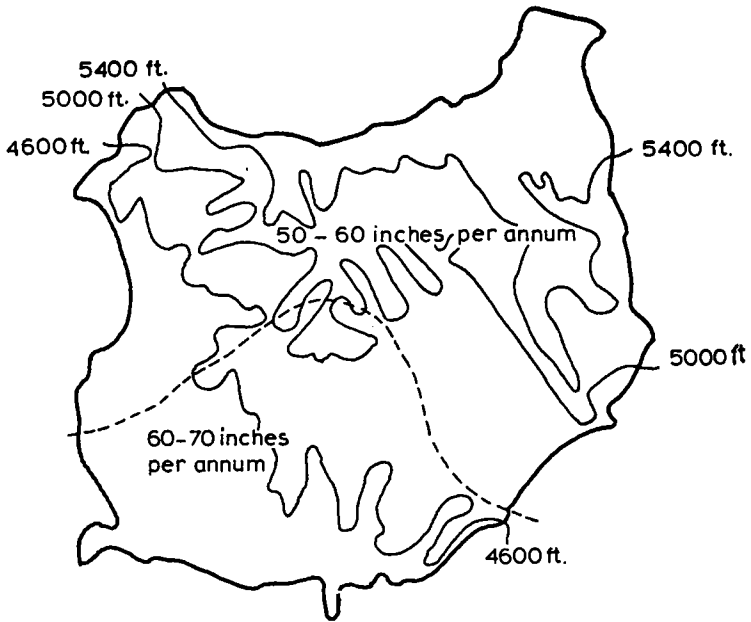
Administrative Divisions and Population Density per square kilometre in 1969  
N.K. = North Kulisiru Sub-location  
S.K. = South Kulisiru Sub-location

Map 2. *Bungoma District* Scale 1 : 400,000

#### 4 Introduction



Map 3. *Bungoma District* Scale 1 : 400,000  
Communications and settlements



Map 4. *Bungoma District* Scale 1 : 400,000  
Altitude and rainfall

## 6 *Introduction*

Before 1963 the present Western Province and Nyanza Province formed one province. For the greater part of the colonial period until 1956 most of what is now called the Western Province formed one district with its headquarters at Kakamega. It was first known as North Kavirondo and after 1949 as North Nyanza. Between 1956 and 1963 Bungoma District and the northern locations of what is now Busia District were known as Elgon Nyanza District with its headquarters at Bungoma. Before 1959 there were only four locations in Bungoma District: Malakisi (North and South Malakisi), Kimilili (Kimilili, Bokoli, Ndivisi), Elgon, and South Bukusu (East and West Bukusu). Before 1952 South Bukusu was known as South Kitosh, and before 1927 Malakisi, Kimilili, and Elgon were jointly referred to as North Kitosh and were under one chief. Kitosh was the name which the Masai gave to the Bukusu.

Both the main motorway and the railway between Nairobi and Kampala pass through the middle of Bungoma District (Map 3). Coming from Eldoret one passes through the Nandi Hills and then descends to cross the Nzoia River, which flows into Lake Victoria. Here one enters Bungoma District. There is another 20 miles before one reaches Bungoma, the district headquarters, from where one has to travel an equal distance before reaching the border with Uganda. Halfway between the border and Bungoma one leaves Bungoma District without noticing it and crosses into the Teso Locations of Busia District. The area where the main road crosses the district consists of hill ridges, often several miles wide, which run in a north-south direction. They have been formed by rivers flowing down as small streams from Mount Elgon, a huge extinct volcano of about 14,000 feet in height. The base of the side visible from Bungoma is about 25 miles long.

Immediately after crossing Nzoia River it is possible to turn right and ascend a steep ridge, which is in fact a continuation of the Nandi Escarpment. Following this ridge in a northerly direction along the main Kakamega-Kitale road one reaches Misikhu after six miles. A left hand turn here brings one to Kimilili after another six miles. Kimilili lies in the middle of an important agricultural area and is a flourishing trading centre. Four miles or so to the north of Kimilili are the foothills of Mount Elgon which rise rather abruptly and which have been called cliffs by some scholars. Generally the forest reserve starts almost immediately after ascending these cliffs, but at Kapsakwony in Elgon Location the inhabited area is several miles wide.

The main road runs parallel with the foot of the mountain from

Kimilili to Chwele. The slopes of the ridges are much steeper here than those to the south. The distance from Kimilili to Chwele is about 10 miles. From Chwele one can go straight southwards and reach Bungoma again after a dozen miles, passing on either side of Kabuchai, a prominent rocky outcrop which is almost the geographical centre of the Bukusu country. Before Bungoma became the headquarters of the district, Kabuchai, conveniently situated on the road from Mumias to Mbale, was the seat of the Divisional Court. Mumias was the first administrative centre in western Kenya and was near a ford in Nzoia river, where the caravans from the coast to Uganda had to pass. Mumias is about 18 miles to the south of Bungoma. The Wanga Locations of Kakamega District start to the south of Kabula.

One can also continue along the road from Chwele to the west and cross the watershed between the Nzoia and Luakhakha basins to reach Sirisia after eight miles. Mount Elgon turns rather sharply north now. If one travels from Sirisa in a north-westerly direction one reaches the border at Luakhakha after ten miles. Malakisi, an old trading centre with a cotton ginnery on the border of the Teso Locations, lies to the south-west of Sirisia. From here one road leads back to Bungoma, while another runs straight south to link up with the main Tororo-Eldoret road after only five miles. This road is only 15 years old and was not of tarmac until 1969. Before its construction the way to Jinja and Kampala went through Kakamega, Mumias, and Busia, or from Kitale, through Kimilili, Chwele, and Malakisi to Tororo. The main north-south links were from Kakamega to Kitale and from Mumias to Malakisi and from there onwards to Mbale in Uganda. When the railway was completed in the late twenties new trading centres were opened where these roads crossed the railway: at Bungoma and at Broderick Falls. At that time Kimilili also became a trading centre. Before this Malakisi was the only officially gazetted trading centre.

Asian traders who dominated the commercial life in the district lived in these trading centres. But since they were few in numbers and far apart, Africans were enabled to set up neighbourhood shops and retail daily necessities, while the Asians acted as wholesalers. In the early fifties the African District Council brought the building of shops outside the trading centres under its control. Plots were acquired and for a fee of shs. 200 per annum people were allowed to erect shops constructed of stone or brick with corrugated iron roofs according to a standardized design, in permanent materials. Shops were often arranged around fenced market squares, where people could sell their farm produce and buy goods from

## 8 Introduction

pedlars at the weekly markets. The best developed markets of this kind, where the greater number of shops are also found, are in prosperous areas between trading centres. Chwele and Misikhu are excellent examples. The markets which sprang up adjacent to the trading centres have become something of an anomaly now that Africans can easily acquire shops there. It has even become official policy to limit the role of the Asians in trade. But they still offer the advantage of a flat rate which is much less than what one would have to pay in a proper trading centre. Trading centres and markets with shops are the most conspicuous concentrations of permanent buildings in the district (Map 3). People do not live in villages but each family lives on the plot which it cultivates.

The most prosperous trading centres and the largest markets are to be found in the areas with the highest agricultural potential and the greatest population density (Map 2). These are the foothills of Mount Elgon and the area immediately to the south of them. The soil consists of dark red friable clay with a deep humic topsoil with a carbon content of 3–7%. This soil is derived from both volcanic and basement complex rocks. The same type of soil can be found in the area to the north-east of a line running from Chwele to Broderick Falls, with this difference that the deep humic topsoil is limited to the summits of the broad flat-topped ridges formed by the rivers which come down from the mountain. The carbon content is less where the land slopes i.e. 3–5%. In the rest of the district the soil consists of dark brown sandy loams with a mere 2% carbon content. It is derived from sediments and basement rocks, partially covered with more humic ash and pumic soils derived from recent unconsolidated volcanic ash. In many places there are swamps which are badly drained and which prevent the growth of trees and shrubs, the natural vegetation of the district. In the centre, where they are most extensive, they consist of dark brown clays with light textured topsoils (Gethin Jones and Scott, 1959).

Agricultural potential, however, does not solely depend on the composition of the soil but also on rainfall and height (Map 4). The rainy season is from March until the end of October, with seasonal peaks during the period April – May and again in August. Rainfall in the south-west is higher than in the north-east, but generally it is over 50 inches per annum. This allows for the cultivation of maize throughout the district. However, this crop fares better on the more fertile soils of the north and north-east. Where the soil is relatively poor maize is not generally grown in commercial quantities. If people do so they use fertilizers. On the other hand the less fertile areas are also lower and hotter. This means that grain grows

faster and can be harvested several weeks earlier in these areas. Traders take advantage of this situation by selling grain from the lower areas to people in the higher areas during this period. The other important cash crops are cotton and coffee. Cotton does not grow well above 4,500 feet while Arabica coffee is not grown below 5,000 feet. Coffee can be grown even in the less fertile areas provided that the site is carefully selected, for example on the site of an old walled village. In the north-west onions have recently become an important cash crop.

In the north and north-east maize is the staple food, but in the rest of the area millet mixed with cassava is also customary. Milk, eggs, poultry and beef are consumed everywhere. The diet is varied with bananas, sweet potatoes, beans, groundnuts, and rice, which is grown in the lowest river valleys. Pineapple and sugarcane are favourite snacks. Cabbages have to a large extent replaced local vegetables grown in the kitchen gardens. European potatoes are grown in the foothills of the mountain and consumed locally. Maize became an important cash crop in the nineteen-thirties after the completion of the railway which facilitated export. In the area adjoining Trans Nzoia people started to use ox-drawn ploughs with which they had become familiar while working for European employers. In the lower areas adjoining Uganda cotton was vigorously promoted in the nineteen twenties and at Malakisi a cotton ginnery was built which is still in operation. The present coffee plantations were started between 1954 and 1962. Onions were first grown on a commercial scale in 1964. They were grown especially in the north-west, probably because the Malakisi Ginnery provided a good marketing channel. Cattle husbandry is also very important in Bungoma District. In 1960 it was estimated that there was approximately one head of cattle per person (Kenya, 1962). The County Council has six major auction rings. The cattle trade can be very profitable. During the colonial period some Africans accrued large fortunes through it. Here they did not face any competition on the part of Asians.

The population density in the most fertile areas in the north and north-east is more than 200 per square kilometre. These areas attracted most migrants before 1950 (Map 2). The only exception is Elgon Location. This is partly due to the fact that part of its area is covered with uninhabited forest, partly to the fact that the area was almost uninhabited in the past. While other areas of Bungoma District increased their population between 1948 and 1962 by 68%, in Elgon Location it increased by 184% (Kenya, 1950b, 1964). Between 1962 and 1969 Elgon Location