

THE JEANES SCHOOL IN KENYA: THE ROLE OF THE JEANES TEACHERS AND THEIR WIVES IN “SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION” OF RURAL COLONIAL KENYA, 1925-1961

By

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Abstract:

This study examines an experimentation of “social transformation” of the rural colonial Kenya by exploring the roles played the Kenyan Jeanes teachers and their wives in the growth and expansion of Western education, as well as in the attempt to ‘uplift’ rural communities of colonial Kenya between 1920s to 1960s. Through the work of the Kenyan Jeanes teachers and their wives, we can begin to identify and understand some of the contradictions and ambiguities of the colonialism in general and in the education system in particular. The Jeanes teachers and their wives opened the window to understand the intended and real aims of Western education in colonial Kenya, and also the interrelationship between the various missionaries and the colonial authorities on one hand, the white missionaries and the Africans and the colonial authority with the Africans on the other. The management, control and supervision of African education, particularly in the rural areas brought the various missionary societies and the colonial government and the Africans to negotiate, dialogue, and cooperate with each other. The Jeanes teachers by their position as supervisors became the effective intermediaries between the various parties concerned about education for Africans.

The study is also explores the educational borrowing between the United States and Africa in general and Kenya in particular. The emphasis placed on the “Educational adaptations” tailored specifically for Africans in Kenya was, as an idea imported from the Southern states of America, having been initiated and experimented at Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes.

The Kenyan Jeanes teachers lived and worked at a time when Kenyans were beginning to agitate for change and equality in education, and other social amenities. Although they were trained to help the colonial system control the Africans in the rural areas, they used their position to improve education and the general welfare of their communities. Majority of the Jeanes teachers chose to cooperate with both the missionaries and the government to get material and financial

support necessary to improve schools among their rural communities. This symbiotic relationship between the missionaries, the colonial government and the African in the rural areas can be understood by examining the roles played by the Jeanes teachers.

This study examines the role played by the wives of the Jeanes teachers in their homes, schools and communities as they endeavored to experiment what they had learnt at the Jeanes School. Their homes became the center of “social Change.” Because the Jeanes teachers’ wives identity and work remained closely linked to the Jeanes teachers’ work and identity, this study has attempted to reconstruct their space, work and identity by looking at them not just as helpmates, but individuals who made remarkable contribution to the experiment of “social transformation” in their respective rural communities. This study has, therefore, made an attempt to reconstruct the history of the Kenyan Jeanes project more inclusive by breaking the silences on the women’s role in the whole project.

This study explores the extent to which the Jeanes teachers were able to advance the missionary and government agendas being fostered through the gospel of community development and the improvement of rural schools. It investigates how the Jeanes teachers spread Western culture and influence through the new educational curriculum and methods in rural schools and the rural community, especially in agriculture, industries, health and sanitation.

The colonial government expected the Jeanes teachers to influence the improvement of rural schools through the implementation of carefully combined academic and industrial educational curricula in addition to conducting short refresher courses for rural teachers, introducing healthy recreational activities, and initiating the teaching of home crafts and agriculture in all rural schools. This study examines the extent to which the schools were able to articulate the community needs and aspirations and how the improvement schools or lack of affected the community and vice versa. Besides the school improvement, Jeanes teachers were expected to initiate certain programs for community development such as experimenting on new agricultural technologies and techniques, starting cooperative societies for the growing and marketing of cash crops, opening of credit and savings societies, advising on building “modern” housing, improving village water supplies and sanitation, planning of teacher/parent meetings to discuss matters related to community and schools, participating in self-help fund raising for school and community development projects and establishing evening adult classes in rural schools. Beyond the school walls, how did the activities of the Jeanes teachers and their wives changed rural communities?

By investigating the role played by the Jeanes teachers and their wives, this dissertation contributes to social history of Kenya by shedding light on how “social transformation” was being initiated from the middle –through the activities of a combined group effort involving intermediaries such as the Jeanes teacher and their wives, the government extension officers and the colonial rural machinery such as the chiefs, headmen. Although the missionaries and the colonial authority expected the Jeanes teachers and their wives to use schools and their homes the “radiating” centers of change, as if no changes were evident, they were in actuality part of the on-going changes in Kenya.