

BEYOND RELIEF AND REHABILITATION: THE ROLE OF NGOs IN KENYA'S
DEVELOPMENT, 1924-2000

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation interrogates the role of three international Non-governmental organizations (INGOs) – the Rockefeller Foundation, CARE International and Oxfam in Kenya's development process between 1924 and 2000. Based on secondary and primary research conducted in the United States and Kenya between 2002 and 2004, the dissertation historicizes INGOs in their tripartite paradoxical roles as agents of colonialism, globalization and development. It traces the role of these NGOs in Kenya's development in their various ways of 'performing development', assessing the various obstacles and successes they have encountered in the process. It explores development relationships in oppositional binaries, between NGO development workers and the project beneficiaries, between NGOs and civil servants, and the ensuing tensions in local structures and institutions. It investigates how these NGOs strive to 'indigenize' their work developmentally in order to foster 'sustainable development' and how local dynamics and environments influence them, and vice versa. The dissertation deconstructs the long-held myths about NGO inviolability, and opens ground for genuine dialogue and discourse on their strengths and weaknesses in Kenya. It interrogates sites of contestation, areas and spaces of negotiation, anxieties and possibilities that NGOs have created in the history of development in Kenya. It looks at structures of hegemony, power, class and gender that NGOs have created through their projects. It illustrates the extent to which

these NGOs are instrumental in the spreading of capitalism, especially economic, cultural and social violence through globalization in Kenya. Thus, the dissertation seeks to explain five patterns: (1) NGOs are part and parcel of Kenya's colonial development legacy, which includes the perpetuation of dependency development; (2) NGOs have provided an alternative reservoir of development resources in Kenya without which some areas would probably never have developed; (3) because of their association with grassroots and civil society movements, NGOs have created spaces of articulation and engagement for the marginalized such as the disabled, the youth, women and children; (4) by fraternizing with the popular masses and sponsoring political elites, NGOs have earned themselves the legitimacy to facilitate and arbitrate local development; (5) because of their patronizing manner and hegemony, they are agents of globalization.