
by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Dalhousie University.
This thesis examines women's and children's labour in Kenya's Western Province, a rural economy, in the colonial and post-colonial periods. It begins with an examination of African patriarchal forms of the division of labour between the sexes in the pre-colonial period. The thesis analyses the impact of colonial rule and the introduction of white settler farming and the effects of this on the use of technology in the production of subsistence and cash crops in Western Province, not itself an area of white settlement, but one profoundly influenced by migrant labour outflows to settler areas. A discussion of colonial policy reveals that policies which ostensibly should have controlled this process and protected both women and children were in effect never applied seriously, given a tacit alliance between European and African patriarchs who were in control of policy implementation and who stressed its impracticality. Finally, the thesis analyses women's responses to their own marginalisation and the forms of their strategies for survival. At the individual level women were able to use markets and the cash economy to carve out niches for themselves as traders and a few of them achieved outstanding success. At a collective level, the emergence of organised and ably led women's groups developed from pre-colonial traditions of women's cooperative labour gangs. These new groups have become one of the most important forces for self-reliant development in Kenya.