

‘A BEACON OF HOPE FOR THE COMMUNITY’: THE ROLE OF CHAVAKALI SECONDARY SCHOOL IN LATE COLONIAL AND EARLY INDEPENDENT KENYA*

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Abstract

Situated in the densely populated former North Nyanza District of western Kenya, Chavakali secondary school was the site where the colonial regime, the nationalist government, and international ‘developmentalists’ attempted to dictate the nature of education and by extension the place of the rural citizenry during the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s. This goal, however, was not easily achieved because ordinary Kenyans rejected the vocational-agricultural curriculum that school officials and development specialists championed as the ideal education program for rural communities. Chavakali students from Maragoliland, in particular, recognized the inherent contradiction of the Kenyan government’s agriculture-as-development model continued from the colonial era – lack of land. Realizing how bankrupt the agrarian development model really was, they used their educational training to enter the wage labor sector on better terms than as simple laborers. Chavakali’s nonsensical curriculum thus hardly produced the agrarian revolution that the state hoped would stabilize the countryside in the postcolony.

Key Words

Kenya, East Africa, decolonization, development, agriculture.

As the seventeenth child of a twenty-one-child household, Joram Clement Chavasuh appreciated that Chavakali secondary school opened in his home village in western Kenya. Chavasuh was a ‘pioneer student’ belonging to the rural high school’s inaugural class of 36 male students that started on 12 January 1959 in a modest one-classroom block of four rooms ‘built of locally fired brick, laid up with mud and pointed up with mortar on the outside, under a sheet iron roof’.¹ For Chavasuh, who was twenty years old when he started high school, Chavakali secondary school was the place where he would

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1 R. Maxwell, ‘The relationship of social differentiation to academic success in secondary school and occupational patters in Kenya: the Chavakali case’ (PhD thesis, Cornell University, 1970), 166.

diversify his skillset and explore careers outside of agriculture. Making a living off the land was neither appealing nor was it a realistic option for Chavasuh who lacked it at the time. His status as a junior son, for instance, precluded him from making any strong claims to a sizable (and thus productive) plot of land on his father's (overworked) five-acre plot in Chavakali. Moreover, as one of the few in his family to receive an education, Chavasuh's parents expected him to pursue job opportunities in towns, which their national leaders promised would become more available to 'learned' Kenyans as the country transitioned from a British colony into an independent nation-state throughout the early 1960s.² Chavakali high school, in short, was to help Chavasuh secure a more comfortable future that did not involve having to depend on the land solely for his livelihood in the postcolony.

Yet, promoting and training young Kenyans for careers in the agrarian sector and thus to appreciate 'the significance of agriculture to the future of economic development of Kenya' was a task that Chavakali's administrators, namely the local Nyanza District officials and the American Friends (Quaker) Africa Mission (hereafter FAM) missionaries, undertook from the start. They did so largely because of the lack of industries and, to some degree, due to self-serving interests on the part of local church and government officials who depended on educated young and ambitious people to stay local in order to maintain business affairs.³ Chavakali's officials and rural 'specialists' consequently emphasized practical training in the curriculum, which they hoped would provide students with the skills (and mindset) to remain in the countryside and to participate in Kenya's agrarian-based economy as skilled farm managers and laborers. By 1961, for example, school administrators had adopted an agricultural syllabus, entitled 'Agricultural Principles and Practice', which included a strong practicum component that required students to take soil samples and learn simple accounting principles, among other activities.⁴

Such contrasting expectations and conflicting visions for Chavakali secondary school provide a window into the chaotic yet euphoric climate of Kenya's transition period and its subsequent independence decade of the 1960s. Certainly, the struggle between local, colonial, national, and foreign experts over the proper nature of education and by extension 'Kenya' unfolded at Chavakali. This was the site where the colonial and the nationalist Kenyan government, along with foreign developmentalists – both secular and religious – tested and contested their theories about the value of vocational educational training in rural secondary schools. Similarly, Chavakali was the arena in which ambitious rural Kenyans adapted top-down development policies to suit their own circumstances and where they rejected claims by 'experts' that remaining in the agricultural sector was practical and in their best interest as citizens of the postcolony.

2 Interview with Joram Chavasuh, Chavakali Location, Kenya, 4 Apr. 2011; Ronald Ngala, 'KADU', *East African Standard* (Nairobi), 6 July 1962; 'Mr. Odinga is quoted: Oust Colonialists', *East African Standard* (Nairobi), 7 Feb. 1962.

3 Friends Collection and Earlham College Archives, Indiana (FCEA), Morris Papers/East Africa, letter from Rodney Morris, American Friends (Quaker) Mission Board, 1958.

4 A. J. Macris, 'Kenya and East Africa – agricultural courses in secondary schools', *International Bank for Reconstruction and Development International Development Association* (Washington, DC, 1967), 1.

The story of Chavakali high school, in short, underscores Frederick Cooper's point that at independence colonialism was not 'turned off like a light switch'.⁵ Colonial assumptions about development, specifically with regard to rural communities and African education, were indeed carried over into the national era. The Kenyatta regime's program for its secondary schools, particularly its emphasis on vocational agricultural learning, was an extension and continuation of the (limited) colonial educational system and (problematic) neomercantile economy. This continuity, coupled with shortages of arable land in the most densely populated regions and the lack of interest in smallholder farming by many ordinary young Kenyans, explains, at least in part, why the Kenyan state fell short in generating the development it envisioned creating within the rural sector in the post-independence decade.

Scholars writing about the shortcomings of Africa's present-day educational system would do well to look beyond incompetent politicians and/or constrained newly-independent African states as the causes of African 'underdevelopment'. Claudia Buchmann, for example, maintains that the 'fragile' Kenyan state that came to power in 1963 was largely responsible for the country's current educational and developmental problems such as the extreme imbalance between education and the labor market. The national government's inability to regulate civil society groups that actively pushed for educational reforms and policies 'framed in ethnic or regional terms', Buchmann argues, eventually made it difficult for the Kenyan state to build and thus to rely on an educational system to improve the welfare and economic growth of its citizens.⁶

Alternatively both Peter C. Otiato Ojiambo and M. N. Amutabi have blamed the nationalist leaders for derailing and hijacking the education system in Kenya. Political interference in the educational process since independence, Amutabi concludes, has been detrimental to the country's economic growth and is the root cause for the crises in the educational sector in Kenya today.⁷ Similarly, Ojiambo traces Kenya's developmental problems to the ill-defined and fluid education policies and programs that Kenyan politicians established and, subsequently, modified during the early years of independence as they worked to accommodate their constituents' expectations and foreign supporters' demands.⁸

In turn historians writing about African education have mostly limited their studies to the pre-independence era. More specifically, their focus has been on the implications of the mission-based educational system, which emphasized rudimentary reading and writing skills suitable for Africans to acquaint themselves with the Bible. Ann Beck and Aaron Windel, for instance, have shown how the mission churches' policy of providing a basic literary education to the local people with whom they worked in places like British East Africa ultimately complicated the Colonial Offices' post-First World War era commitment

5 F. Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge, 2002), 4.

6 C. Buchmann, 'The state and schooling in Kenya: historical developments and current challenges', *Africa Today*, 46:1 (1999), 95-117.

7 M. N. Amutabi, 'Political interference in the running of education in post-independence Kenya: a critical retrospective', *International Journal of Educational Development*, 23 (2003), 127-44.

8 P. C. Otiato Ojiambo, 'Quality of education and its role in national development: a case study of Kenya's educational reforms', *Kenya Studies Review*, 1:1 (2009), 133-49.

to develop an appropriate 'native' schooling system that would support the imperial project. Windel and Beck's analyses highlight the contradictory nature of colonialists as they struggle to maintain the hollow and racist notion that 'tribal' Africans were incapable of handling a conventional academic schooling because it would erode their communal nature while at the same time relying on educated locals to serve as civil servants and authorities.⁹

Similarly Carol Summers and Derek Peterson have paid attention to how ambitious young Africans took advantage of mission schools in ways that frustrated and challenged missionaries, local officials, as well as community elders in colonial Rhodesia and colonial Kenya, respectively. While Summers and Peterson make clear that rural Africans preferred a conventional academic training over adapted education, their narratives are still about ordinary people living under colonialism.¹⁰ This narrow focus on the colonial era has its limits because it suggests that the newly-independent African governments abandoned the policies and programs of their colonizers once they assumed power. Yet, as the Chavakali high school case reveals, Kenya's nationalist government and its developmentalist partners took measures to implement a vocational-agricultural curriculum that was similar, if not identical, to their colonial predecessor's educational program for rural Kenyans. The newly-independent state, consequently, confronted some of the same challenges in its effort to encourage ambitious secondary school students to turn to the agricultural sector for viable job opportunities.

At the same time by explicating how the Kenyan government during the transition period and independence decade proceeded with the late colonial government's rural education program, this article adds to the scholarship on postcolonial education in Africa. It specifically builds on studies that have elucidated the significant role mission education played in building the independent African state and in shaping its rural citizenry. Anthony Simpson's ethnography about life in a Zambian Catholic boys' boarding school in the 1990s, for example, reveals how missionaries attempted to no avail to utilize education to remake students into virtuous leaders in the postcolony. Like the Catholic missionaries in postcolonial Zambia, the Quaker church in western Kenya sought to use mission schooling to influence local Quakers' identity formation during and, more importantly, after colonial rule. Friends missionaries in the late 1950s lobbied for Chavakali's construction and played a significant role in crafting the school's practical education curriculum. In so doing, FAM missionaries reinforced the self-serving notion that ordinary Kenyans' responsibility as *wanainchi* (citizens) and 'good' Christians was to accept potential careers in agriculture. Unsurprisingly, as were Simpson's observations in Zambia, the missionaries in western Kenya were ineffective in creating 'docile bodies' who would embrace the flawed notion that becoming a smallholder farmer or laborer was the only way to show that they were 'dutiful' Christians and thereby virtuous citizens.¹¹

9 A. Beck, 'Colonial policy and education in British East Africa, 1900-1950', *Journal of British Studies*, 5:2 (1966), 115-38; A. Windel, 'British colonial education in Africa: policy and practice in the era of trusteeship', *History Compass*, 7:1 (2009), 1-21.

10 C. Summers, 'Demanding schools: the Umchingwe project and African men's struggles for education in Southern Rhodesia, 1928-1934', *African Studies Review*, 40:2 (1997), 117-39; D. Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth, 2004), 138-62.

11 A. Simpson, *Half-London in Zambia: Contested Identities in a Catholic Mission School* (London, 2003), 1-8, 43.

Local needs, expectations, and realities trumped those of the Kenyan state and its development partners. The lack of success or the failures of the agrarian revolution of the 1960s in places like Kenya were consequently the result of ordinary people challenging the trite narrative that rural people should only strive to have careers in agriculture and thus remain in the countryside. The renunciation of this stereotyping, which was often championed by urban elites and rural development practitioners like the Friends Quaker missionaries, underpins the story of Chavakali high school. By neither continuing with advanced studies in agriculture and thus becoming 'progressive' farm managers nor taking up employment as skilled farm laborers upon leaving high school, Chavakali students rejected the school's intended aims and thereby complicated Kenya's nation-building project.

THE PLACE OF CHAVAKALI

The Chavakali region, which is situated within the North Maragoli sub-location of present-day Vihiga county in what was historically known as the North Nyanza District of Nyanza Province in western Kenya, is predominantly home to the people who identify as the Maragoli Luhya. The Maragoli are a subgroup of the Abaluhya ethnic community, which is the second largest in Kenya.¹² As a result, the former North Nyanza District was and continues to be one of the most densely populated regions in Kenya. Census reports from the 1950s, for example, show that the area around the high school's site contained between 1,000 to 2,500 people per square mile.¹³

This statistic suggests that young people, especially in Maragoliland, had a slim to no chance of acquiring sizable arable land from their families because of its limited availability in a region that was already severely overpopulated by the 1950s. The average size plot of land for a Maragoli family of eight in 1956 was 5.26 acres, for example. By 1960, this acreage had decreased to 4.7 acres because of a 3 per cent increase in the area's population.¹⁴ This particular statistic reflected a higher average holding size than the 'some two acres' revelation made by FAM's agricultural missionary in his report to the American Board in the early 1960s regarding local land holding sizes.¹⁵ The difference likely resulted from district officials not accounting for the fact that land was often subdivided by family members. Nonetheless, the data suggests that the people in the North Nyanza District, especially the Maragoli, were cautious about any type of development agenda and

12 As others have shown elsewhere, ethnic patriots and cultural brokers in the post-Second World War era 'invented' the Abaluhya (or Luyia) ethnicity as a means to actively participate in the imperial project of charting African communities and identities, see Julie MacArthur, *Cartography and the Political Imagination: Mapping Community in Colonial Kenya* (Athens, OH, 2016); Thomas Spear, 'Neo-traditionalism and the limits of invention in British Colonial Africa', *The Journal of African History*, 44:1 (2003), 3–27.

13 Kenya Western Provincial Archives, Kakamega (WPA) HD/3/3: Bukuru Farmers' Training Center, 1959–1968, 'North Nyanza district statistics, 1951 Census'; Robert M. Maxon, *Going Their Separate Ways: Agrarian Transformation in Kenya, 1930–1950* (Cranbury, 2010), 20; Kenda Mutongi, *Worries of the Heart: Widows, Family, and Community in Kenya* (Chicago, 2007), 1.

14 Kenya National Archives, Nairobi (KNA) HD/18/3: District Agricultural Gazetter, letter from T. Hughes Rice, 'Location statistics table.'

15 FCEA, Morris Papers/East Africa, Rodney Morris, 'Transcript of tape correspondence to Mildred White'.

program either from the Kenyan government or developmentalists that emphasized the importance of land and farming as a career option.

The population crisis in the Maragoli locations, which was also present in other parts of Kenya like the Central Province, largely derived from the native reserve system formalized in the early twentieth century. By linking space with identity, the colonial state codified the erroneous assumption that all Africans belonged to specific 'tribes' and thereby assigned each to a specific homeland that was purposely insufficient for the growing Kenyan population. The Abaluhya 'tribe', for example, shared a total area of 7,114 square miles with two other communities in colonial Kenya's Nyanza Province. According to the 1933 Kenya Land Commission, Nyanza Province's three reserves held an estimated '1,029,422 persons ... more than one-third of the total population of the Colony'.¹⁶

An unspoken function of the reserves was thus to ensure the wellbeing of the European settlers rather than to protect 'tribesmen' from giving communal land to outsiders – a justification British colonialists used in explaining the need for designated African 'homelands'. The surplus population in places like North Nyanza district, in reality, provided the colonial state, the European settler community, and foreign investors with an abundance of cheap African labor because many traveled outside of their 'homelands' searching for work and farmland. Understandably, for many Maragoli people who were all too familiar with the region's land pressure problem by the mid-twentieth century, as well as with the physical and financial hardships associated with smallholder commercial farming, Chavakali high school embodied possibilities and brighter futures. It was a beacon of hope for North Nyanza people, such as the Chavasuh family, demanding a higher standard of living (off the farm) at the twilight of Kenya's colonial period.

CHAVAKALI'S EMERGENCE AND ADAPTED EDUCATION

The local residents first learned of the Chavakali secondary school project from the North Maragoli sub-location's 'chief', Matthew Mweneis and FAM missionaries, who proposed the initiative at community *barazas* (meetings) around the North Nyanza District throughout the late 1950s. The project and its objective were straightforward: to establish in North Nyanza District an innovative rural day secondary school to meet local demands for education. This high school, Mweneis promised, would provide the region's ambitious intermediate school graduates, who were unsuccessful in securing a limited spot in the more prestigious high schools throughout late colonial Kenya, with a type of secondary education required for 'useful careers in trade, agriculture, teaching, development of small industries and community leadership'.¹⁷ The high school was to recruit only boys, because there were already nearby FAM-administered secondary schools catering to local girls.¹⁸ Thus, for Mweneis, Chavakali was a solution to the local community's land pressure and unemployment problems even if the school's curriculum fell short of acknowledging the

¹⁶ W. M. Carter, *Report of the Kenya Land Commission, September 1933* (London, 1934), 287.

¹⁷ KNA AV/7/13, ICA Proposal: General Friends Africa Mission, 1958–1959, 'Project proposal and approval – explanation – short – North Nyanza Education Department'.

¹⁸ KNA DC/KMG/2/8/19: African Education, 'Minutes of the 1st meeting of the AD doc board of governors of Chavakali high school', 26 Nov. 1958.

realities and expectations of his young constituents by privileging vocational subjects like agriculture. Focusing on training students for ‘useful careers’, in other words, sidestepped the concerns of young rural Kenyans in places like Maragoliland, such as Chavasuh, who neither had the resources – land, in particular – nor the ambition to remain in the countryside as simple laborers.

Despite his promises that the high school would serve all communities in the North Nyanza District, the North Maragoli chief, Mwenesis, only managed to convince the leadership from three sub-locations, his own and those of South Maragoli and Idakho sub-locations, to accept a self-imposed tax known as the Chavakali Special Rate. The Luhya families from the three sub-locations therefore became responsible for an annual tax to jump start the school’s development. Specifically, beginning in 1958 to 1961, the households in both of the Maragoli locations were each responsible for paying 12/- shillings and 50 cents while the Idakho sub-location households were to contribute 5/- shillings. This fee was to be collected by the local African District Council (hereafter ADC) in North Nyanza.¹⁹

Even though the local officials believed this tax was reasonable and had initially advertised it at the community *barazas* as a voluntary contribution, paying the Chavakali Special Rate did become a burden for a number of residents whose weekly average wage was about 2/- shillings.²⁰ Rachel Amudava, whose husband was part of the North Nyanza leadership council, made clear that the tax was difficult to collect because it was ‘a lot of money by then ... [and] making that contribution was not that easy because there were different levels of understanding in the community’.²¹ Further, the collection of Chavakali Special Rate eventually turned into an upsetting event for some Maragoli residents when local authorities made it compulsory in late 1958.²² Epharina Esabu, who had relocated to Chavakali sub-location after marriage, recalled how this fee was collected: ‘It was hell!’, Esabu bemoaned, ‘animals went ... they used to come and force people to pay 12/- and 50 cents, if you don’t pay it, your animal would be taken ... it reminds me of tough moments’.²³

The abusive treatment that local residents experienced on behalf of the ADC tax collectors, indeed, were made known to the North Nyanza District officials through letters by residents and in reports by local administrators who detailed the harassment. James Mage Aluda’s letter to the North Maragoli chief in January 1960, for example, captures the frustrations that local residents felt about having to pay for the mandatory Special Rate. Upset that the ADC collectors had confiscated a table from his home to serve as payment, Aluda implored his chief to explain how the Special Rate collection process worked. ‘I would like to know how many times one pays in a year’, he wrote, ‘does it mean that

19 KNA DC/KMG/2/8/19, ‘Minutes of a meeting to discuss the proposed establishment of a day secondary school at Chavakali’, 10 Oct. 1958.

20 FCEA, Morris Papers/East Africa, letter from Rodney Morris, American Friends (Quaker) Mission Board, 1958.

21 Interview with Rachel Amudava, Chavakali Location, Kenya, 18 Apr. 2011.

22 KNA DC/KMG/2/8/19, letter from Matthew Mwenesis to Mr. C. O. Kilasi, ‘Kyavakali day secondary school’, 16 Oct. 1958.

23 Interview with Epharina Esabu, Chavakali Location, Kenya, 27 Apr. 2011.

when I am not at home your people can take my things without any information? Don't you think it is against the civilized principles?'²⁴

While people objected to how the Chavakali Special Rate was collected, some Maragoliland residents were still in favor of the school being built in the region. 'It was a good thing for this area to have a school', Keran Magunamu, a resident in the North Maragoli sub-location, maintained.²⁵ Sharing Magunamu's sentiment, local officials pushed forward with the four-year tax initiative because it would (in theory) generate the initial capital needed for the secondary school's basic construction.

Particularly, the Chavakali Special Rate allowed the community to move forward with the goal of building a secondary school for their children. Rather than wait until 1961, which was when the Government of Kenya indicated to local authorities it would be willing to allocate funding to such a project, the local Maragoliland government used the tax revenue it collected throughout the 1958 cycle to open the school on January 1959.²⁶ Therefore, as Chavasuh proudly noted, 'it [Chavakali secondary school] was sponsored by the community and was purely for the local people'.²⁷ The secondary school, in other words, stands as a testament to Abaluhya efforts, particularly those of the Maragoli Luhya, to provide their sons with a literary education that many hoped would lead to good paying jobs far away from the family's overcrowded homestead.

Even though the local community supplied the start-up funds, the majority of ordinary Maragolis neither governed Chavakali high school nor developed its curriculum. This was largely due to the fact that Kenyan law had provided the Education Department supervisory control over all independent or community-sponsored schools. Accordingly, FAM missionaries and, by February 1960, faculty from Earlham College (located in Richmond, Indiana) along with staff members from the International Cooperative Administration (hereafter ICA), the predecessor to the United States Agency for International Development (hereafter USAID), were the school's administrators and curriculum planners.²⁸ For the developmentalists, Chavakali high school was to offer the local community an adapted education.

Popularly known as the Tuskegee philosophy of education, this type of schooling was what American philanthropic organizations like the Phelps-Stokes Fund and Jeanes Foundations transplanted to British territories in Africa starting in the 1920s. Proponents of adapted education like Thomas Jesse Jones, who served as the Phelps-Stokes Fund's Education Director, argued that it was appropriate for the rural African milieu because it was utilitarian and rooted in a strong agricultural bias.²⁹ Through adapted education, the Colonial Office hoped to foster compliant African subjects who would serve the interests

24 KNA DC/KMG/2/8/19, letter from James Mage Aluda to Chief of North Maragoli, 'RE: Claim of my table', 11 Jan. 1960.

25 Interview with Keran Magunamu, Chavakali Location, Kenya, 21 Apr. 2011.

26 KNA DC/KMG/2/8/19, 'Memorandum on the proposal to establish a day secondary school, Chavakali, North Maragoli', 23 May 1958.

27 Interview with Joram Chavasuh.

28 L. M. Hoskins, *Chavakali: An Experiment in Practical Education in Kenya Directed by Earlham College, 1960-64* (Richmond, 1964), 3.

29 T. J. Jones and P.-S. Fund, 'Education in Africa; a Study of West, South, and Equatorial Africa by the African Education Commission, under the Auspices of the Phelps-Stokes Fund and Foreign Mission Societies of North America and Europe', *African Education Commission* (New York, 1922), 16-38.

of Europeans within and outside of its territories for years to come. Technical and agricultural (as opposed to academic) education, was to prepare Kenyans to be productive individuals who would gradually assume their own (political) affairs in the distant future thereby preserving the political status quo. More importantly, the Colonial Office hoped that a non-conventional education program in the African territories would also avoid creating a class of problematic Western nationalists like Gandhi and others who formed the Indian National Congress in British-ruled India.

Given the unpopularity of practical educational programs throughout the colonial period, which manifested in events like the Kikuyu independent-school movement of the 1930s and 1940s whereby local Kikuyus rejected the vocational-agricultural training model by funding independent schools that provided only liberal arts education, it would seem reasonable that Kenya's Ministry of Education would discontinue this type of schooling.³⁰ However, the Kenyatta regime in 1964 moved forward with expanding and implementing Chavakali's vocational-agricultural program into its rural secondary school curriculum.³¹ It did so because of individuals like David M. Mulinidi. As the Secretary of the Busali Development Committee, Mulinidi reminded his Provincial Education Officers in 1962 that 'we have no industries to keep the boys and girls busy ... in this way crimes will increase in the country'.³²

The Busali location was also in North Nyanza District, and thus its local leaders like Mulinidi were very much aware of Chavakali's aim and also desperate for solutions to address their own unemployment crisis prevalent throughout the colony at the eve of decolonization. Consequently, Busali officials sent a delegation to explain to the Provincial authorities in western Kenya that this particular secondary education would 'be an indirect industry to keep them [boys and girls] until they are full grown up ready to hold or do some reasonable service for the community'.³³ Chavakali's curriculum therefore seemed to meet the needs of local administrators facing challenges resulting from lack of industries and land.

Moreover, upholding adapted education and thereby the notion that working on the land was key to an individual's social upward mobility and prosperity supported the colonial regime's and, eventually, the Kenyatta administration's economic policy of neomercantilism. This economic system, which stressed large-scale production of agricultural materials for international markets, had prevented industrialization and economic diversification throughout the colonial era. The agriculture sector, particularly large-scale commercial farming, unsurprisingly was the backbone of Kenya's economy when the British government announced in 1960 plans to divest itself of the colony within a three-year period.³⁴

30 Peterson, *Creative Writing*, 139–63.

31 Macris, 'Kenya and East Africa – agricultural courses in secondary schools', 1.

32 KNA DC/KMG/2/8/5: Secondary Schools, David M. Mulinidi, 'Day secondary school development in North Maragoli, delegation', 10 Jan. 1962.

33 *Ibid.*

34 Bodleian Library, Oxford (BL) MSS. Afr.1717 (18A): Intensification of smallholder African Agriculture in Kenya Collection, 1940s to 1982, L. H. Brown, 'A straight look at some hard facts, Appendix III'; Colin

The quick onset of decolonization and political independence meant that the 1961 Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU)-led government, the 1962 coalition administration of KADU and Kenya African National Union (KANU), as well as the KANU-led nationalist regime that assumed power on 12 December 1963 continued the export-oriented agriculture. In so doing, it maintained the colonial economic development model of neomercantilism: a system that consequently benefited elite (land-rich) Kenyans at the expense of ordinary (land-poor) Kenyans in the postcolony. Neomercantilism also meant that the Kenyan government needed a productive (and cooperative) agricultural labor force. The fact that in 1964 the Kenyatta regime requested additional funding from USAID, the successor of the ICA, to expand agricultural teaching within the country's rural secondary schools was a realistic acknowledgement that colonial rule had failed to produce a viable and diversified capitalist economy.³⁵

The Kenyan state's reliance on the rural sector and the continuation of the neomercantilist economic system in the postcolony was due, in large part, to its Western allies espousing the virtues of modernization theory throughout the independence decade. Proponents of modernization theory maintained that the leadership in the so-called 'developing world' ought to develop the economic viability of 'progressive' farmers to grow and to accumulate capital rather than build industry. Walt Rostow, for example, maintained that when 'traditional' agrarian societies had the sufficient capital and proper conditions in place they had the ability to overcome the blocks and resistances inhibiting growth and thus the capacity to 'take-off'.³⁶ Agriculture, especially commercial farming, was thus the launching pad for industrialization and modernization, where 'modern' often meant adopting Western values and culture.

KANU's economic program in 1964, for example, shows how Kenyan leaders adapted modernization theory into its nation-building program by underscoring the importance of the agrarian sector within the process. The development of the nation, according to the ruling party, rested on the shoulders of 'progressive' smallholder commercial farmers. These individuals were the solution to addressing chronic rural poverty and to growing Kenya's agriculturally-based economy in the postcolony. If smallholder farmers 'planned an extra row of maize, worked an extra hour per day, planted the recommended seed and followed the advice of the agricultural officer', wrote Kenyatta, they had the ability to start an agrarian revolution that was the 'principal means for creating employment opportunities and raising incomes in Kenya'.³⁷

This expectation from political leaders that 'progressive' smallholder cash farmers would become privileged rural development partners responsible for the country's economic, industrial, and social growth in the countryside was carried over into the independence era by former British colonialists like Bruce McKenzie, then the minister of agriculture,

Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Underdevelopment 1964-71* (London, 1975), 28-62.

35 Macris, 'Kenya and East Africa - agricultural courses in secondary schools', 1.

36 W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (Cambridge, 1962), 20-2.

37 Kenya Government, *Kenya Development Plan, 1965/66 to 1969/70* (Nairobi, 1964), 63-4.

who stayed in Kenya to advise the nationalist government.³⁸ Specifically, it had been the hope of the late colonial government since 1954 when it implemented the Swynnerton Plan, and eventually, launched in 1962 the high-density Million Acre Schemes that the state's agricultural output would increase and with it the people's acceptance of farming as a viable career option. The Swynnerton Plan, in particular, sought to raise the socio-economic standing of some African farmers by encouraging select Kenyan cultivators to practice small-scale commercial agriculture on privately owned consolidated planned farming units.³⁹

More importantly, the agriculture-as-development paradigm allowed the transitional government and, subsequently, the Kenyatta regime to confront a direct threat to the political establishment: young, semi-educated, land-poor, and unemployed Kenyans. The 1960 Dalglish survey of unemployment estimated that only 435,000 of the 1.5 million Kenyan males between the ages of 16 and 45 seeking employment outside of the rural areas had waged employment. Locally, the survey indicated that 600,000 residents were either jobless or underemployed in the North Nyanza District, making it the largest area of unemployment in Kenya at the time.⁴⁰ Such statistics were understandably threatening to nationalist leaders and foreign investors who were concerned with young people migrating into urban centers in search of employment in both the formal and 'informal sectors'.⁴¹

By Kenya's complete independence from Great Britain in 1963, the unemployment issue was exacerbated by the fact that rural *harambee* (community-funded) or independent high schools had mushroomed.⁴² The growth of *harambee* schools essentially resulted in an increasing number of educated yet idle Kenyans in the countryside. These schools were often scantily staffed and lacked appropriate resources to carry out a high-quality academic program. As a result, the graduates of the *harambee* schools usually were limited in their educational experiences compared to their peers who graduated from the more elite and mission-administered schools like Alliance High School.

Yet, like their ambitious and better-trained peers, the *harambee* school graduates expected to acquire employment off the land and to live comfortably in urban centers. Such expectations from this particular demographic, especially in light of the Mau Mau

38 For more on the continuities of colonial personnel in postcolonial Kenya, see A. Kirk-Greene, 'Towards a retrospective record: part I—what became of us?', *The Overseas Pensioner*, 82 (2002), 30–4; J. Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens, 2007), 207–76.

39 R. J. M. Swynnerton, *A Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya* (Nairobi, 1954), 1.

40 A. G. Dalglish and Kenya, *Survey of Unemployment* (Nairobi, 1960), 1–44; WPA HB/9/18: Land Settlement Schemes, C. H. Williams, 'Memorandum on the subject of over population in the Maragoli and Bunyore Locations 1952'.

41 For more on the urban employment and youth crisis in colonial Kenya, see F. Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven, 1987), 194–274; J. Willis, *Mombasa, the Swahili, and the Making of the Mijikenda* (New York, 1993); British Colonial concerns over African urbanization and migration was not unique to Kenya, see K. Sheldon, 'Urban African women courtyards, markets, city streets', in K. Sheldon (ed.), *Countryside, Markets, City Streets: Urban Women in Africa* (Boulder, 1996), 259–84; A. Burton, *African Underclass: Urbanization, Crime and Colonial Order in Dar es Salaam* (Oxford, 2005).

42 J. E. Anderson, 'The Kenya Education Commission Report: an African view of educational planning', *Comparative Education Review*, 9 (1965), 201–7.

uprising, concerned the foreign 'experts', late colonial regime, transitional government, and then the Kenyatta administration. Town officials particularly feared that this group would become hostile and cause unrest by aligning themselves with communist rabble rousers if the government failed to meet its expectations for employment, which seemed possible given that there was not a significant private sector in Kenya and the reality that Kenyatta had to retain a number of colonial officials at independence.⁴³

Such circumstances essentially meant that the desirable non-agricultural jobs were scarce and out of reach for the majority of *harambee* school graduates who were unable to compete for the coveted jobs because they lacked the necessary training and education. The Kenyan government in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s was therefore enthusiastic about the Chavakali secondary school project because of its aim to motivate rural Kenyans to remain on the land as skilled farm managers and laborers. The school's commitment to offer its students a vocational-agricultural education grounded in practical rather than theoretical training, in particular, supported the newly-independent Kenyan state's nation-building program that prioritized export-oriented agriculture as the driver of economic development and the solution to keeping young and able-bodied rural citizens in the countryside.⁴⁴

Along with the Kenyan and British government, the FAM missionaries throughout the first half of the twentieth century promoted technical training over academic instruction in its educational program. The Quakers, like most religious organizations in Kenya and across Africa, had a key role in 'improving' the local communities like the Maragoli. Consequently, upon receiving from the British Crown a title lease to the impressive 1,000-acre property at Kaimosi, western Kenya in 1902, the founding mid-western American evangelists aimed to establish and operate schools with a vocational-industrial focus.⁴⁵

FAM missionaries intended for these schools to attract loyal converts whom they anticipated would become leaders responsible for transitioning the mission into a self-sufficient local church.⁴⁶ In practice, however, the pioneering FAM missionaries offered an adapted education program to the local communities in North Nyanza, which included training in brick making and 'modern' farming practices, because they were limited in terms of supplies and personnel to start their desired local church. Moreover, the mid-western American Friends evangelists were farmers more than theologians who favored an agricultural curriculum because it supported their practical orientation for the mission: to foster a

43 For discussion of the process of decolonization in Kenya, see B. A. Ogot, 'The decisive years 1956-63', in B. A. Ogot and W. R. Ochieng (eds.), *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya 1940-1993* (Athens, 1995), 48-79; T. Mboya, *Legislative Council Debates* 84 (24 Mar. 1960), 'Kenya's economic situation', 84; R. S. Alexander, *Legislative Council Debates* 84 (24 Mar. 1960), 'Kenya's economic situation', 79-80.

44 Kenya Government, *Kenya Development Plan, 1965/66 to 1969/70*.

45 S. Kay, 'The Southern Abaluyia, the Friends Africa Mission, and the development of education in Western Kenya 1902-1965' (PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1973), 78.

46 By 1960, the Friends Africa Mission was in charge of approximately 300 schools. The majority being primary schools, with thirty intermediate schools, a nurses' training school, two teachers training schools, along with a secondary boarding school for boys; see Hoskins, *Chavakali: An Experiment in Practical Education in Kenya*, 3-4.

group of literate Christian farmers and farm workers who would use the land to sustain the local church and its activities.⁴⁷

Supporting the Chavakali secondary project in the mid-1950s, consequently, fit in with the Quaker church's mission. The emphasis on practical over traditional academic training was necessary for young ordinary Kenyans, FAM and Earlham College representatives argued, because it prepared them to garner jobs in the rural sector that would enable them to become 'good' Christians and citizens. Particularly, FAM personnel anticipated that graduates of Chavakali would remain in the countryside and assume leadership positions in the home church given that they would have acquired the practical training necessary to manage the mission's religious work and its 1,000-acre property at Kaimosi. Chavakali secondary school, put another way, was a means by which missionaries could directly influence and foster the younger generation of Luhya Quakers into becoming 'proper' church leaders in the late colonial and, eventually, postcolonial era. Its establishment and, more importantly, Chavakali's vocational-agricultural education program thus catered more to outsider interests and expectations than those of the people in the Maragoli area whom the school was supposed to serve.

FROM COMMUNITY PROJECT TO INTERNATIONAL SCHEME

That rural Kenyans' place within the newly independent state was limited to the agricultural sphere was one of the main reasons why FAM leaders like Fred Reeve, the mission's Executive Secretary at the time, strongly backed the campaign by the North Maragoli sub-location chief, Matthew Mwenesis, to build a rural high school in Chavakali. Reeve's enthusiasm for the school project led him to solicit support from officials at Earlham College in the late 1950s. The executive secretary's efforts resulted in the two religious (Quaker) Friends institutions working jointly in 1957 on grant proposals to the United States' ICA and the British government. Reeve and Landrum Bolling, who was Earlham College's president at the time, appealed to officials in Nairobi, London, and Washington, DC, for funding and resources to assist the Maragoli community's effort to establish the first day secondary school in Kenya. Bolling and Reeve proposed that Chavakali secondary school would borrow elements from American rural high schools that included adopting a day rather than a boarding (overnight) structure as well as privileging agriculture and industrial arts over conventional academic subjects in the school's curricula.⁴⁸

On 16 February 1960, over a year after Chavakali secondary school's grand opening on 12 January 1959, Reeve and Bolling secured a grant for \$310,685 from ICA. This financial support was for four years, meaning it carried over into the independence era, and effectively transitioned the high school from a local community-financed initiative into an ICA (and eventually USAID) pilot project with Earlham College in charge of overseeing the contract.⁴⁹ Consequently, the college was responsible for providing staff and leadership while the British

47 For a discussion of the establishment of the Friends Africa Mission in western Kenya, see A. M. Bak Rasmussen, *A History of the Quaker Movement in Africa* (New York, 1995).

48 Hoskins, *Chavakali: An Experiment in Practical Education in Kenya*, 2.

49 F. F. Indire, 'A comprehensive high school curriculum proposal for reviewing and revising the program of Chavakali secondary school, Maragoli, Kenya' (PhD thesis, Indiana University, 1962), 45.

Colonial Office and Kenyan government were to offer these same services (on a limited basis) and to furnish the classrooms with equipment and tools.

In its role as an ICA-AID pilot project, Chavakali intensified its vocational curriculum by having faculty and administrators implement agriculture and industrial arts courses. Particularly, the ICA-AID contract brought Robert Maxwell, the assigned agricultural instructor, to western Kenya in 1961. Maxwell, an American farmer from Iowa, arrived at Chavakali tasked with creating an agricultural program that was to appeal to students and their families.⁵⁰ This assignment was certain to be a challenge for Maxwell given that prior to his arrival, in 1960, some parents had threatened to pull their children out of Chavakali after they witnessed an instructor working on his demonstration farm plot at the school's facilities. The parents demanded that Morris Kirck, then the headmaster, to compel this particular teacher to refrain from working in the field and to dress more professionally.⁵¹ It is unclear if Kirck formally addressed the parents' concerns, but Chavakali's student rosters for this time period do not reflect a huge drop in enrollment numbers (rather, the opposite) suggesting that the angry parents likely did not carry out their threat to withdraw their sons from the high school.

In spite of the community's reluctance to have Chavakali students learn farming skills from their instructors, Maxwell implemented an agricultural syllabus in the early 1960s that Kenya's Ministries of Agriculture and Education supported and, more importantly, was Cambridge Syndicate approved. The syndicate's endorsement was vital because it organized and regulated the curriculum and examinations for Kenya's secondary school programs, and thus it was the organization that issued the coveted Cambridge School Certificates that were often required for admission to a university and 'white-collar' jobs.⁵² Maxwell, in other words, provided Chavakali students and parents with a reason to take the subject of farming seriously because agriculture was now part of the Cambridge School Certificate exam, an examination that most (if not all) Kenyan students in the late colonial and independence decade worked diligently to be eligible to take and to pass.

Nevertheless, even if rural Maragoli students were interested in learning 'better' agriculture skills, the lack of land available prevented many pupils from practicing at home what they were learning on the school's demonstration plots. Colonial education and farm policies, in effect, were inherently irrational and nonsensical in western Kenya. The reality was there was no free land and the practice of fragmenting holdings for inheritance purposes was forcing future generations to make due on smaller and less fertile plots.

THE PRACTICALITY OF 'PRACTICAL EDUCATION'

Whereas the Kenyan government and FAM missionaries throughout the independence decade sought to create a specific type of rural citizen using Chavakali secondary school, students and their parents had their own objectives for the high school. For a number of

⁵⁰ L. K. Painter, 'Opportunities for Friends in Kenya', *Friends Journal: Quaker Thought and Life Today*, 12:8 (1966), 200; Macris, 'Kenya and East Africa – agricultural courses in secondary schools', 2.

⁵¹ Morris Family Personal Archives, Cortland, New York (MFA), letter from Rodney Morris to Morris Family, Oct. 1960.

⁵² Maxwell, 'The relationship of social differentiation to academic success in secondary school', 12.

Maragoli residents, the school offered them a way to provide their children with a conventional literary education, which they understood was essential for socioeconomic upward mobility within any Kenyan state. The school, in other words, represented more than a place to receive vocational-agricultural training; it was to enable western Kenyans to acquire an education that would lead to a good paying job ideally far away from the family's overcrowded homestead. The school's emphasis on vocational-agricultural training, understandably, frustrated parents and community members.⁵³

That Chavakali students and their parents were unenthusiastic about the school's emphasis on application and demonstration was reasonable, especially in light of significant political events taking place nationally, as well as across the sub-Saharan African continent in the late 1950s and early 1960s, that seemed to expedite the end of colonial rule in Kenya.⁵⁴ Chavakali high school officials' aim to make vocational-agricultural education a priority, in effect, started during the twilight years of colonization and, subsequently, continued into the country's decolonization and transfer of power period – a moment when expectations for better working and living conditions were high among all Kenyans. Accordingly, like most ordinary Kenyans at this time, Chavakali parents expected material improvements in their families' circumstances as the country transitioned into a sovereign nation-state in the early 1960s.

The community's expectations seemed warranted given that they also contributed to the school's development by way of the Chavakali Special Rate Tax. Indeed, as tax payers, many parents who sent their children to Chavakali felt that they were entitled to have some influence over the school's affairs and its curriculum. Administrative control, however, belonged in the hands of the Friends missionaries, Kenyan officials, and the US development representatives who ideally had the local communities' best interest in mind. Keran Magunamu, for instance, provided insight as to why the local population may have not had much sway over Chavakali's academic program: 'most of the villagers were uneducated, so that did not allow us the opportunity to dictate what was supposed to be taught at the school'.⁵⁵

The lack of education, nonetheless, did not keep parents from feeling that they ought to have some control over their children's schooling. This feeling of entitlement, in fact, ultimately engendered complications for FAM missionaries and authorities during Kenya's transition period. For instance, the school's acting-superintendent, Rodney Morris, wrote to the Mission Board in 1960 about the challenges missionaries faced in terms of carrying out the mission's agenda for the school under these circumstances. 'The outcry was tremendous with many rumors being circulated about the school being second-rate', Morris

53 Interview with Dan Beane, Iowa, 18 Nov. 2010.

54 Chavakali School's opening, for example, occurred on the heels of the 1958 national elections that brought to power vocal nationalists like Tom Mboya and Oginga Odinga. Moreover, within the school's first few years of operation, events like Harold MacMillan's famous 'winds of change' speech to the South African Parliament in 1960 ultimately led Kenya into the 1960, 1962, and the 1963 Lancaster House Conferences in London. Such events allowed Kenya to achieve its political independence from Great Britain faster than previously envisioned by the Colonial Office, see Ogot, 'The decisive years 1956–63', in Ogot and Ochieng (eds.), *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya 1940–1993*.

55 Interview with Keran Magunamu.

explained, 'the people really have a feeling that the school belongs to them, a feeling that we don't want to discourage, but one that makes any proposed changes all the more difficult.'⁵⁶

Along with being problematic for the missionaries on the ground, the local community's attitude about the school's main purpose essentially undercut the efforts of the Kenyan government and its developmentalist partners who were eager to have young rural people invested in their communities and, more importantly, participating in the national economy as either skilled agricultural workers or productive smallholder commercial farmers. For example, as Robert Maxwell discovered during his return trip to Kenya in 1969, a number of former students from the first five classes, meaning those who entered between 1959 and 1963, neither remained in western Kenya nor became successful smallholder commercial farmers once they left Chavakali secondary school. Of the 266 former Chavakali school students with whom he interviewed for his doctoral research, Maxwell learned that only 23 people (11 per cent) indicated they worked in the agricultural sector yet did not specify if they either were commercial farmers or officials for the Ministry of Agriculture, with the latter being the more likely scenario. Compared to the 108 respondents who reported that they were clerical workers residing in places like Nairobi, the 23 people working in the agriculture sector signaled to Maxwell that the school's vocational-agricultural program that he implemented fell short in its goal to influence students' real-life career choices.⁵⁷ More importantly, these statistics highlight the point that ordinary western Kenyans hardly shared the same vision as the political elites and development practitioners about what it meant to be a 'developed' Kenyan citizen.

Similar to their parents, the former Chavakali students had issues with the fact that school administrators wanted them to remain on the land and involved with the agricultural sector after completing their education. The students' concerns particularly stemmed from first-hand knowledge that their high school agricultural training program had limitations. Jethro Luseno, for instance, problematized the agricultural education he received at Chavakali high school from 1964 to 1967 recalling that the training, at best, prepared students to become simple laborers on large-farms outside of Maragoliland. Specifically, Luseno remembers how the lack of arable land in the Maragoli region prevented some classmates from practicing what they learned at home and thus having to use their skills elsewhere: 'I know some of my friends actually joined big farms ... when they joined big farms like Kericho [tea plantation] farms it was easier for the managers to teach them and bring them into line on how to manage the place.'⁵⁸ Luseno's comments essentially underscore the fact that the local Abaluhya community realized the main contradiction with agrarian education in Kenya: access to land.

More specifically, they did not have access to sufficient land to make practicing commercial farming worthwhile. Nicholas Ben Ganira, as an example, enjoyed working outside and had considered attending Egerton upon graduating from Chavakali in 1962. Opened in 1939 as a farm school for Europeans interested in pursuing agricultural careers,

⁵⁶ MFA, letter from Rodney Morris to Morris Family, Oct. 1960.

⁵⁷ Maxwell, 'The relationship of social differentiation to academic success in secondary school', 70-5.

⁵⁸ Interview with Jethro Luseno, Chavakali Location, Kenya, 17 Mar. 2011.

by 1955 Egerton had become a premiere agricultural college offering diplomas and training certificates to all Kenyans.⁵⁹ Post-secondary education opportunities, in other words, were available to students such as Ganira who were passionate about farming. ‘I didn’t want to be sitting in the office’, Ganira explained, ‘I wanted to work as somebody dealing with crops, cows, cattle, whatever.’⁶⁰

Despite his ambition to utilize his vocational-agricultural training, however, Ganira continued his post-secondary education at Siriba College where he focused on earning a teaching credential rather than building on his high school agricultural training at Chavakali. His decision to become a primary school teacher was likely due in large part to the fact that Ganira was born in the Kaimosi area of the North Nyanza District where his father neither had the land nor the finances to support his ambitions. While Ganira did not reveal how much land his father held, based on the aforementioned land statistics, the family’s property in North Nyanza likely was less than five acres and thus insufficient to sustain Ganira’s ‘big farmer’ dreams. Land shortages in places like western Kenya, which were due as much to the commercialization of agriculture and land consolidation policies, understandably discouraged Chavakali students and their families from engaging in agricultural ventures.

Although land scarcity in western Kenya may have been enough reason to make some parents (and students) skeptical of Chavakali’s vocational-agricultural curriculum, the sentiment that farming, namely subsistence and smallholder farming, was a ‘dirty job’ reserved for illiterates kept many local people determined to have the school administrators continue providing their children with a conventional liberal arts education. Someone who had the privilege to obtain an education, in other words, was expected by family and community members to aspire to be more than a cash-crop farmer in a ‘free’ Kenya. Magunamu, for example, was a parent with ‘learned’ children who shared this sentiment. Particularly, she did not want her two sons whom the family was struggling to put through secondary school in the early 1960s ‘to learn how to write, to speak English, and [then] come back [home] and start doing all kinds of rubbish with soils’. However, when questioned further, Magunamu conceded to the fact that had her sons wanted to work in jobs dealing with the ‘rubbish soils’ that she probably would have supported their career choice on the condition that they ‘teach agriculture instead of coming to do farming’.⁶¹

The negative stereotypes associated with farming unquestionably also persuaded some Chavakali students from taking their agricultural training seriously. Sammy Akifuma recalled how his family and neighbors had an unfavorable opinion about vocational-agricultural training because they could not fathom the students doing more with this kind of education than ‘ploughing the home’. Akifuma started at Chavakali high school in 1963 at the age of 17, and was very much cognizant of the unflattering attitude that some individuals in his local village harbored about farming as a career option in general and about the school’s agricultural program in particular. ‘Teachers like Dan Beane were expecting us to be farmers’, he remembered, ‘but, those days, not today, farming was

59 *Legislative Council Debates* 86 (21 Dec. 1960), ‘The Egerton Agricultural College (Amendment) Bill, 7 December 1960’, 910.

60 Interview with Nicholas Ben Ganira, Kaimosi Location, Kenya, 9 Mar. 2011.

61 Interview with Keran Magunamu.

considered [by locals] to be a field for the illiterates . . . they would say, I do not want to see you here in Khakis . . . people were not impressed with that kind of clothes.'⁶² His community's position about agricultural training and farm workers, along with his modest upbringing, likely motivated Akifuma to concentrate his attention on subjects like math, and subsequently, to become an employee at a bank in Nairobi after finishing high school.

North Nyanza residents' judgments and skepticism concerning farming as a viable full-time career option were not the only reasons why some Chavakali high school students may have opted to pursue post-secondary education at conventional colleges instead of at agricultural training centers like Bukura Farming Institute in western Kenya. Farming, indeed, is labor-intensive and often can be unpredictable because of changing weather patterns and soil conditions. Put simply, being a farmer is physically and emotionally taxing. This difficult task was something that the Maragoli Abaluhya community, as agriculturalists, knew first-hand and, reasonably so, sought to avoid if opportunities were available. So, while tilling the soil may have been part of many young western Kenyans' daily activities, farming was a secondary commitment for a number of Chavakali students fortunate enough to have an education and, therefore, options.

Luseno, as a matter of fact, had no intentions of making agriculture his chosen profession because of his status as a 'learned' person. Despite having access to at least two acres of his father's six-acre holding in Maragoliland, he did not share the developmental goals that his school administrators and the Kenyan government's imagined for young educated rural people. Rather, he practiced the 'modern' farming techniques that he learned from his teachers in order to receive a passing grade and only did so on the school's demonstration plots. 'After my fourth form when I got the chance to join college, I thought [to myself] OK, let me pursue college first', Luseno explained, 'I would go to farming if I still wanted to, but when I got to college I found it was even easier to make some little money out of that education . . . so, I thought, why go back to farming? . . . let others do it.'⁶³

Likewise, having passed his Cambridge School Certificate exam in 1962, Chavasuh applied to and attended Kaimosi Teachers Training College. His decision to teach rather than farm, Chavasuh explained, was because his village elders expected him to contribute to the community's needs. 'I received a delegation from the community requesting me to take up teaching because there was no teacher in the community', he said, 'not even a single teacher.' While there may have been a teacher shortage in the North Nyanza region, Chavasuh's career choice was likely due to the fact that teaching, unlike agriculture, was not physically demanding, offered a relatively stable income, and garnered him respect from the local community. Chavasuh also understood that becoming a teacher did not mean that he could no longer practice what he learned from Chavakali school's agricultural instructors. Like many educated rural Kenyans, Chavasuh simply became a part-time 'telephone' farmer relying on family members' time and labor to maintain the land. Agriculture, namely cash crop farming, he revealed 'helped to generate funds . . . [which] was my interest'.⁶⁴ Chavasuh's white-collar teaching profession, nonetheless, was the

62 Interview with Sammy Akifuma, Nairobi, 5 Dec. 2010.

63 Interview with Jethro Luseno.

64 Interview with Joram Chvasuh.

more popular choice that allowed him a higher chance of securing a comfortable future during a time of transition and change in 1960s Kenya.

CONCLUSION

The controversy surrounding Chavakali high school's vocational-agricultural curriculum specifically underscores the disjuncture between rural Kenyans' ambitions and urban (elite) politicians, as well as (foreign) developmentalists' goals in the independence decade. More importantly, it highlights the unintended consequences of colonial policies that continued into the postcolony. Chavakali students and their family members in the late 1950s and into the 1960s neither agreed, for example, with using their education to pursue only agriculture-oriented careers nor did they have the main resource – land – to fulfill the nation-builders' expectations for the rural sector, namely to continue the export-oriented agricultural economy of the colonial era. Unsurprisingly, Chavakali students looked beyond their fathers' overcrowded homesteads for opportunities and ways to improve their condition. In so doing, they frustrated the developmentalists' (both secular and religious) plans to turn young, semi-educated, rural Kenyans into productive citizens.

The land issue in Maragoliland and their own career ambitious kept a number of students off the land and uninterested in pursuing agricultural training at the post-secondary level. The community's attitude about practical education being second-rate training, moreover, allowed Chavakali students like Akifuma, Luseno, and Chavasuh license to continue appropriating the schools' resources to suit their own agendas rather than carry out the expectations of their school officials and nationalist leaders in the postcolony. Put simply, the local community's reactions and actions toward Chavakali high school's vocational-agricultural program show that the nation-building project was, in large part, unsuccessful because the everyday realities and expectations of Kenyans in the countryside differed significantly from their nationalist leaders in Nairobi and from those of foreign developmentalists. As such, the experiences of rural Kenyans in general and Chavakali students in particular illustrate not only that vocational-agricultural education in rural high schools hardly produced the cadre of 'modern' smallholder commercial farmers whom the Kenyan state hoped would socially and economically stabilize the countryside; but, also that rural communities that were far removed from Nairobi were both objects and agents of developmental change, especially in the realm of education, during the late 1950s and into the 1960s.

The reality was that not all rural people aspired to become small-holder farmers who would sustain themselves and their families on a small piece of land that was often depleted of its nutrients and thus unreliable in terms of productivity. Owning large farm estates and becoming commercial farmers were indeed desirable goals for Maragoliland residents. But, Maragoliland's alarmingly high population density meant that residents were pragmatists. Further, this was not the outcome that Chavakali promised its students. Its goals were less ambitious. Chavakali students and their parents, rightly, recognized the school for what it was – a stepping stone – and utilized this resource to their own advantage to the exclusion of outsiders.

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