



# Feeding Families: African Realities and British Ideas of Nutrition and Development in Early Colonial Africa

*Cynthia Brantley*

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Colonial nutrition investigations and interventions in Africa began earlier than scholars have commonly assumed. Comparative details of African village nutritional conditions, as well as the specifics of British colonial scientific nutrition projects, are presented in this historical perspective on Africa's early colonial nutrition legacy. British colonial scientific nutrition projects in Nyasaland (Malawi), especially data from the Nyasaland Nutrition Survey and the first Nutrition Development Unit, form the foundation of this book. The ultimate conclusions British nutritionists derived from the surveys were misleading-both in terms of what was needed and what could be accomplished. Brantley examines and contextualizes this rich and obscure data.

The comparative complexities of African village life illustrate the degree to which Africans drew on rich historical and cultural combinations in their efforts to adapt to constant change, and the challenges of meeting their nutritional requirements. By highlighting gendered aspects of feeding families, the specific ways that colonialism transformed African lives, and the ways in which colonial officers believed in the superiority of British technological and scientific expertise, Brantley offers suggestive insights about many of the problems that linger in contemporary nutritional development projects.

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