

On Call in Africa in War and Peace, 1910-1932, By Norman Parsons Jewell

This is more than a personal memoir. It is a rich and transformative history of the practice of medicine and public health in time of war and peace. Dr. Norman Parsons Jewell worked in East Africa and Seychelles during the formative years of colonial governance. His memoir vividly and eloquently presents the tensions, challenges, interventions and negotiations that informed the development of Western medicine and public health systems in the region.

Diseases were rampant, yaws, smallpox, black water fever, plague and Influenza. Dr. Jewell's tour of duty in Kenya was long and impactful. He introduces to us the intersecting worlds of medicine and war. He served in various parts of Kenya including, but not limited to, Mumias, Kisumu, Nakuru, Malindi, Mombasa and Nairobi. Health care infrastructure was hardly existent. He was frustrated by lack of personnel, availability of supplies and insufficient investment by the colonial state. Dr. Jewell soldiered on and became the architect of many reforms and changes that were effected during his tenure in the colonial medical service.

Following the outbreak of First World War, Dr. Jewell served as Captain and Senior Medical Officer of the 3rd East African Field Ambulance. He detailed the military engagement between the British and German forces, especially specific battles and the role played by the military medical personnel. The viciousness of the war is visually expressed in the photographs, which speak to the chilling cost of war in lives, deaths and terror.

Dr. Jewell was a perceptive eyewitness. He reveals the cultural lanes during his time in Africa. Without engaging in whitewashing, Dr. Jewell enlightens his readers with a vivid account of African cultural beliefs and practices such as traditional medicine, performances,

athletics, romance and the struggle among Africans regarding their past and emerging present. Similarly, the Europeans were engaged in cultural conversations about the world they grew up in and the new society that was in the making. Humor, romance, music, plays, adventure and the transplanting of their culture occupy a pride of place in the memoir. This is undoubtedly refreshing because the intercultural process emerges in its full beauty as a vital dynamic of human history.

My admiration for this memoir is more than I can easily say. It is rich in content, scope and range. It redefines the memoir genre altogether. By neatly weaving together Dr. Norman Jewell's personal life and the historical, the memoir re-centers the conversation on the development and institutionalization of health systems in Africa, the colonial state, the interface between war and medicine, and the cultural engagement during the infancy of colonial governance. The memoir will be the defining primary source for students and scholars in African medical and military history, tropical medicine, public health and intercultural studies.

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