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Migrant Luo rail and port workers and the cartographies of colonial Mombasa, 1902-1950s

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Migrant Luo rail and port workers and the cartographies of colonial Mombasa, 1902-1950s

Belinda Aluoch Okelo

Cover photo: Undated photograph of dock workers at the Kilindini harbour. Photo courtesy of the British National archives in Kew

Migrant Luo Rail and Port Workers and the Cartographies of colonial Mombasa, 1902-1950s

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in 1984

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LIST OF FOREIGN WORDS

Bara/m'Bara	Inland region/person indigene to the inland regions of Kenya
Baraza	Meeting
Benga and Ohangla	Typology of Luo ethnic music
Buch piny	Assembly governing the *piny*
Changáa	Local gin
Debi	10-litre water container
Dholuo	Luo language
Gweng'	Settlement
Heshima	Social respect
Jabilo	Medicine man/woman
Jadak (pl. Jodak)	Tenant
Jua kali	Informal small and medium enterprise
Kipande	Identity card
Makuti	Palm front roofing
Mandazi/mahamri	Local Kenyan pastries.
Mwambao	Political movement for coastal autonomy
Ngoma	A typology of dance found along the Kenyan coast
Nyathi simba/Kimirwa	Loosely translates to "illegitimate child"
Oganda	Patrimonial group
Piny (pl. Pinje)	Autonomous territorial units in Luoland
Por	Elopement
Pwani/ m'Pwani	The coastal region/person indigene to the coast
Simba	Bachelor's housing
Tembo	Alcoholic drink
Ushenzi	Uncivilised state
Ustaaarabu	Civilised state
Wangwana	Freeborn
Wanyika	African ethnicities living along the Kenyan coastline
Watumwa	Slaves

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

KURH	Kenya Uganda Railway and Harbours
LNC	Local Native Council
CBO	Community Based Organisation
BSAC	British South Africa Company
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II
OI	Oral Interview
DC	District Commissioner
YKA	Young Kavirondo Association
KTWA	Kavirondo Taxpayers Welfare Association
MCA	Member of County Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
DO	District Officer
IBEAC	Imperial British East Africa Company
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republic
MRC	Mombasa Republican Council

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> *Mombasa, a melting pot of languages and cultures from all sides of the Indian Ocean, waits like a decadent dessert for travellers who make it to Kenya's coastline. Having more in common with Dakar or Dar es Salaam than Nairobi, Mombasa's blend of India, Arabia, and Africa is uniquely enchanting, and many visitors find themselves falling for East Africa's biggest and most cosmopolitan port.*[1]

Lonely Planet's description of Mombasa captures the quintessential character of a town renowned for being a tourist hub. Mombasa's bustling business and social district, scenic landscape, infrastructural architecture, serene laidback ambiance, and cosmopolitan multilingual/racial demography indeed positively reflect the defining characteristics of a modern urban African space. The picturesque quaintness observed in the town's general landscape, however, belie its history of tumultuous struggles and quietened murmurs, particularly surrounding issues of citizenship, autonomy, and the autochthony rights of its diverse population. Occasionally, the town's underbelly is exposed through sporadic outbreaks of ethnic violence and acts of terrorism, directed at perceived "invader" visitors accused of "occupying and taking over the town's general landscape while relegating indigenes to the periphery."[2] Mombasa's contradictory nature – equanimity on one side and bleeding conflict on the other – is a complex phenomenon shaped by the interplay of numerous factors and influences, some rooted in centuries-old history while others have emerged more recently. It is nonetheless certain that European colonisation was a pivotal moment, triggering a chain of events that defined and moulded the town's colonial character, with both overt and covert effects spilling over into the contemporary era.

The letterheads on all government documents in colonial Kenya were inscribed with the title "Colony and Protectorate of Kenya." To a casual observer, this designation might appear to be a simple nominal attribution for a defined geographic space. However, there are deeper

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[1] Lonely planet's description of Mombasa accessed from the company's website on 2 January 2024. https://www.lonelyplanet.com/kenya/the-coast/mombasa

[2] Kenya's coastal belt, including Mombasa, has endured its fair share of ethnic violence, pitting groups who consider themselves indigenous autochthons against those from the inland regions and migrant Westerners who are perceived as invaders. The Likoni clashes of 1997, for example, was an attack by indigenous Digo targeting ethnic Luo, Luhya, and Kikuyu. The Mpeketoni terrorist attack of 2014 was another example of a local vs visitor struggle, where Al- Shabaab Islamists carried out anti-Christian and anti-Western attacks on the non-Muslim community living in Mpeketoni. Even as the Government of Kenya attempts to navigate these tensions by muffling the main antagonists, the Mombasa Republican Council and Al-Shabaab, the question of belonging and rights remains an emotional and emotive issue in Kenya's coastal belt. A more in-depth understanding of the tensions along the Kenyan coasts can be gleaned by reading, among others, John Oucho, *Undercurrents of Ethnic Violence in Kenya* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Binaifer Nowrojee and Bronwen Manby, *State Sponsored Ethnic Violence in Kenya* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1993); Stephen Magu, *The Socio-Cultural, Ethnic And Historic Foundations of Kenya's Electoral Violence* (Abingdon: Routledge/ Taylor and Francis, 2018).

implications underlying this categorisation, revealing its significance for collective aspirations of national cohesion spread across East Africa. These implications extended not only through the era of British occupation but also well into the postcolonial period. From 1888, when East African soil was declared the Imperial British East Africa Company's (IBEAC) sphere of influence, until 1963, when Kenya negotiated for independence, the boundaries of the colony, and of the protectorate, and whomever had rights to these spaces, were defined and redefined, and the margins drawn radically transformed the topography of the spaces and the respective peoples occupying them. The migrant Luo rail and port workers in Mombasa played a crucial role in informing the decisions leading up to the drawing and redrawing of these boundaries.

Kisumu and Siaya, the representative[3] homelands for ethnic Luo, lie in Luoland, some 830 and 900 kilometres, respectively, from Mombasa. Figure 1.1 shows the location of the two regions. The Luo stepped into Mombasa's social landscape as the official African labourer class, mobilised specifically to mitigate Mombasa's manpower shortages as the British colonial state rolled out its grandest imperial projects in East Africa: the Uganda Railway and the port of Mombasa. Their entry into Mombasa, a territory that, at that time, fell under the Zanzibar Sultanate, revolutionised the town's landscape and radically transformed the Swahili coastal landscape by way of effecting the shift from a predominantly Islamic Swahili structure towards a new cosmopolitanism. The convergence of the European colonial state, the Swahili socio-cultural landscape, and the migrant Luo labourers in Mombasa indeed produced modern-age histories for Mombasa, for ethnic Luo, and for what was to later become the Republic of Kenya. Colonial-era mobilities in Mombasa – of both ideas and people – transformed the town's topographical features. They altered its political structure, revolutionised systems and methods of subsistence, shifted established communal belief systems and public social conventions, and informed new ideas of perceived rights to spaces.

[3] Though Luoland is spread over a wider area in Western Kenya, Luo ethnicity is typically attached to homelands in Kisumu and Siaya.

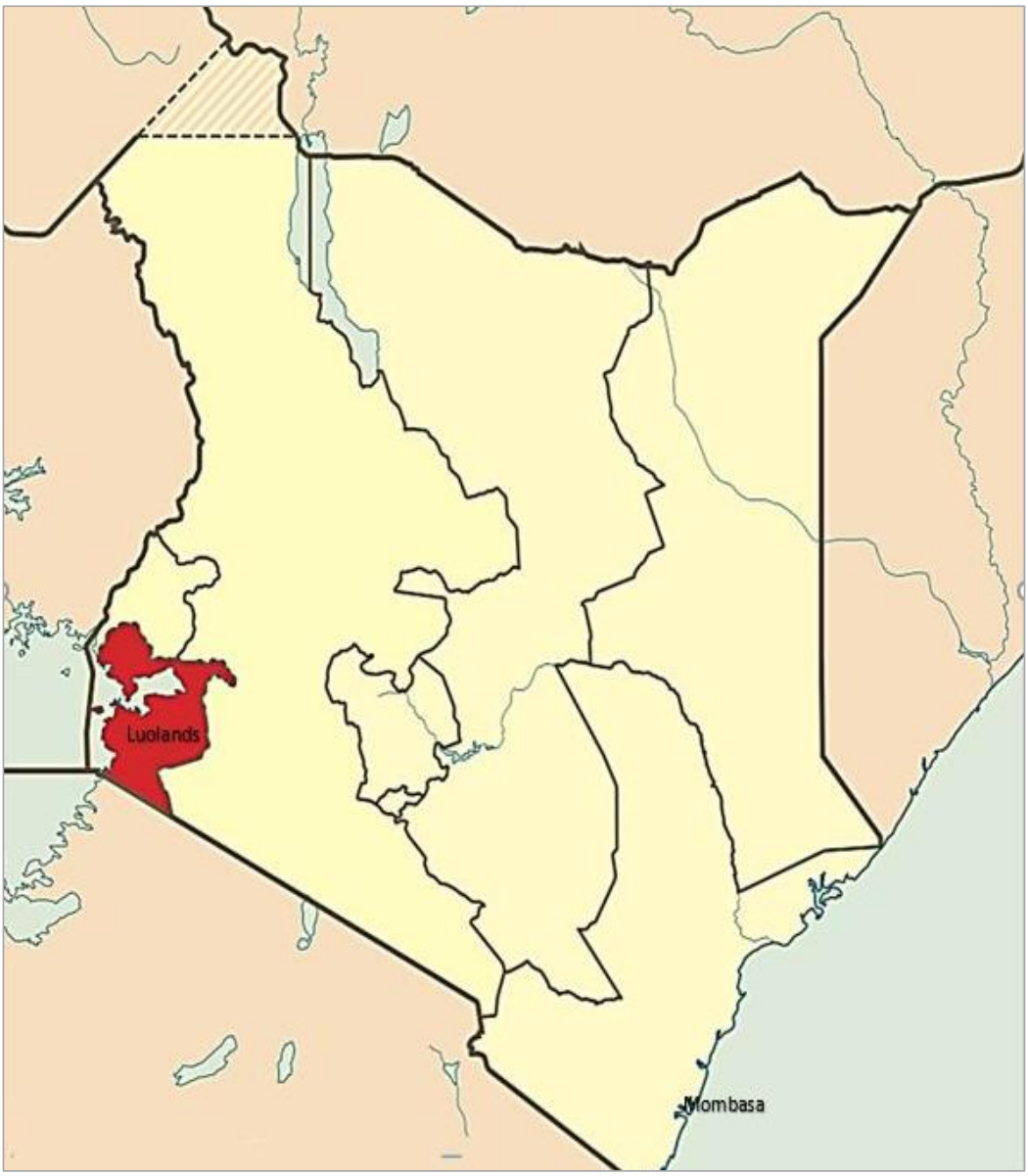

Figure 1.1 Map of Kenya showing Luoland and Mombasa. Map courtesy of Wikipedia commons [*https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Nyanza_in_Kenya.svg*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Nyanza_in_Kenya.svg)

The British Empire's acquaintance with the East African coast and Mombasa in particular began in the late nineteenth century, when surrogates of capitalist investors began whispering of the potential Africa's previously unexplored interior offered to the metropole. Geographically, Mombasa was strategically positioned, and incorporating the town into the British sphere of influence was deemed a sensible and prudent imperial move. This would have not only secured vast, resource-rich lands for the British Empire, but also provided a vantage point to monitor Germany's aggressive expansion into territories north of Tanganyika, including regions closer to the Buganda Kingdom, where British interests lay.[4] Mombasa town was already a notable player in the Indian Ocean maritime trade network and presented promising opportunities for profitability, provided proper occupation and control were established. Though the town's position and importance in the broad imperial scheme were clear, Mombasa nevertheless faced challenges that potentially jeopardised British chances of securing proper occupation, particularly in competition with another European power, in this case Germany. The town lacked modern infrastructure, and the thriving trade network, which Britain planned to take over, was deeply rooted in social contracts between Arab traders and African populations inhabiting the regions along trade routes extending to the Great Lakes of East and Central Africa. Britain was determined to overhaul the organisational structure of this trading system by cutting out all the middlemen facilitating the trade and, instead, engaging traders directly. This goal was to be realised by establishing a rail network and modernising Mombasa's port. Robinson noted that locomotives had already proved their remarkable capacity for integrating local and national economies in Europe and the United States, fostering growth. Once the trunk lines had been completed at home and become profitable, railway mania spread abroad.[5] In East Africa, the metropolitan rail networks were replicated by way of the construction of the Uganda Railway line. The Uganda Railway, along with Mombasa's Kilindini Harbour, indeed, became pivotal to the success of East Africa's imperial campaign, particularly in facilitating access to the interior resources (including labour), for incorporation into the colonial capitalist economy.

The construction of the Uganda Railway commenced in Mombasa in 1896, and the line was extended to the Eastern borders of Lake Victoria (present day Kisumu). The line was completed in December 1901. Upon its completion, the colonial office took over control of its management from the Uganda Railway Committee, and in 1903 the Uganda Railway and Harbours Corporation (renamed the Kenya–Uganda Railway and Harbours Corporation after an amalgamation process that took place in 1912–1914) was established. The rail headquarters was transferred to Nairobi but the corporation's major operations remained in Mombasa.

On taking over the management of the rail and harbour, the colonial state was abruptly confronted with a severe shortage of manpower. Mombasa's political and cultural landscape in that period harboured deeply rooted prejudices regarding labour and work, forcing Britain to

[4] R.M.A van Zwanenberg and Anne King, *An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda 1800–1970* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Books, 1975).

[5] Ronald E. Robinson, "Introduction: Railway Imperialism" Clarence B. Davis, Kenneth E. Wilburn, and Ronald. E. Robinson, eds., *Railway Imperialism* (Westport, CT: Bloomsbury Academic. 1991) p. 2.

reckon with the fact that the specific labour required for operations and further expansion of the rail and harbour was severely lacking. Hence, the colonial administration began migrating communities from the Lake Victoria region, collectively known as the Kavirondo, into Mombasa, in such large numbers that Kavirondo Luoland in Western Kenya become the primary labour pool for Mombasa's rail and harbour infrastructure projects. The arrival of these migrant labourers triggered transformational changes in Mombasa's political, economic, and social landscape. The town, for example, witnessed rapid economic development to the extent that, by 1910, it had overtaken Zanzibar to become East Africa's centre for Indian Ocean maritime trade. The introduction of Luo labourers into Mombasa's distinct cultural space, however, disrupted established norms of social interaction within the Swahili social fabric, generating tensions that would become the foundations for the development of colonial Mombasa's urban identity. Using migrant Luo rail and port workers as the unit of my analysis, this thesis illustrates how Luo labourers influenced the foundation of a new Mombasa, with visible changes in demography, spatial development, economic outlook, and systems of social interactions. The study seeks to stimulate debates on the effects of migration on the development of present outlooks of African urban spaces, and inspire a re-explorations of perspectives on migration and urban social change.

1.2. Objectives

This study explores the role played by migrant Luo rail and port workers in the development of the defining features of colonial Mombasa's urban landscape in the years 1902–1950s. The main objective, therefore, is to analyse how the introduction of the Luo labourer produced the revolution that informed the radical transformations that were witnessed in Mombasa's economy, demography, and society. This objective is guided by the following research questions:

- Why did the Luo migrate into Mombasa town at the onset of colonial occupation?
- How did Luo rail and port workers interact with the colonial state, the wage labour economy, and Mombasa's society?
- What tensions were produced by the introduction of Luo rail and port workers, and how were these manifest in Mombasa's urban environment?
- How did migrant Luo rail and port workers respond to colonial Mombasa's social hierarchies, and how did their reactions influence the development of the towns new urban outlook?

1.3. Area of study

Nestled between the districts of Kilifi and Kwale, Mombasa is the second largest city in Kenya and lies in what, until 2010, was Kenya's Coast province. The cosmopolitan district of Mombasa is composed of the island of Mombasa,[6] from which it derives its name, and pockets of the mainland that officially border Kwale and Kilifi districts. With a population of over 1.2 million,[7] Mombasa district is divided into six constituencies, namely, Changamwe, Jomvu, Kisauni, Likoni, Mvita, and Nyali. Figure 1.2. presents a contemporary map of Mombasa, showing the location of the constituencies, while Figure 1.3. is the 1917 colonial mapping of the town.

The study to analyse migrant Luo port and rail workers and the transformational cartographies of colonial Mombasa was mainly conducted in the constituencies of Changamwe, Mvita, and Nyali. The three constituencies were selected because their housing estates host a significant cluster of Luo households. Respondents included in this study were therefore drawn from residents living in Mombasa's Railways Estate in Changamwe and Luo households in Shimanzi, Kongowea, Kisumu Ndogo, Bangladesh, Makupa, Magongo, and Port Reitz. The contemporary conditions of the study area clearly reflect the positionality of the Luo community as Mombasa's unofficial labourer class, both in the colonial period and in the postcolonial era. Port Reitz, Magongo, Shimanzi, Makupa, and Changamwe are located near Mombasa's ports and its surrounding goods godowns. The clustering of Luo households in these estates indicates a deliberate choice by Luo port workers to live in close proximity to their workplaces. Kongowea in Nyali constituency is close to Mbaraki, where the first railway godowns were constructed. Kongowea and Kisauni, moreover, were among the first resettlement points for the Kenya Uganda Railway and Harbours (hereafter KURH) labourers when the boundaries of Mombasa town were extended to include areas outside the official island. Figures 1.4 and 1.5 are photos of houses in the Railways estate where the researcher sampled a number of respondents included in this study.

The Luoland districts of Kisumu and Siaya and Nairobi form two secondary study areas. Since the primary focus of this study is Mombasa, the secondary study areas were not conclusively defined due to the limited number of respondents, who were scattered throughout the respective regions. For example, two respondents, a retired KAR soldier formerly stationed in Mombasa, and the elderly widow of a former Railways employee were the only informants sampled in the village of Malanga in Siaya. A total of five respondents were interviewed in Siaya, three in Kisumu, and four in Nairobi. Respondents in these secondary study areas were purposefully selected because they were either repatriated individuals or relations of retired and returnee

[6] The island officially falls under Mvita constituency, one of Mombasa's six constituencies.

[7] Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, *The Kenya Population and Housing Census, 2019: Vol II, Distribution of Population by Administrative Units*, (Nairobi: KNBS, 2019).

Mombasa port and rail workers. Figure 1.6 shows the interviewing process with Christopher Okumu,[8] a former goods loader for the Railways Corporation in Mombasa.

Figure 1.2. Map of Mombasa County. Map courtesy of Tourist Maps Kenya.

[8] Okumu worked at Mombasa's railways godowns and was forcefully repatriated to Siaya for associating with an ethnic Kikuyu woman. His story is narrated in Chapter Four.

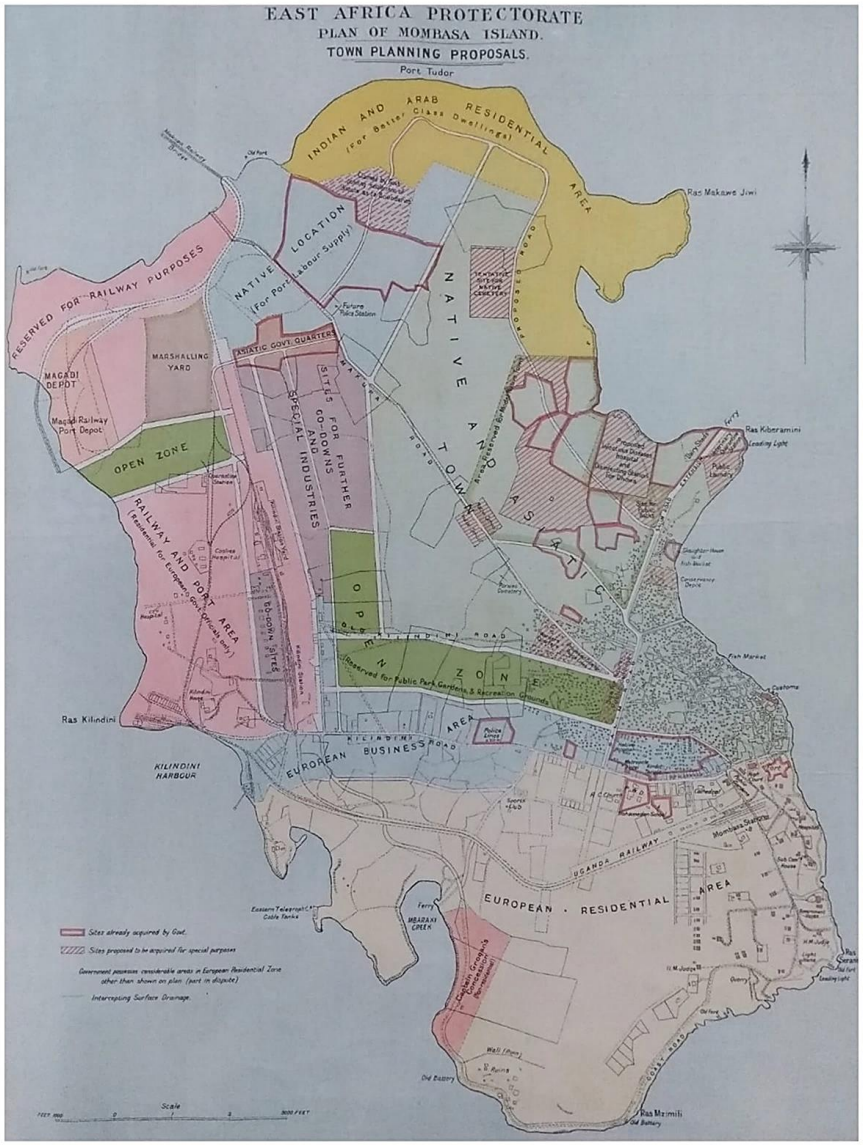

Figure 1.3. Proposed plans for the mapping of Mombasa Island, 1917. Source: C0/533/190 Colonial Office Kenya: Official Correspondence.

Figure 1.4.

Figure 1.5.

Figure1.4. and 1.5. Photographs of Mombasa Railways Housing Estate in Changamwe.

Figure 1.6. Photograph of interview with Christopher Okumu, on 27 February 2018 in Banana Siaya.

1.4. Methodology and data collection procedure

The research base upon which I draw my conclusions brings together a range of diverse sources. The principal source materials used were the official government correspondences and reports deposited at the Kenya National Archives. In particular, the files of the Chief Native Commissioner and the Departments of African Affairs and Labour provided vital information. The annual reports for Mombasa districts, the Central Kavirondo districts of Kisumu and Siaya, and reports of Local Native Councils (LNCs) offered a wealth of information regarding migrant Luo labourers working for the rail and port service in Mombasa. In Britain, the main archival source was the CO533 series dedicated to Kenya, which is deposited at the Public Records office in Kew. The archival data referencing colonial Mombasa's landscape in Nairobi and Kew were indeed illuminating, in that they were almost exclusively related to the KURH. Labour needs and tensions in the town are discussed, for example, in relation to the rail and port service, while the housing crisis in Mombasa is analysed and recorded pertaining to the KURH. The town's demographic and spatial planning, security concerns, and ethnic tensions are also examined while referencing the rail and port workers. Scrutiny of this data clearly revealed that KURH was the colonial state's primary concern in Mombasa.

The archival data used to describe the Luo rural landscape at the cusps of colonial domination was sourced from the personal archives of travellers to East Africa that are available online, and from the Mill Hill Mission Archives in Oosterbeek, the Netherlands. The data included photographs, missionaries' official correspondence, and collections of various private letters and dairies. These sources were essential in providing the broad picture of Luo positionality in the period immediately preceding European occupation, and how this position influenced the transition to embracing the wage labour economy.

Setting its veracity aside, the voices contained in this diversity of documentary archival material are almost exclusively European. Colonial documents in Africa are notorious for silencing African voices and disregarding African personal experience in their portrayal of colonial spaces. The archival data documenting Mombasa's colonial space, for example, is almost exclusively related to the KURH, and there are gaps in the data documenting the manifestation of other facets of Mombasa's topography that did not directly influence the management of the port and rail. Data documenting the changes witnessed in Mombasa's demography, for example, emphasise KURH's migrant labour problem, but overlook the contribution of Luo women to this development. Scholars of subaltern Africa have endeavoured to correct this anomaly by adopting methodologies that engage with their subjects' life histories as a way to overcome their silencing. White's study, for example, utilised the life histories of women sex workers in colonial Nairobi to reveal how women's gendered labour contributed to the economic development of the African labourer class in Nairobi.[9] Pesa's study on family history is another example of how life histories and biographies fit into and sometimes challenge dominant narratives of social history. Their study of family histories of migrant labourers in Mwinilunga district in northwestern Zambia juxtaposes individual stories with the grand theories of social change in colonial Mwinilunga, and from this basis they were able to map how the individual was connected to the grand social changes witnessed in the town.[10] To overcome the silencing of the Luo labourer's voice in the creation of Mombasa's colonial urban landscape, additional data was therefore sourced from interviews with principals and descendants of migrant Luo rail and port workers who were stationed in Mombasa in the years 1902-1950s. A total of 52 one-on-one interviews and four focus group interviews were conducted. The focus group interviews comprised groups of 10–15 individuals.

Though Mombasa was the main study area, interviews were also conducted in Siaya, Kisumu, and in Nairobi. Respondents in the three latter areas were selected using the snowballing sampling technique, and they were either repatriated or retired migrant labourers or their descendants. Mombasa nonetheless was the main study area, and the majority of respondents were sampled in this district. Mombasa's respondents came from clusters of "Luo settlements"[11] in Kisumu Ndogo, Bangladesh, Kongowea, Magongo, Shimanzi and Port Rietz, and from different parts of estates in the wider Changamwe constituency. Two focus group interviews were conducted in Bangladesh, one in Magongo and one in Changamwe. Unfortunately, a significant number of colonial era port and rail workers are deceased, hence the interviewees were mainly with second-, third- and fourth- generation relatives of former KURH labourers. These familial respondents were able to provide personal biographical

[9] Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

[10] Iva Pesa "From Life Histories to Social History: Narrating Social Change Through Multiple Biographies" Klaas van Walraven, ed., *The Individual in African History* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2020).

[11] The colonial practice of segregating African urban settlements ethnically has spilled over to the spatial mapping of contemporary Mombasa. Areas that housed particular ethnic groups during the colonial era more or less have the same ethnic composition today. Chaani, for example, has a disproportionate number of Kamba households just as Port Rietz is predominantly Luo.

material, which was used to position the individual migrant experience within the larger picture of the development of colonial Mombasa. Local administrative networks of chiefs and community leaders who were not necessarily kin to former KURH workers were also interviewed, and they provided useful information on how the Luo rail and port community has profoundly influenced the development of local spaces. They also pointed out community members who were connected to the KURH, thus allowing the researcher to roll out a list of relevant informants who were later interviewed for this study. Members of the Legio Maria Church, and *Sauti ya Wanawake* and SHOFCO CBOs working in the predominantly Luo settlements were immensely helpful in identifying older and retired rail and port workers, while also illuminating the long-standing tensions between migrants Luo labourers and coastal indigenes.

The oral interviews in Mombasa were conducted in the framework of participant observation. As an ethnic Luo, I requested and was allowed to immerse myself in the daily lives of the descendants of colonial-era KURH labourers. For example, I was a welcome visitor at the Legio Maria Church in Magongo, whose membership includes a sizeable number of current KURH labourers who have gained employment through communal networks stretching back to the colonial era. Legio Maria is an African independent religious movement whose core theology is centred around Luo ethnicity. I participated in the church's social activities and outreach programmes during the five-month period I was conducting interviews in Mombasa. Moreover, I was invited to participate in the community programmes and meetings held by *Sauti ya Wanawake* and SHOFCO CBOs. Participant observation allowed me to become familiar with my respondents, and it illuminated how the Luo community in the Mombasa diaspora have a sense of kinship with members of the ethnic community dispersed in other regions. It also allowed me to compare my observations against archival documentation of communal networks, and their role as survival mechanisms in navigating KURH's volatile labour market in the colonial era. Today, these communal networks continue to play a crucial role in helping residents of low-income areas, where many previous and present rail and port workers live and endure everyday hardships. Figure 1.7 below is a photograph of a local currency that was once used by a (predominantly ethnic Luo) CBO in Bangladesh for bartering goods and services amongst members whenever there was low circulation of cash.

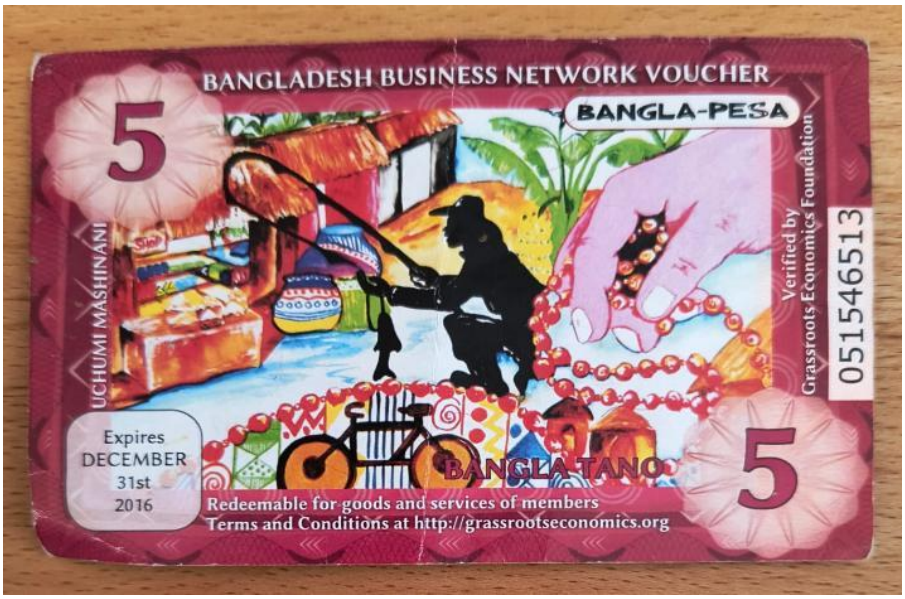

Figure 1.7. A photograph of the Bangla-pesa currency

The primary data collected was analysed, edited, and contrasted with an array of secondary sources. A review of a selection of books, journal articles, newspapers, and opinion pieces on the internet helped situate my findings within the broader context of imperial expansionism and the impact of colonialism on African communities and communal spaces. Priority was given to books and articles focused on African labour, including, among others, Berman's *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya*; Gutking et al. *African Labour History*; and Stichter's *Migrant Labour in Kenya*. A major theme analysed in this dissertation is how communities make adaptations to cope with social change. The arguments supporting this theme in the analysis of the cartographies of colonial Mombasa were informed by the work of scholars such as Dekker, whose body of work is mainly dedicated to analysing the coping mechanisms that communities adopt when confronted with stress.[12] One study, for example, examined how familial bonds and group networks were used as support systems by newly resettled households in Zimbabwe's land resettlement schemes, and my study of the Luo found parallel support systems used by migrant Luo workers to navigate the shocks of Mombasa urban living. Similarly, Carotenuto's

[12] Marleen Dekker, *Risk, Resettlement and Relations: Social Security in Rural Zimbabwe* (Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers, 2004); Marleen Dekker, "Sustainability and Resourcefulness: Support Networks during Periods of Stress," *World Development*, 32, No. 10, (Elsevier, 2004), pp. 1735–1751; Abigail Barr, Marleen Dekker, and Marcel Fafchamps, "Who Shares Risk with Whom under Different Enforcement Mechanisms?" *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 60 No. 4 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012) pp. 677–706.

dissertation *Cultivating an African Community: The Luo Union in 20th-Century East Africa*,[13] was especially informative in laying the foundation for understanding how the urban Luo diaspora community was a reproduction of the colonial experience in Nairobi and, hence, it was the basis of my analysis of a similar situation in colonial Mombasa. My study diverges from Carotenuto's in the fact that it reveals how the development of a unitary ethnic Luo constituency contributed to the official shift of Mombasa's demographic and political status from an Arab/Swahili town to an African town.

1.5. Problematisation of the Luo

This study originally proposed to explore how Luo rail and port workers contributed to the development of the defining features of colonial Mombasa. The question of "who are the Luo?" lingered, however, as I continued analysing data and realised that the boundaries defining this category of individuals were constantly shifting in the colonial period. This situation created a conditional framework, which I have described as the "problematisation of the Luo."

An ethnic group is generally defined as a community or population made up of people who share a common cultural background or descent.[14] Scholars often categorise ethnic groups on the basis of language, territory, shared history, or common culture.[15] The categorisation of people within specified ethnic boundaries is, however, contentious, and is oftentimes challenged by scholars of the subject who argue that the boundaries of backgrounds and descents that make up ethnicities are subjective and tend to be constructivist.[16] Moreover, scholarly categorisations of ethnicities sometimes differs from the peoples' own definition of the given designations.[17] Thus, how an individual categorises themselves ethnically may not fall within the textbook definitions of that particular ethnicity.

This study encountered a similar problem regarding the ethnic classification of the "Luo." While trying to define the ethnic boundaries of colonial-period Luo rail and port workers in Mombasa, an inevitable overlap with other ethnicities emerged. This occurred because Luo ethnicity, as a homogenous cultural entity, had not fully solidified even years into the twentieth century. Several Luo-speaking cultural groups inhabited regions of Western Kenya in the nineteenth century, in the nascent years of European occupation, but they did not form a

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[13] Matthew Paul Carotenuto, *Cultivating an African Community: The Luo Union in 20th-Century East Africa* (Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 2006).

[14] Definition derived from the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[15] Elliott D. Green, "What is An Ethnic Group? Political Economy, Constructivism, and the Common Language Approach to Ethnicity," *London School of Economics Working Papers* (London: 2005). Accessed on 22 April 2023 from https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/137723/WP57.pdf.

[16] Kanchan Chandra, "Cumulative Findings in the Study of Ethnic Politics" *APSA-CP*, 12 No.1 (2001) pp. 7–11.

[17] Katarzyna Hamer, Sam McFarland, Barbara Czarnecka, Agnieszka Golińska, Liliana Manrique Cadena, Magdalena Łużniak-Piecha, and Tomasz Jułkowski, "What is an 'Ethnic Group' in Ordinary People's Eyes? Different Ways of Understanding it Among American, British, Mexican, and Polish Respondents," *Cross-Cultural Research*, 54 No. 1 (2020) pp. 28–72.

homogenous cultural polity. Luo speakers in Western Kenya certainly mixed with Bantu groups in regions including Alego, Samia, Bunyala, and Yimbo. Additionally, the Lake Victoria islands of Sesse, Bugaya, Magenta, Mfangano, and Rusinga were also inhabited by several hybrid communities who did not necessarily consider themselves Luo.[18] It was the members of these hybrid groups who migrated into Mombasa to work for the KURH, and who later came to identify as the Luo. Thus, up until the 1930s and, in some cases, the 1940s, "Luo" migrants were not Luo as we know them today. The amalgamation of Luo ethnicity was in fact a process that occurred in the twentieth century, and it included the incorporation of groups some of whom may not have previously considered themselves Luo.[19] The Suba, for example, were part of Bantu refugee groups arriving in Luoland from Uganda in the first decade of the twentieth century, and they gradually adopted "Luoness" to the point that, in the 1950s, a majority of the Suba considered themselves Luo. The trade unionist Tom Mboya is an example of a Luo with Suba origins who is considered "Luo proper" in the annals of Luo and Kenyan history.

The problem of Luo categorisation was compounded by colonial classification of the group. In colonial documents, they are categorised as the Kavirondo. Kavirondo, however, is a collective term for a group of individuals who were said to have originated from the Kavirondo Gulf. Today, this means that the Kavirondo ethnicities encompass Luo, Gusii/Kisii, (Aba)Kuria, and (Aba)Luhya. The boundaries of the four groups were, however, fluid during the colonial period, and they shared similarities in terms of patrimonial relationships, cultural practices, and spatial and temporal boundaries. Thus, it is possible that documents discussing the Kavirondo, even those that specifically name the Kavirondo Luo, may have captured groups that, in later periods, came to regard themselves as the Luhya or Gusii/Kisii. This study reveals, however, that it was the experiences of the urban collective that formed the constituency that came to be regarded as the Luo. The Luo Union, the organisation that played a crucial role in the construction of a pan-Luo identity in the twentieth century, extended membership to all individuals as long as they were willing to abide by the organisation's regulations and statutes.[20] My reference for ethnic Luo in this study is thus drawn from the urban Luo's own definitions (those who claimed Luo ethnicity) and also from the history of the formation of the ethnic Luo constituency and cultural polity in colonial urban areas. For example, the Manyala, who consider themselves a hybrid Luo/Luhya ethnic group and fully claim both ethnicities were included in this study and categorised as Luo because they are considered Luo by the "Luo proper"; they speak the Luo language, have similar cultural traditions (for example, with respect to naming), and are found in "Luo settlements" in both Mombasa and Luoland.

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[18] Bethwell A. Ogot, *Economic Adaptation and Change among the Jii-Speaking Peoples of Eastern Africa*, (Kisumu: Anyange Press, 1996). Inhabitants of these islands currently consider themselves Luo.

[19] This point will be elaborated in the final chapter of this dissertation, where I will discuss how Mombasa became a "Kavirondo town." A glimpse of this phenomenon was revealed by Parkin when he observed that the Luo Union welcomed everyone into the association "as long as they agreed with Luo customs and traditions, and the constitution." Up to the late 1950s, several Union committee members were indeed non-ethnic Luo. David Parkin, *Neighbours and Nationals in an African City Ward*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).

[20] Parkin, *Neighbours and Nationals*; KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/12 Administration, Riwruok Luo, 1945–51.

1.6. The Luo in Kenya's historiographical tradition

From the earliest anthropological writings as African history, where scholars like Evans Pritchard, Southall, and Wilson elaborated on the evolution of Luo cultural practices,[21] political organisation,[22] and tenure systems,[23] to the modern era in which the Luo feature prominently in analyses of Kenya's ethnic based politics, the Luo have undoubtedly secured space in Kenya's historiographical tradition. Initial Luo historiography was the preserve of European writers, and missionaries, amateur historians, and professional anthropologists were at the forefront of providing writings that later became valuable reference points for information regarding the social practices and structures of the communal organisation of Luo society. As soon as the Luo adopted European record-keeping practices, however, they too began chronicling their cultural history. The impetus for the Luo to produce their own anthropo-historical works arose from the perceived threat of erosion of their cultural identity, and the formation of a detribalised urban group in the colonial diaspora as migration to urban areas progressively increased in the first half of the 20th century. Amateur historians such as Malo[24] and Mboya[25] then began recording and archiving records of Luo cultural life for posterity, and their writings often served as invocations of heritage and nationalism presented as authentic expressions of the national collective.

The professionalisation of African history in the 1960s informed the production of a new body of scientific work covering Luo history proper. Stimulated by Bethwell A. Ogot's *History of the Southern Luo,*[26] other historians ventured into recording the world of the Luo in the past and the near present. Scholarly works continued previous themes elucidating Luo cultural, economic,[27] political,[28] and social life,[29] but new frontiers were also made by works revealing the interconnectedness of colonialism to Luo history in modernity. These included Glickman's[30] analysis of the evolution of Luo patriliny, which, he argued, was influenced by

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[21] Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, "Marriage Customs of the Luo of Kenya" *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute,* 20 No. 2 (1950), pp. 132–142.

[22] Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, "Luo Tribes and Clans," *The Position of Women in Primitive Societies and other Essays in Social Anthropology* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), pp. 205–227; Aidan Southall, *Lineage Formation amongst the Luo* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1952).

[23] Gordon Wilson, *Luo Customary Laws and Marriage Laws Customs*, (Nairobi: Government printer, 1961).

[24] Shadrack Malo, *Dhoudi mag Central Nyanza* [Clans of Central Nyanza], (Kampala: Eagle Press, 1953).

[25] Paul Mboya, *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi* [Customs, beliefs and practices of the Luo], (Kisumu: Anyange Press, 1938).

[26] Bethwell A. Ogot, *History of the Southern Luo: 1500–1900*, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967).

[27] William R. Ochieng, ed. *Historical Studies and Social Change in Western Kenya: Essays in Memory of Prof. G. S. Were* (Nairobi: East Africa Education Publishers, 2002); Ogot, *Economic Adaptation and Change among the Jii-speaking Peoples*

[28] William R. Ochieng, *A History of the Kadimo Chiefdom of Yimbo in Western Kenya*, (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1975).

[29] A.B.C. Ocholla-Oyayo, *Traditional Ideology and Ethics among the Southern Luo*, (Upsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1976).

[30] Maurice Glickman, "Patriliny among the Gusii and the Luo of Kenya," *American Anthropologist,* 76. No.2 (1974), pp. 312–318.

creation of ethnic reserves. Cohen and Atieno Odhiambo[31] explored how colonialism informed the changes witnessed in Siaya's rural landscape, and Ochieng's[32] work on the development of modern Kenya included the contribution of Luo labourers in settler farms and other urban areas.

The Luo are also mentioned in studies on Kenya's labour history and on the development of Kenya's urban spaces, and they feature in works such as those of Stichter,[33] Zwannenberg,[34] and Janmohammed.[35] In addition, they have been invariably analysed in scholarship on urban protest movements, in works such as those by Clayton,[36] Singh,[37] and Cooper.[38] Scholarly outputs such as those of Ogwang and Mugambi,[39] and Cohen and Atieno Odhiambo,[40] which, in analysing the saga of the death and burial of S.M Otieno, espoused linkages between urban Luo and their rural counterparts, reveal how communal links and ethnic identities have been integral parts of the identity of urban Luo through history.

Moreover, the Luo feature prominently in discourses on the development of Kenya's postcolonial political landscape. Scholarship on this theme is immense, due partly to constant flare-ups of ethnic violence targeting the Luo, especially during electoral cycles, but also because of the dominance of Oginga Odinga and Raila Odinga (both ethnic Luos) throughout Kenya's postcolonial national politics. Notable works here include those of Throupe,[41] Shilaho,[42] Ndubai,[43] and Oucho,[44] all of which analyse the development of Kenya's ethnic-based political landscape.

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[31] David William Cohen and E.S. Atieno Odhiambo, *Siaya: The Historical Anthropology of an African Landscape*, (London and Nairobi: Heinemann and James Currey, 1989).

[32] William R. Ochieng, ed., *A Modern History of Kenya, 1895–1980* (Nairobi: Evans Press, 1989).

[33] Sharon Stichter, *Migrant Labourers* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Sharon Stichter, *Migrant Labour in Kenya: Capitalism and African Response 1895–1975* (Nairobi: Longman, 1982).

[34] R.M.A Zwanenberg, *Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, 1919–1939* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1975).

[35] Karim Janmohamed, *A History of Mombasa, c. 1895–1939: Some Aspects of Economic and Social Life in an East African Port Town During Colonial Rule*, (Doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University, 1978).

[36] Anthony Clayton and Donald Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya*, (London: Frank Cass, 1975).

[37] Makhan Singh, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969).

[38] Fredrick Cooper, *Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University press, 1987).

[39] J. B. Ojwang and J.N. Kanyua Mugambi, *The S.M Otieno Case: Death and Burial in Modern Kenya*, (Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 1989).

[40] David William Cohen and E.S Atieno-Odhiambo, *Burying SM: The Politics of Knowledge and the Sociology of Power in Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992).

[41] David Throup and Charles Hornsby, *Multi-Party Politics in Kenya*, (Nairobi and London: James Currey and East African Education Publishers, 1998).

[42] Westen K. Shilaho, *Political Power and Tribalism in Kenya*, (Johannesburg: Macmilan and Palgrave, 2018).

[43] Benjamin Ndubai, *Cleavage in Kenya Politics: A Critical Post Mortem of General Elections and of Current Trends in Kenya's Multi-Party Politics*, (Nairobi: Kensing International Limited, 1993).

[44] Oucho, *Undercurrents of Ethnic Conflict in Kenya*

Luo women have also been given some, albeit minimal space in Kenya's historiographical tradition. Work here has centred on their contribution to the development of local politics[45] and the transformations of their gender roles as a consequence of male wage labour migrations.[46] Scholars like Jean-Hay[47] have illuminated how Luo women's consumption patterns contributed to the development of a wage labour economy, while Strobel[48] has, albeit in a small section of her work, revealed migrant Luo women's experience of ethnicity in Mombasa. Ndeda has also produced informative work on gender and its intersection with politics, culture, and religion.[49]

The Luo have also featured, albeit on a shallow level, in discourses illuminating the Kenya coasts' territorial boundary contests and security issues. Kanyinga's[50] work, for example, revealed their involvement in the development of the incessant land question on the Kenyan coast, while Aseka[51] and Willis and Gona[52] have discussed their contribution in the structuring of Kenya's coastal politics, which became the foundation for past and current secessionist politics.

A comprehensive historical analysis of the Luo diaspora community in Mombasa, with a focus on mobilities and the consequent changes in the political, economic, and social map of Kenya's protectorate space, has yet to be produced, however. This work hopes to make a contribution in this regard and to provide some insights into the question of the place of the diaspora Luo community living along the Kenyan coastline and particularly in Mombasa, where persistent struggles exist with those who consider themselves indigenes and particularly over questions of historical and autochthony rights. The findings in this study may help involved parties to mediate these issues from a point of knowledge, and find a feasible middle ground that, may lead to peaceful co-existence.

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[45] Dorothy A. Nyakwaka, *Gender and Political Transformation in Kenya: A Case Study of Women in Luoland, 1895–2002,* (Doctoral dissertation, Egerton University, 2013).

[46] Mildred J. Ndeda, "Women and Development since Colonial Times," William R Ochieng ed., *Historical Studies and Social Change in Western Kenya* (Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers, 2002), pp. 232–260.

[47] Margaret Jean Hay, *Material Culture and the Shaping of Consumer Society in Colonial Western Kenya* (Boston, MA: African Studies Center, Boston University, 1994).

[48] Margaret Strobel, "From Lelemama to Lobbying: Women's Association in Mombasa Kenya," Bethwell A. Ogot ed., *Hadith 6: History and Social Change in East Africa* (Nairobi: East Africa Education Publishers, 1976).

[49] Mildred J. Ndeda, "Luo Women Voters/Aspirants and the New Constitutional Dispensation in the March 2013 Kenya Elections: The Case of Siaya and Kisumu Counties," *Kenya's Past as Prologue: Voters, Violence and the 2013 General Election* (Nairobi: IFRA, 2016); Mildred J. Ndeda, "Nomiya Luo Church: A Gender Analysis of the Dynamics of an African Independent Church among the Luo of Siaya District in the Twentieth Century and Beyond," *Gender, Literature and Religion in Africa* (Nairobi: Kenyatta University, 2011).

[50] Karuti Kanyinga, "Re-distribution from Above: The Politics of Land Rights and Squatting in Coastal Kenya," *Report No. 115 of the Nordic African Institute*, (Uppsala, 2000) accessed on 2 March 2020 from https://nai.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:271584/FULLTEXT01.

[51] Eric Masinde Aseka, *Political Activities among the Mijikenda of Kilifi and Mombasa*, (Master's thesis, University of Nairobi, 1984).

[52] Justin Willis and George Gona, "Pwani C Kenya? Memory, Documents and Secessionist Politics in Coastal Kenya," *African Affairs,* 112 No. 446 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 48–71.

1.7. Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is structurally divided into five chapters plus a conclusion. The introduction chapter gives an overview of the research, including background information, objectives, research methods, and the outline of the various components of the thesis. The discussions in the conclusion are a review of the entire dissertation, and include an analysis of how the cartographies of colonial Mombasa informed the development of the space that came to be the Republic of Kenya, and how Luo rail and port workers were the main protagonists in the contests that produced this particular outcome. The main body of arguments for migrant Luo rail and port workers and the cartographies of colonial Mombasa are presented in Chapters Two to Five, each chapter offering thematic arguments about the interactions of the colonial state, the Swahili social landscape, and the Luo migrant labourer in the production of the features of Mombasa's colonial urban space.

Chapter Two, aptly named "The setting," explores the intersection of Mombasa's positionality, British imperialism, and the Luo labourer in Mombasa. The chapter analyses how, at the onset of British occupation, Mombasa's organisational structure and urban features placed considerable limits on access to local labour and, in particular, the typology of manual labour needed for British rail and harbour projects. The chapter will elaborate on how British imperial interests engaged with Mombasa's semi-autonomy, social stratification, and demography, to produce a labour economy that was, ultimately, contradictory to British imperial interests. This contradiction was resolved by the introduction of the Luo labourer. The chapter goes on to chronicle the movement of Luo rail and port workers into Mombasa's urban space amidst a backdrop of worsening living conditions in Western Kenya's Luoland.

Chapter Three, "A town in turmoil," deliberates on the interaction of the colonial state and Luo rail and port workers, and the controversies these interactions produced in colonial Mombasa's urban space. The chapter discusses the development of Mombasa's volatile labour landscape, which, at its core, was the product of contradictions in official labour policy and the evident labour practices of colonial capital. The arguments put forward elaborate on how policies for the development and expansion of the rail and harbour network influenced the migration of huge numbers of Luo labourers into Mombasa and, subsequently, contributed to the proletarianisation of labour. The chapter additionally discusses Mombasa's recurrent labour tensions and persistent contests over wages, working conditions, and housing, and evaluates how these pressures stimulated migrant labourers' labour and political organisation. Finally, the chapter scrutinises strategies applied by colonial capital to control Luo labour, and to define workers articulation of grievances to colonial policies in Mombasa.

Chapter Four, "A town divided," discusses the evolution of conceptions of ethnicity in colonial Mombasa, and the subsequent development of Mombasa's infamous *wabara/wapwani* ethnic divide. The chapter examines how the racial structure of the colonial economy disrupted established hierarchies of social interactions amongst the Swahili, and produced new tensions over identity. By examining articulations of visitor *wabara* and indigenous *wapwani* identities in the age of British imperialism, the chapter reveals how race and ethnicity structured opportunity and access to individual and communal resources thus producing Mombasa's delineated ethnic and racial lines. The chapter further illuminates how contests over drawn

identity lines impacted Mombasa's cost of living, making it one of the most expensive colonial towns for Luo migrant labourers to subsist in. The chapter ends with an analysis of the Swahili coast's embracing of social practices aimed at invigorating Swahili cultural purity. This will be elaborated through analysis of two institutions, *kafaáh* marriages and *ngoma*, whose roles and boundaries were reconstituted in colonial Mombasa in order to ensure that *wabara* Luo remained at the bottom of Swahili and colonial social and racial hierarchies.

Chapter Five, "A Kavirondo town," elaborates on the processes of the development of a diaspora Luo community in colonial Mombasa. The diaspora community was the cumulative outcome of the actions of migrant Luo labourers attempting to survive Mombasa's volatile labour economy, and to counter Mombasa's vehement resistance to their integration into Swahili elitism. The responses adopted included the embracing of a pan-Luo identity, which worked to create numerical strength, a valuable asset when it came to negotiating for better terms of service with KURH management. Other responses included the foundation of a neo-Luo identity, which entailed the reformation of materiality and cultural identifiers of Luo identity to align with Western interpretations of modernity. A modern "Luoness" worked to challenge Swahili stratification indexes in Mombasa and offered the Luo an opportunity to engage in the Africanisation process in the post-World War II decolonisation era. The diaspora community was, however, ultimately produced by the migration of Luo women into Mombasa town, which is also discussed in this chapter. Indeed, Luo women contributed to the emergence of permanent Luo households in Mombasa, a situation that eventually produced the dramatic shift in the town's demographic map as Mombasa cemented its outlook as an African town.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SETTING: BRITAIN, MOMBASA, AND ETHNIC LUO – AN EXERCISE IN IMPERIAL EXPANSIONISM

2.1.1. Introduction

European economists', geologists', adventurers', and Christian missionaries' acquaintance with East Africa in the late nineteenth century was a crucial moment in history. Notably, the encounter saw the emergence of efforts aimed at exporting European institution models to Africa as part of the global expansion of a European international order. Exploration expeditions in East Africa discovered the region's potential to expand and enrich the Great British Empire, and the knowledge initially analysed in lecture halls, society meetings, and conferences was gradually communicated back to the colonial office in London. Soon afterwards, propositions were presented to the British Crown to encourage a segment of its population to immigrate into East Africa – and particularly to the fertile regions surrounding Mt. Kenya – and thereby establish a European settler colony parallel to the Southern African model. For the cultural ambassadors intent on spreading Christianity and extending European models of civilisation, occupation of these regions was regarded as critical to their missions as they were facing crises of insecurity and fierce resistance from African populations. In particular, the murder of the Anglican Bishop James Hannington had unsettled missionaries in Uganda, who then began making frantic requests to England to occupy the Buganda Kingdom and its adjacent territories to enhance their safety.[53] The East African coastal town of Mombasa would emerge as an important piece in the grand scheme of extending the British Empire to East Africa. Mombasa's deep harbour and its long-established maritime trade network offered glimpses of the regions prospects, albeit blurry, positioning the town as a potential getaway to the hinterland. Arguably a key player in the Indian Ocean trade network, by the close of the nineteenth century, Mombasa had nevertheless not yet developed the infrastructure to facilitate the large-scale haulage of goods to and from the interior lands of the Great Lakes region other than using human porters. Reimagining a faster and more effective alternative to human portage, Britain set out to revolutionise Mombasa's infrastructure network by establishing a railway network and expanding and modernising its harbour. Such radical transformations required the mobilisation and input of massive amounts of labour.

At the onset of British occupation, Mombasa's organisational structure and urban features placed considerable limits on access to local labour and particularly of the manual kind needed for British rail and harbour projects. This chapter will discuss these features of Mombasa's urban space; features that influenced Britain to translocate labourers from communities living in the Lake Victoria region, collectively known as the Kavirondo Luo, into Mombasa, in such large numbers that Kavirondo lands in Western Kenya became the primary labour pool for Mombasa's rail and harbour infrastructure projects. The chapter elaborates on how British

[53] Kevin Ward, "The Church of Uganda and the Exile of Kabaka Muteesa II, 1953–55," in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 28 No.4 (Brill, 1998), pp. 411–449.

imperial interests engaged with Mombasa's semi-autonomy, social stratification, and demography, to produce its particular wage labour economy and its associated widespread labour shortages. The chapter then chronicles the movement of Luo populations into Mombasa's urban space in the first decade of the twentieth century, against a backdrop of worsening living conditions in Luoland in Western Kenya.

2.1.2. A town in flux

In the years preceding British occupation, Mombasa's urban space manifested features confirming the existence of centuries of commercial, political, and social contacts with Asia, the Arabic world, and Europe. The earliest written sources chronicling the nature of this town – which was part of the larger East Africa Swahili coast – came from the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, a Greek trade document dating from around 100AD.[54] The *Periplus* reported visits by Greek sailors to the East African coast, then referred to as "Azania," – whose inhabitants were said to be tall and dark skinned – and of a thriving trade between locals and numerous visitors arriving via the Indian Ocean. Other early documents describing the East African coast include *Ptolemy's Geography* and *Christian Topography* (c. 600 AD). These two documents are most useful in their description of the monarchs of Ethiopia, and their documentation of the ascendancy of Persia in the Indian Ocean and on the coast north of the Cape of Guardafui.[55] Though they provided valuable information on the East African coastal landscape, these early sources of information nonetheless paid little attention to the influences that adjacent and distant hinterland regions had on the development of coastal city states urban outlooks. More recent interdisciplinary works have endeavoured to fill this gap, with, for example, Fleisher's work revealing that hinterland rural villages produced food for the coastal city-states and hence were instrumental in their establishment and growth from as early as 750 AD.[56] Archaeological works such as those of Monge, whose evaluation of skeletons in Mtwapa and Shanga revealed morphological affinities between coastal ethnic groups like the Taita and inland ethnicities,[57] have additionally confirmed that coastal city-states, including Mombasa, were economically and socially connected to the hinterland communities of East Africa.

Scholars have established that the initial inhabitants of the East African coast were of African descent.[58] Arabic influence on the region, however, became much more significant at the

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[54] Magbaily C. Fyle, *Introduction to the History of African Civilisation: Precolonial Africa* (Lanham, New York, and Oxford: University Press of America, 1999), p. 44.

[55] UNESCO, *General History of Africa II. Ancient Civilisations of Africa* (London: James Currey, 1990)

[56]Jeffrey B. Fleisher, "Swahili Synoecism: Rural Settlements and Town Formation on the Central East African Coast, A.D. 750–1500," *Journal of Field Archaeology*, 35 No.3, (2010), pp. 265–282.

[57] Janet Monge, "Researching the Origins of Swahili Coast Inhabitants," *Expedition Magazine*, 43 No.1 (March 2001), p. 5.

[58] James de Vere Allen, *Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture and the Shungwaya Phenomenon* (Nairobi: East African Education Publishers, 1993); D. Nurse and T. J. Hinnebusch *Swahili and the Sabaki: A Linguistic History*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

beginning of the twelfth century when maritime commerce in the Indian Ocean increased. Stimulated by a growth in Eastern Roman opulence, Arab traders ventured into the Indian ocean in search of animal skins, precious minerals and, in particular, ivory, the material of choice for making statues, combs, luxury cutlery, furniture, bird cages, and carriages for the Byzantine elites.[59] In this period, the East African coast was not under a unified jurisdiction; rather, different areas were administered by local elites who increased wealth and harnessed political authority by controlling trade.[60] To secure the rights to trade and trade routes into the interior, where especially ivory was sourced, Arab merchants sought familial linkages with these East African merchants. The merging of these two trading groups' familial lines revolutionised East Africa's coastal cultural space, in so far as it stimulated the development of Swahili culture, a product of the synoecism of Arabic and coastal Bantu cultures. Arab familial descent and later settlement along the coast ushered Islamic culture into East Africa, which became firmly embedded in local political and social networks. New trading dynasties were founded and coastal city-states on the East African coast thrived. Kilwa, Pemba, Lamu, Mombasa, Malindi, and Zanzibar, flourished but also fell at times as rival Arabic dynasties battled to take control of their lucrative trade networks.

Arab supremacy on the East African coastal towns was temporarily disrupted by the arrival of the Portuguese from around 1498. The Portuguese period was marked by a decline in trade and a decay of the vibrancy of the city-states as relations with coastal inhabitants and with traders from Arabia strained. For example, it was not unusual for the Portuguese to confiscate trade goods brought in by Arabs merchants, which, of course, led to huge losses.[61] Constant rebellions coupled with persistent external attacks by Omani Arabs and the additional inability of Portugal to bring in reinforcement to quell revolts ultimately led to their expulsion from the East African coast in 1699. Portugal moved its activities to the southern coastal regions, consolidating its power in the area around modern-day Mozambique, and Arab reign was re-established on the northern side of the coast. The thriving trade with inland communities resumed and ivory, animal skins, and, in this particular period, slaves, were exchanged for goods like cloth and guns from Arabia. The battle for control of this strategic point persisted, however, and in different periods, Arabs, Persians, and Turks gained authority and governed trade. In 1840, the sultan of Zanzibar gained control and reigned over the region until 1895, when it was placed under shared administration with Britain.

2.1.3. Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) and the occupation of Mombasa

The arrival of the British on the East African coast signalled the beginning of a new chapter. Colonial mobilities then – of ideas and people – influenced the radical transformations that took place in the coast's political, economic, and social landscape, altering its form from a

[59] UNESCO, *General History of Africa II* p. 311.

[60] Allen, *Swahili Origins.*

[61] Michael Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders: The Swahili Coast, India, and Portugal in the Early Modern Era*. (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1998).

predominant Islamic Swahili structure and towards a new cosmopolitanism. This new urban outlook included visible changes in demography, spatial development, economic growth, and systems of social interactions, among many others: and they were the product of British colonial enterprise interacting with the Swahili coast and inland ethnicities – in this case, the Luo – who constituted a majority of its formal wage labourer population.

The expansion of imperial Britain to East Africa was by no means accidental. Events in the later years of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had threatened Britain's supreme economic and maritime position on the world stage, and this prompted a new wave of expansionism.[62] The coast of East Africa then became hotly contested. The acquisition of East Africa's strategically positioned lands was a critical component in imperial strategy, mainly because these lands could provide a platform from where Britain could launch the campaign to extend its empire into the unexplored interior regions of Africa. Though eager to embark on this new imperial journey, the British colonial office was nevertheless reluctant to spend public money on such pursuits at the close of the nineteenth century. They were equally unwilling to leave these new discoveries to other European powers, however. Germany, which had begun undertaking aggressive expansionism after its unification, was viewed as particularly threatening. The impasse on the decision to either move ahead or hold back was resolved when an agreement was made to outsource the task of acquiring and administering new colonies to private enterprises.[63] In Africa, three enterprises were given charters to run the affairs of areas under British spheres of influence: the Royal Niger Company, which was tasked with administering regions in West Africa; the British South African Company (BSAC) of Cecil Rhodes; and William Mackinnon's Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC). The Royal Niger Company was based on a long-established trade network on the Niger Delta, and the charter gave the company a trade monopoly and hence enabled its accumulation of immense profits. BSAC was also a profitable venture as there were already prospects of huge mineral deposits in Southern Africa, and manpower could be tapped from the established white society already in the Cape. The IBEAC, on the other hand, was tasked with opening up a region that was yet to be properly invaded or occupied by Europeans.

The absence of a robust and modern transport and communication infrastructure network proved to be IBEAC's and, by extension, Britain's main challenge to its plans to extend hegemony into the hinterlands of East Africa. The success of the East African colonial project thus rested entirely upon IBEAC's ability to develop vital infrastructure, *and fast*. However, a significant portion of the coast where IBEAC planned to establish a rail network and expand the harbour was under the jurisdiction of the sultan of Zanzibar, and Britain was neither willing nor capable of wrestling the area from the sultan's grip. This was mainly because, at that

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[62] The nineteenth-century European expansionism, colloquially known as "new imperialism," featured an unprecedented pursuit of overseas territorial acquisitions. Britain's reasons for expansion were varied and included, for example, the search for compensatory trade colonies after losing colonies in America.

[63] J. Forbes Munro, *Maritime Enterprise and Empire: Sir William Mackinnon and his Business Network 1823–1893* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2003).

moment, the British military was engaged in another military campaign in Sudan. The Mahdist revolution in Sudan (beginning in 1881) had led to the White Nile tributary of the Nile proper temporarily falling under the Mahdist's area of control. This action threatened to destabilise Egypt's production of high-quality cotton on the banks of the Nile, and the continuity of the transportation network on the Suez Canal. In a bid to protect the White Nile, Britain sent its military to occupy Sudan and neutralise the Mahdists.[64] Opening yet another war front with the sultan of Zanzibar would have not only extended the British military, but also put extra strain on public coffers. Hence, Britain settled on drawing up a mutual agreement of occupation with the Sultan of Zanzibar.

The Sultan of Zanzibar governed the islands on the coast of East Africa, together with portions of the mainland bordering the coast. He had no effective control, however, of the hinterland. From around 1815, Britain enjoyed a monopoly of this region by having informal control of it; that is, by way of maintaining the integrity of the Kingdom of Zanzibar.[65] Though aware of the strategic importance of this region, Britain was nevertheless unwilling to properly occupy it as its potential for profitability remained sketchy. They would rethink this laissez-faire approach, however, when Germany began showing interest in the same region. Germany's expansion into East Africa and the formation of Deutsch-Ostafrika (German East Africa) had indeed heightened Britain's insecurities and concerns over the Nile. Karl Peter's remarks regarding a "[...] vast German colonial empire, stretching from Nyasa (Zambezi) to the Nile which would become a source of wealth and power to the German nation [...]"[66] discomposed Britain, which then began a defensive strategy aimed at reconfiguring its geopolitical presence in East Africa. Its first action was to secure the Blue Nile, which was achieved by annexing the Victoria Nyanza region.[67] This was only possible if the route to the interior where the Blue Nile lay was administered by Britain.

In 1878, Mackinnon entered negotiations with the Sultan of Zanzibar, Sayyid Barghash, to acquire the lease of a territory extending 1,150 miles along the coastline from Tungi to Warsheik, and extending inland as far as the eastern province of the Congo Free State, an area

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[64] George Neville Sanderson, *England, Europe and the Upper Nile 1882–1889: A Study in the Partition of Africa*, (Chicago, IL: Edinburgh University Press, 1965); Terje Tvedt, "Hydrology and Empire: The Nile, Water Imperialism and the Partition of Africa," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 39 No. 2 (June 2011), pp. 173–194.

[65] The British Navy patrolled the Indian Ocean for pirate and slave ships and safeguarded the monopoly of British traders in the Indian Ocean. John Frederick Day, "British Admiralty Control, and Naval Power in the Indian Ocean (1793–1815)," (Doctoral dissertation (Volume 1 of 2), University of Exeter, 2012); Raj Kumar Trivedi, "The Role of Imperial British East Africa Company in the Acquisition of East African Colony in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 33 (1971), pp. 616–623.

[66] Quotation from the Bismarck Papers in Arne Perras, *Carl Peters and German imperialism 1856–1918: A Political Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

[67] Jonas Fossli Gjersø, "The Scramble for East Africa: British Motives Reconsidered, 1884–95," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 43, No.5 (2015), pp. 831–860.

of 590,000 square miles that included Lakes Nyasa, Tanganyika, and the Victoria Nyanza.[68] The British government, however, declined to ratify this concession and Mackinnon could not secure the monopoly for his company's trading. In 1888, he made a second appeal to the Crown to ratify a new concession with the sultan. The region under the second concession was considerably smaller in size, covering only about 150 miles of the coastline, and included the harbour of Mombasa and extended from the River Tana to the frontier of the German protectorate.[69] The British Crown agreed to the second request and granted the charter, which gave Mackinnon's IBEAC a free hand to manage trade and in the political administration of the specific territory for the benefit of the British crown. IBEAC's objectives were to secure treaties from indigenous populations, bring in concessions made by chiefs under IBEAC's occupation, and to construct roads and railways that would open up areas for trade and commerce.[70] IBEAC was additionally mandated to protect the Lake Region and Uganda from falling into foreign hands. The company thus was to essentially act as a surrogate of the colonial governing instrument.

IBEAC's resources, however, were insufficient for carrying out the heavy duties placed on them. IBEAC was unable to raise private capital for investment as investors deemed the region unpredictable and precarious. The plan to open up the interior by constructing a rail line running from Mombasa to the Victoria Nyanza experienced a series of false starts when the company failed to secure both capital to finance the venture and labour. Unable to obtain more resources from the British government, the company decided to withdraw plans of operations in the interior, electing to instead focus on the coast where a thriving trade network already existed. This decision triggered debates in London on whether to proceed or abandon the East Africa imperial mission. In 1894, opinion favoured retaining the region and a British protectorate was declared. IBEAC territories were taken over by the Foreign Office in June 1895, and the territory was duly renamed the British East Africa Protectorate. Figure 2.1 below is a photograph of the statue of William Mackinnon, which was once erected in Mombasa. Figure 2.2. is a map of the imperial partition of the territories of British East Africa.

[68] GB 102 PP MS 1/IBEA, Imperial British East Africa Company, 1874–1894. Papers of Sir William Mackinnon. School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Archives, University of London. Accessed on 4 April 2022 from https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/97625e6e-7a88-3d89-a1c7-9be6222d7602?component=7a2dc54c-4db2-349e-8333-73513cb7c90d.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Trivedi, "The Role of Imperial British East Africa Company," p. 619.

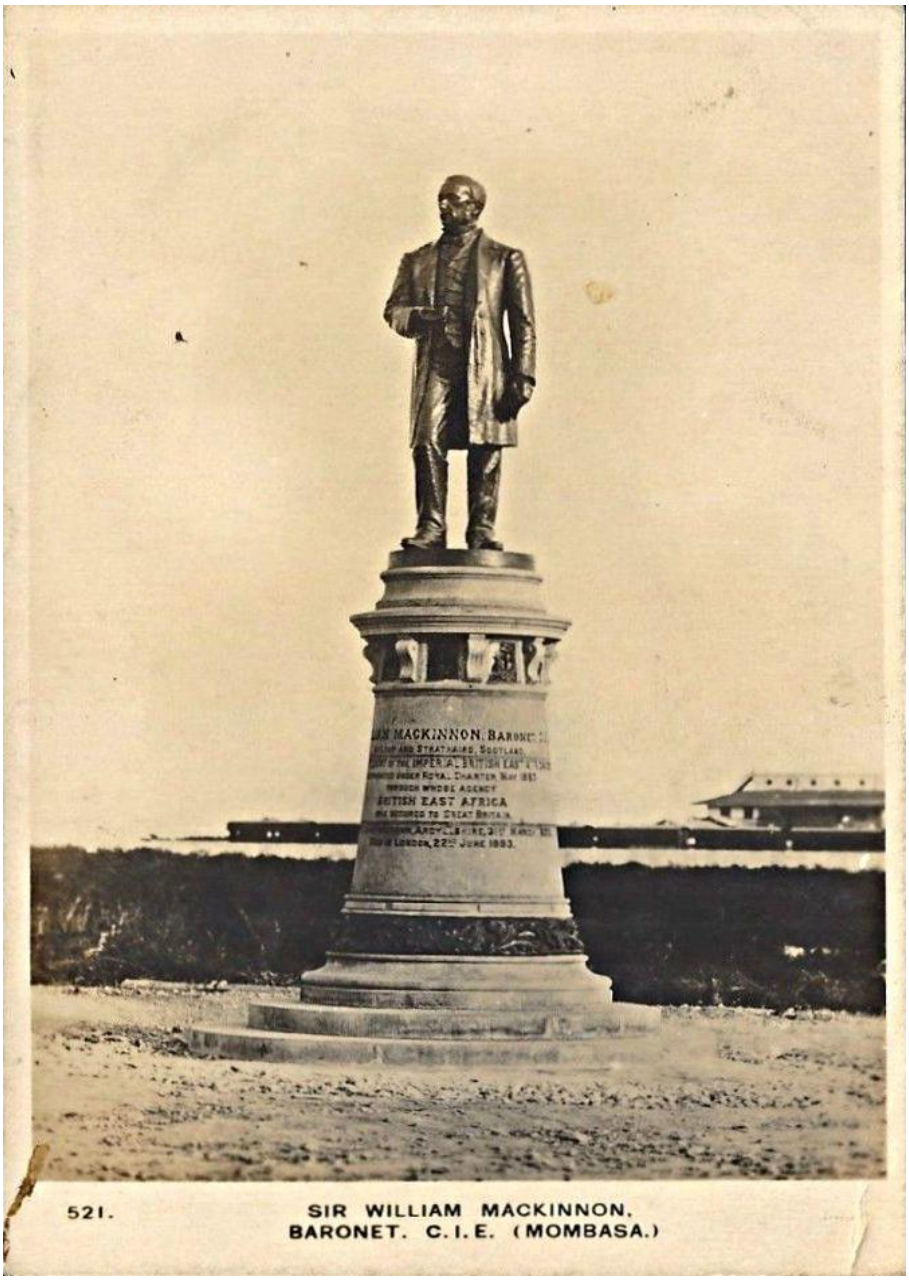

Figure 2.1. A photograph of the statue of Scottish trader and IBEAC founder William Mackinnon. The statue was erected in Mombasa in 1900, but moved to Keil School in Dumbarton, Scotland, in 1964. Photo source: Vintage East Africa on Pinterest. https://pin.it/4Ku69yb

Figure 2.2. Map showing European nation partitions of East Africa's territories in the period 1881–1925. Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica. Accessed on 4 June 2023. https://www.britannica.com/place/British-East-Africa#/media/1/80007/1192.

Mombasa, a region under the Sultan's jurisdiction, was selected as the capital and centre from where British hegemony was to later extend into the unexplored hinterland. In 1896, the construction of the Uganda rail line began in Mombasa, and the plan was to extend it to the eastern borders of Lake Victoria (present-day Kisumu) which, in this period, was part of Ugandan territory. The rail line was completed in December 1901. From its inception and up to the end of its construction, the Uganda rail line was fraught with severe challenges, ranging from lack of manpower and ever-increasing costs, to attacks from wild animals and pillorying by interior ethnic groups like the Nandi, who stole rail equipment. Indeed, the completion of the line in the face of these extremes led Charles Miller to describe it as the "Lunatic express."[71] Because Africans had no previous experience of rail construction and the British had neither extra resources nor the time to train them, Sir George Whitehouse, the rail chief engineer, was unable to tap into the existing pool of African labour on the coast and from the hinterland for preparation of the roadbed and for laying tracks on the rail line. The only Africans working on the railway were therefore porters and translators, while labour for construction proper had to be imported. Whitehouse turned to the British colony of India, which provided over 30,000 of mainly Punjabi coolies and artisans, who were shipped in for this special construction.[72] The photo in Figure 2.3 shows the ceremony marking the completion of the Uganda rail line in Kisumu.

On completion of the rail line, Britain still needed to expand the harbour and construct feeder lines to connect important economic zones to the main Uganda line. The labour situation on Kenya's coast, and particularly in Mombasa, remained unchanged, however, and the colonial administrators continued to report severe deficits.[73] Britain's inability to procure labour from the coastal indigene led to the introduction of a new labour policy, whereby labourers from other localities within the colony were encouraged or forced to migrate to Mombasa and become its primary labour pool.[74] This was the origin of the story of migrant Luo labourers in Mombasa, who constituted the majority of the imported labourers who worked for the KURH stations located in the town.

[71] Charles Miller, *The Lunatic Express: An Entertainment in Imperialism* (London: Macmillan, 1971).

[72] M.F. Hill, *The Permanent Way: The Story of the Kenya and Uganda Railway* Vol. 1 (Nairobi: East African Railways and Harbours, 1949).

[73] KNA/PC/COAST/ 1/9/56 Labour Statistics, 1912–1920.

[74] KNA/PC/COAST/1/9/21 Labour for Government Departments, 1914.

Figure 2.3. Mrs. Florence Preston, the wife of Uganda Railway's construction engineer David Preston, driving the last peg of the Uganda Railway at Port Florence (Later Kisumu) on 20 December 1901. Photo courtesy of the Kenya Railway Museum, Nairobi.

2.2.1. Coastal semi-autonomy and its influence on Mombasa's labour shortages

The first section of this chapter gave a general overview of how imperial capitalism precipitated Mombasa's need for vast amounts of labour, much of which was generally unavailable. Why was this the case? Was it a matter of Mombasa's population dynamic, or was it a problem of a population lacking appropriate skills? Was the problem a result of people being unresponsive to the idea of a wage labour economy, or was Britain constrained in other ways from acquiring local labour? This section attempts to answer the above questions by highlighting the key factors that contributed to Mombasa's inability to satisfy KURH labour demands. The section presents a picture of the setting from where Luo labourers began their journey to Mombasa, which, in turn, triggered the transformational changes witnessed in the town's landscape in no more than a few years after official British occupation of its urban space.

The political agreement between the sultan of Zanzibar and Britain, which essentially made Zanzibar a protectorate state rather than a colony proper, was a key factor in Mombasa's acute labour shortages. The Anglo-German agreement of 1886 awarded the Sultan semi-autonomous dominion over the islands of Mombasa, Lamu, and Zanzibar, together with a sixteen-mile strip

of the coastal mainland.[75] Because Zanzibar's internal affairs were still under the Sultan's control, Britain was unable to advance its efforts to extract labour from the Sultan's subjects. In any case, British rail and harbour enterprises in Mombasa required manual labour of the kind that, in Zanzibar, was only provided by slaves. Though receptive to British protection, the Sultan nevertheless remained wary of upsetting the established norms and social order within his dominion. The main concern was the strength of his authority in the northern and mainland territories (Mombasa, Lamu, and inland areas falling under present-day Kenya) where Arab elites merely considered him as their chief (*Syed*) who led them to conquest, rather than their Sultan.[76] Consequently, he was cautious of upsetting them by abolishing their lucrative slave trade, which would have surely stoked a rebellion. Acknowledging their positionality at the time of the signing of the protection agreement, Britain had ceded to a limited continuity of slavery and slave trading in the Sultan's dominion, albeit in the hope that, once the jurisdiction properly fell under British protection, then trading would gradually cease.[77]

KURH, nevertheless, still required labour to effectively run its operations. Workers were required for road construction, to load and unload cargo from ships, and to pull trolleys on the streets of Mombasa, as in this period there were neither motorcars nor public transportation systems. Because British enterprises were forbidden from employing slave labourers, IBEAC introduced and used paid labour for its ventures. There was, however, a severe shortage of Zanzibari indigenes willing to offer this kind of labour. Arab and Swahili populations regarded themselves as the region's elites and hence flatly refused to engage in manual labour. Labour could therefore be only procured from a small pool of coastal African proper populations and freed slaves, but this demographic was also unwilling to provide it. Previously, attempts had been made to increase the number of labourers on the Kenyan side of the Sultanate by recruiting from Zanzibar Island, but, in 1896, the Sultanate banned all employment of its subjects beyond the island of Mombasa.[78] The political position of Mombasa therefore situated Britain in a uniquely contentious place if matters labour were anything to go by, and threatened to jeopardise the establishment of a firm footing in the region that was intended to be the platform from where expansion into the interior was launched. Figure 2.4 is an illustration of the kind of labour that KURH administrators required from the African population in Mombasa in the nascent years of British occupation.

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[75] Hansard records of parliamentary proceedings, Anglo German Agreement, 1 August 1890. Accessed on 16 August 2021 from https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1890/aug/01/the-anglo-german-agreement.

[76] Church Mission Society, "The Slave Trade of East Africa." Reprinted from the *Christian Observer* (London: C.F. Hodgson and Sons, 1896).

[77] Hansard records of parliamentary proceedings, Anglo German Agreement, 1 August 1890.

[78] Anthony Clayton and Donald Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya* (London: Frank Cass, 1975).

Fig 2.4 An African labourer pushing the trolley carrying Sir Charles Eliot, the governor of the Kenya colony, and Mrs Chamberlain, through the streets of Mombasa, 1904. Photo courtesy of the Kenya Railway Museum, Nairobi.

2.2.2. The role of the Swahili social landscape in Mombasa's labour shortages

The political situation informing Mombasa's endemic labour shortage was further aggravated by the long-established social practices of public interactions within Mombasa's social spaces. Mombasa had for centuries been part of the Indian Ocean maritime trade network, and trade and social engagement with Arabia gradually reproduced the organisation of political and social interactions modelled from the Arabic world. Social stratification and categorisation of individuals were therefore prominent features of Mombasa's social landscape, and the assumed hierarchies of individual identities had crystallised by the time the region came under the British sphere of influence. Swahili stratification ranking ran from the Arab and Afro-Arab populations, who occupied the top echelons of society, to slaves sourced from the hinterland *bara* who occupied the bottom rung of the hierarchy. Other social groups within the order, including merchants, freed slaves, and indigenous coastal African proper *wanyika*, occupied and moved either higher or lower in the various positions existing within this stratification.[79]

[79] Despite social status being acquired at birth, it was possible for social groups to be promoted to higher ranks or demoted to lower ones. Social status was more likely to change for one's offspring than for the individual.

East African coastal elitism was defined by a close association with Arabic cultural motifs. Thus Islam, Arabic forms of dressing, and social interactions, and even the proximity of one's home to an Arab town worked to increase ones social currency. Social prejudices in Arabia had informed the development of a class of slaves who provided much-needed labour in Arabic homes, and race had been a determining factor in the gradation of this class.[80] On expanding to East Africa, Arabs exported and transplanted their classifications and social hierarchies, and granted themselves higher titles while awarding slave status to the black African population. It was because of this that the Swahili went to great lengths to dissociate from their Bantu origins and instead emphasised their Muslim-Arabic heritage.[81] A relationship of mutuality had however developed between Arab and Swahili elites on the one hand, and the *wanyika* population on the other, even though this group was Bantu and largely non-Muslim. This was mainly because coastal towns were sustained by food coming from rural *wanyika* settlements,[82] but also because the *wanyika* were instrumental in the extension and expansion of trade into the interior in their capacity as intermediaries and guides.[83] The *wanyika* were therefore largely spared from Arab slave traders' dragnets. Coastal towns, however, still required labourers and Arabs ventured deep into the interior in search of them.

The intersections of race and class in the East African coastal landscape ultimately produced the prejudices of labour witnessed at the time of British occupation. In an attempt to present themselves as higher ranked than the Afro *wabara* slaves brought in from the interior, the *wanyika* created new hierarchies, and began associating the provision of non-kindred labour with the slave class.[84] Prejudices on labour were deeply embedded in the Swahili coasts' social psyche, so much so that even former slaves were unwilling to participate in the wage labour economy, especially if the labour needed was manual. Indeed, former slaves opted for reintegration into rural subsistence economies or moved into other "respectable" sectors of the cash economy.[85] The Swahili social landscape's reinterpretations of respectable work thus fuelled the severe manpower shortages along the East African coastline and specifically in Mombasa.

Mombasa's labour shortages could not be mitigated by mobilising labours from adjacent *wanyika* lands falling under Seyyidie province (later Coast province). This was because the male population there had no interest in doing so because it was already engaged in other forms of subsistence production. Colonial officers in Mombasa and other coastal towns incessantly

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[80] Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
[81] Lyndon Harries, "The Arabs and Swahili Culture," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 34 No.3 (1964), pp. 224–229.
[82] De Vere, *Swahili origins.*
[83] John Middleton, *African Merchants of the Indian Ocean: Swahili of the East African Coast* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2004).
[84] Fredrick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labour and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya 1890–1925* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1980).
[85] Ibid.

moaned about their inability to procure reliable and sufficient labour for a number of imperial projects.[86] Mr Alistair McMillan comments on the Afro population's labourers illuminates the extent of this challenge:

> *They regard life with a practical philosophy, and they find the casual employment offered to them by the development of the port of Mombasa more than sufficient for their unambitious (sic) needs. As a general rule, they work reasonably hard for about a week in each month and in that time earn enough to keep them during their period of rest.*[87]

Coastal indigenes regularly changed and circulated work status and, depending on the agricultural season, oscillated between subsistence farm work and wage labouring. Such practices of labour circulation were widely adopted in colonial Africa and for varied reasons. The reserve and apartheid policy in South Africa, for example, encouraged such circulations as it pushed poor migrants seeking wage labour in the cities into creating other sorts of productive relations with rural areas in order to survive.[88] In West Africa, Soninke *navétanes* labour migrants often moved to work in the peanut fields during the rainy season in order to acquire cash for buying goods like cloth, which they later resold for a profit.[89] In Tanzania, the need to accumulate enough resources for the payment of bridewealth saw the Ha shifting between being labourers on European sisal farms, working for Baganda coffee farmers, and working for the Bahaya and Sukuma living in close quarters to them.[90] On the East African coast, indigene Mijikenda and Swahili labour cycles were dependent on agricultural season and weather patterns. In seasons of droughts, they were especially willing to become wage labourers to substitute their primary agricultural production. During planting seasons and in seasons of plenty, they refused wage labouring.[91] Because of widespread labour scarcities, monthly wages in Mombasa became higher than in other parts of the burgeoning colony. In 1913, for example, they officially stood at 9 rupees, together with a ration of *posho* (staple starch). Inland towns, by contrast, were offering wages of between 3–6 rupees in that period. Despite the incentive of significantly higher wages, it was still fairly difficult to get the coastal indigene to work for less than 10 rupees.[92]

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[86] KNA/PC/COAST/ 1/9/56 Labour Statistics, Letter No. 16/23. The Kipini DC gives reasons as to why there is difficulty in accounting for labour

[87] Mr McMillan's comments are found in the report, KNA/RW/33/1 *Labour Unrests and Commissions of Enquiry since 1937*

[88]Akin Mabogunje, "Urban Planning and the Post-Colonial State in Africa: A Research Overview," *African Studies Review*, 33, No.2 (September 1990), pp. 121–203.

[89] François Manchuelle, "Slavery, Emancipation and Labour Migration in West Africa: The Case of the Soninke," *The Journal of African History*, 30, No.1 (1989), pp. 89–106.

[90] Walter Rodney, Kapepwa Tambila, and Laurent Sago, *Migrant Labour in Tanzania during the Colonial Period*. (Hamburg: Institut für Afrika-Kunde, 1983).

[91] KNA/PC/COAST/ 1/9/56 Labour Statistics, 1912–1920.

[92] KNA/PC/COAST/1/14/11, Administration Letter by District Commissioner dated 4 June 1914.

In the initial years of the establishment of the colonial state, the African male population living in the coastal belt was also very low. In 1921, the District commissioner (DC) for Kwale estimated that the area under his jurisdiction had a population of about 10,000 men. Numbers recorded for previous years were even lower.[93] These numbers simply did not permit rigorous recruitment of labour without jeopardising local food production mechanisms. Unlike the interior highlands, the coastal region did not have a large number of food crop settler farmers. Colonial officers hence became much more dependent on getting their (and migrant labourers') food supplies from local African farms. The coastal indigene male population was culturally needed for the production of much-needed staples, including rice, maize, and cassava. Furthermore, the drought and hunger years of 1908, and again, later, in 1920, revealed the importance of supporting African agriculture along the coastal belt. Difficulties had then been experienced in receiving supplies from the interior where colonial authorities had their headquarters, and colonial officers did not wish a repeat of this logistical nightmare in the event of a similar case of food shortage. Hence, they became agreeable to the idea of letting local labour focus on food production, while they procured labour for expansion of industry and infrastructural development from other regions.

The area under Seyyidie province where the Afro indigene (at the time referred to as *wanyika*) lands were was also quite vast and lacked enough European personnel to enforce labour recruitment calls made by colonial authorities. Locals fiercely resisted recruitment, and ran off to neighbouring villages whenever roll calls of men required to provide labour were demanded. Often, authorities found that men had set out for hunting expeditions in nearby forests, or gone to look for food in neighbouring villages. Nor could authorities rely on village headmen to provide proper information on the whereabouts of locals under their jurisdiction; indeed, they colluded in their unavailability.[94] Headmen despised European interference and were more than happy to help those under their jurisdiction escape recruitment.[95]

Britain faced the additional challenge of desertion as the w*anyika* were notorious for not showing up after being recruited for work. In one case, various labourers were recruited by the railway fuel contractors in Taveta, but their full details were not taken down. All disappeared after the recruitment process.[96] The resident engineer for the Shimba Hills waterworks camp, which was developing the waterway network needed for the residents of Mombasa, constantly complained of recruited Digo men abandoning their stations on the same night they were taken on. A reliable working population was therefore desperately needed in Mombasa, and especially for the colonial state's most important infrastructure project. Disliking stays in Mombasa's hot

[93] KNA/PC/COAST/ 1/9/56 Labour Statistics. Kipini DC reiterates that population figures are estimates because a thorough census was not been conducted. The labour statistics state that because there is an absence of reliable census returns, then native populations are estimated at three persons per hut, and that the male population is taken as 47% of the total population.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Robert M. Mambo, "Nascent Political Activities among the Mijikenda of Kenya's Coast During The Colonial Era," *Transafrican Journal of History*, 16 (1987): pp. 92–120.

[96] KNA/PC/COAST/1/14/11, Letter by District Commissioner dated 4 June 1914.

climate, European contractors began making requests for high numbers of inland workers to quickly finish infrastructure-related jobs. Flirtations with Kavirondo Luo labourers were apparently so fruitful that, by 1910, infrastructure engineers began to specifically ask for workers from Kavirondo lands.[97] These actions were mirrored by the KURH, which also began making specific calls for Luo labourers when they began expansion projects in Mombasa. By the 1920s, the Luo constituted a majority of the workers in Mombasa's largest and most important government corporation, to the extent that the town soon acquired the infamous pejorative tag of being a "Kavirondo town."[98]

2.3.1. The Luo solution

The story of KURH's Luo labourers in Mombasa cannot be fully appreciated in isolation of understanding their connection to the newly constructed Uganda railway. The railway informed the transfer of the eastern province of Uganda – which included Luoland regions – to the Kenya colony, which definitively changed the position of ethnic Luo in East Africa's grand imperial project. Previously, Luoland regions were nothing more than unexciting caravan stopovers for traders transiting to the Buganda Kingdom and the Congo hinterland. After the completion of the main Uganda rail line and consolidation of its administration under one government, however, the spotlight moved to illuminate Luoland as the imperial project struggled to mobilise African manpower to enable capitalist penetration, in order to maintain stable control over the new colony. Luo positionality in the imperial project then radically shifted, and the Luo moved from the periphery to become key players in the legitimation and further expansion of the British Empire in East Africa.[99]

After the completion of the main Uganda rail line, Governor Charles Eliot fervently lobbied for the Kenya side of the territory to be transformed into a European settler colony.[100] He recommended the use of African labour in the implementation of this programme. This proposal was however not without contradictions as ongoing attempts to procure labour from the African populations living in Kenya were producing mixed results. Some ethnicities fiercely resisted recruitment into the wage labour economy, while others, like the pastoralists – while more willing – had proven to be inexperienced in the provision of agrarian forms of labour; the kind

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[97] KNA/PC/COAST/1/14/11. Report on Labour Camp: Shimba Water Works, 1910–1915.

[98] Karim Janmohamed, "African Labourers in Mombasa," Bethwell A. Ogot ed., *Hadith 5: Economic and Social History of East Africa* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1975).

[99] Boundaries of the Uganda and Kenya protectorate were redrawn after the completion of the Uganda Railway with the intention of consolidating the administration of the railway under a single jurisdiction. Following the decree banning importation of labour, incorporating portions of the Uganda protectorate where the Luo lived into the Kenya side of the colony resulted in the Kenyan colonial state gaining a considerable number of able-bodied men from the Luo ethnic group, who were later incorporated into the wage labour economy. Throughout the colonial period, the Luo and Kikuyu were the largest ethnic groups participating in the colonial wage labour economy.

[100] William Robert Ochieng (ed.), *Historical Studies and Social Change in Western Kenya* (Nairobi, East Africa Education Publishers, 2002).

that was needed from Africans. Because settler agriculture had to be speedily put into practice,[101] colonial authorities turned to mobilising communities that could easily adapt to work in agrarian environments. Ultimately, the bulk of these chosen labourers came from the Kikuyu, Luo, and Luhya ethnic groups. Although no official documentary evidence exists to support this claim, the persistent call for Luo labourers in the development and maintenance of settler agriculture, as well as in industrial towns such as Mombasa, fuelled rumours that the transfer of Luoland from Eastern Uganda into the Kenya colony was done solely for reasons of acquiring labour from the industrious Luo.[102]

Earlier discussions in this chapter revealed the extraordinary contradictions surrounding labour acquisition in Kenya's coastal region, and Mombasa in particular. The region's hot, humid, and malarial climate presented yet another challenge, exacerbating Mombasa's labour problem by making it even more difficult to recruit workers from inland communities unaccustomed to living and working in such zones. For example, efforts to make the Kikuyu work in Kibwezi, a region whose climate profile was more or less similar to Mombasa, had failed when labourers deserted their work stations citing Kibwezi's harsh and hot climate.[103] Consequently, colonial officers gradually realised that Mombasa's labour shortage could only be mitigated if they sourced labour from groups used to working in conditions similar to Mombasa's hot and humid climate, and for whom desertion would be difficult. The Luo perfectly fit this profile. They were already used to hot climates and malarial conditions, were agrarian and very industrious, and, as a bonus, their homelands were far away, at the opposite end of the colony to Mombasa, hence they were less likely to desert and abandon their workstations.

The colonial state machinery thus took the lead, putting in place mechanisms that orchestrated the push- and pull factors enabling the migration of large numbers of Luo labourers into Mombasa. These labourers became the primary workforce for the town's most critical colonial infrastructure projects. Legislation such as the Native Registration Ordinance of 1915 criminalised movement outside boundaries of established ethnic reserves unless one was employed by a European. Adventurous young men, chasing freedom from communal restrictions and a taste of life in the new urban environment could only access it if they participated in the migrant wage labour economy. Tax was another tool used to efficiently reproduce Luo labour migration to Mombasa, particularly for the KURH. Indeed, taxation killed two birds with one stone in that it not only encouraged Luo labourers to flock into Mombasa town in search of quick monetary returns, but also created tax-indentured labourers. Up to 1915, all tax-indentured labourers from Kavirondo Luoland were transported to Mombasa and the wider Seyyidie province to provide labour for government projects.[104] The workers at several railway fuel stations in Seyyidie, for example, were indentured Luo

[101] Ibid. Eliot argued that this was the fastest way to ensure the loan given to construct the railway would be repaid.
[102] Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya.*
[103] Ibid., p. 14.
[104] KNA/PC/COAST/1/9/46 Returns from Port Labour Office, Mombasa. The PC's comments in a letter dated 27 August 1913.

labourers.[105] Other mechanisms used to entice Luo labourers included capping wages in Mombasa's KURH at slightly higher rates than in other sectors of the economy. The estimated wages for an unskilled worker in KURH, in 1914, was 9 rupees a month, while semi-skilled labourers received as much as 24, sometimes even 37.50 rupees a month.[106] During World War I, when labour shortages were particularly extreme, KURH adjusted wages upwards when some private companies in Mombasa began paying an extra of 2 rupees in order to acquire workers from Luoland.[107] Against a backdrop of worsening living conditions in Luoland, Mombasa and, specifically, the railway and the port service, then became attractive destinations for struggling Luo seeking alternative means of subsistence.

2.3.2. Journey to Mombasa

..no one would leave home

unless home chased you to the shore

unless home tells you to

leave what you could not behind,

even if it was human.[108]

-Warsan Shire

A 1920 letter written by the Mombasa Uganda Railway traffic manager offers a glimpse of the travel conditions confronting Luo labourers journeying from Kisumu to Mombasa. Here, I paraphrase his description of the gruesome journey

> *Huge gangs of workers are brought in by the recruitment companies. Some appear sombre, but a majority of the younger men are clearly excited by the prospect of a train ride and possibly, of a journey to visit far-off lands. They are allowed into the third-class carriages, where, unfortunately, overcrowding is common. Sanitation here is also not high, mainly because there is one bucket toilet to share. Up until recently (1920), the doors to the compartments were kept locked for the whole*

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid., Letter from PC Mombasa to the Chief Natives Commissioner in Nairobi, 1913.

[107] KNA/PC/COAST/1/9/21 Labour for Government Departments. In a letter to the PC dated 13 August 1914. J.J. Lory, the manager of British East Africa rubber and fibre estates, says he will pay an extra 2 rupees a month to acquire Kavirondo men for his plantation.

[108] Warsan Shire, "Home". Accessed on 14 January 2023 from https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/home-warsan-shire.

> *duration of the journey. The rail administrators then argued that they were afraid that the raw native [sic] may try to escape by attempting to jump off a moving train. Currently, however, compartment doors are opened up in stations in Muhoroni, Nakuru, Nairobi, Makindu, Voi, and, finally, Mombasa, and they are allowed to get refreshment in stations centres in Kijabe and Samburu.*[109]

The above description evinces the long, arduous, unpleasant, and even hazardous journey that migrant Luo labourers had to endure to arrive in Mombasa. Why, then, would initially hundreds, then thousands of Luo men embark on such a journey? Why would they subject themselves to this rail travel, year after year, even as prospects of finding work on the railways or in the harbour dwindled, as Mombasa's labour market became saturated? Why would they leave home? Warsan Shire's poem "Home", embodies the positionality of these migrant labourers at a time when there was a tacit acceptance in Luoland of the colonial state's economic and political order.

70-year-old Joseph Odhiambo is a second-generation migrant Luo living in Changamwe Mombasa. His father arrived in the town somewhere in the 1930s, after being recruited to work for a sisal plantation in Voi. At the end of his contract, he moved to Mombasa where he worked as a porter at the Kilindini harbour. Joseph's father helped him secure a messenger's job at the Kenya Landing Company in 1965, where he worked until his retirement in 2000.[110] Amina Achieng fled her matrimonial home and abusive husband in Gem and arrived in Mombasa in 1952. Soon after, she began cohabiting with a casual labourer working at Port Rietz. Their earnings from casual labouring were meagre and unstable, hence Amina took up trade in illicit brewing to supplement the household income.[111] Onyango Achach had seduced his neighbour's wife and was forced to flee his village of Malanga in Alego in 1956 when he could not pay the communal fine his village elders prescribed. He fondly recounts his youthful escapades, and audaciously narrates how his now-faded good looks and heavy-set physical appearance, helped him successfully navigate Mombasa's conjugal market, which was crucial for his survival whenever he was unemployed. His physicality, moreover, secured him a job at the docks in Kilindini where the heavy lifting of goods was required.[112] For every personal story of Mombasa's KURH migrant labourers, the decision to move and later establish a home was primarily informed by circumstances in Luoland. To most migrants, migration was merely the embodiment of conquest as they had no choice but to submit to the push factors compelling them to fill the labour gaps in Mombasa's rail and port service. To some like Amina and Onyango, however, migration provided a rare chance to contest communal power and property relations. Amina, in this case, was able to flee from new interpretations of conjugality and gender norms developing amongst the Luo, in which Luo men had begun to represent the

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[109] KNA/P/C/Coast/1/9/36 Native Labourers, The Transportation of the Labourers. Letter by traffic manager, Uganda railway dated 20 September 1920.

[110] Joseph Odhiambo, Oral interview (henceforth O.I.), 16 February 2018 in Changamwe, Mombasa.

[111] Amina Achieng, O.I., 12 February 2016, in Bangladesh, Mombasa.

[112] Onyango Achach, O.I., 20 February 2016, in Port Rietz, Mombasa.

dynamics of marriage in absolute patriarchal terms.[113] The routinisation of husbands' authority over wives had especially weakened women's position and bargaining power and, from the 1930s onwards, rural women became severely undermined. Migration therefore presented Amina with the choice to opt out of her conjugal arrangement and enter into another partnership agreement, on her own terms and away from her community's prying eyes. In Onyango's case, migration presented him with an opportunity to continue life as a member of the Luo community amongst the urban Luo, without paying the fine for his indiscretions. In the not-so-distant past, his non-compliance with the elders' prescriptions would have definitively confirmed his ex-communication. Chiefs and headmen whose traditional authority was being severely challenged by colonialism in that period indeed breathed a sigh of relief as young men began making the journey to far-off Mombasa. During the famine years of the 1920s, for example, young men who could not farm were the cause of much worry as they became agitated, rebellious, and impossible to control. Hence, Luoland chiefs were relieved when a sizeable number began to move to work at the port of Mombasa, if only because it removed potential threats to their authority.[114]

Banda has argued of the existence of two main migratory practices: voluntary migration, which is influenced by pull factors; and involuntary migration, which is informed by push factors.[115] Voluntary migrations, he posits, occur when individuals are motivated to move from their present location in order to improve their overall living standards. This can be, for example, a trader seeking to expand their business, young men hoping to find fortune in new lands, or youth pursuing adventure away from a community's watchful eyes. Involuntary migration, on the other hand, occurs when individuals are forced to move from their home due to strenuous circumstances making life in their present location unbearable. In this case, colonial fiscal policies would be a reason for the involuntary mobility witnessed in Kenya in the 1900–1930s.[116] This study has established that a combination of voluntary and involuntary impulses informed Luo labourers' choice to migrate to Mombasa throughout the colonial period, and particularly towards work at the KURH. The circumstances are fully outlined in the next section.

Much of the literature on colonial taxation has emphasised the prominent role that taxation played in the shift from African subsistence economies to colonial capitalist wage-labouring

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[113] Samwel Ong'wen Okuro, "Our Women Must Return Home: Institutionalized Patriarchy in Colonial Central Nyanza District, 1945–1963," *Journal of Asian and African Studies,* 45 No.5 (Oct 2010), pp. 522–533.
[114] KNA/PC/NZA/1/26 Nyanza Annual Report 1921.
[115] Harvey Chidoba Banda, *Migration from Malawi to South Africa: A Historical and Cultural Novel* (Langaa RPCIG, 2017).

[116] Stichter, *Migrant Labour in Kenya;* Leigh A. Gardner *Taxing Colonial Africa: The Political Economy of British Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

ones. Tarus[117] and Brautigam et al.[118] have argued that it was through taxation that Britain was able to fully coerce African participation in the cash economy. Colonial fiscal policies aimed at Africans were intended not only to provide resources necessary for colonial expansion and administration, but they were also a method of establishing European hegemony. Adhering to taxation demands implied the acknowledgment of colonial authority and, in a way, bestowed legitimacy on the colonial state.[119] In the early stages of the formation of Kenya's colonial state, hut taxes were the dominant fiscal policy for revenue mobilisation. Hut taxes, however, were easily paid by Africans who seasonally migrated to colonial urban centres, where they engaged in wage labour for a few months specifically to earn the cash needed to pay this tax. They then returned to their farms where they practiced their main family-based commodity production.[120] As British labour demands intensified, the colonial state became cognisant of the need to encourage movement of even more men into the wage-labour workforce, and for longer periods of time. New forms of taxation were therefore introduced, and rates progressively increased. Furthermore, harsher penalties were prescribed for absconding from or lateness in payment. The tax regime thus developed meant that the African population was in a constant cycle of tax demand and payment. African men were hence forced to remain in the colonial urban environment for longer periods of time, constantly supplying labour in exchange for cash, of which a substantial portion was used to pay taxes.

When the Uganda rail line reached Kisumu in 1901, a small number of ethnic Luo began working for the railway company, prompted perhaps by the hut tax of one rupee, which C.W. Hobley, the commissioner for Kavirondo region, collected in this area in 1901–1902.[121] Contrary to administrators' hopes, however, Luo consumption patterns only marginally changed and this did not warrant long-term labour provision. The Luo, moreover, did not see a need to accumulate money to deal with unforeseen situations and hence labour was only exchanged when they needed to purchase items to fulfil traditional expectations.[122] To mobilise more Luo labour, the colonial state thus resorted to increasing and later diversifying their taxes. In 1903, the amount of hut tax was increased to 3 rupees. This tax was specifically aimed at encouraging more men to seek employment on the railway after the repatriation of unskilled Indian workers.[123] Taxes imposed on the Luo continued rising steadily and, by 1915, the hut tax rate stood at 5 rupees per annum. In 1921 it was raised again, to 8 rupees (16 shillings) but following vehement protestations the increase was rescinded and reduced to 12 shillings in

[117] Isaac K. Tarus, "A History of the Direct Taxation of the African People of Kenya, 1895–1973" (Doctoral dissertation, Rhodes University, 2004).
[118] Deborah Braütigam, Odd-Helge Fjeldstad, and Mick Moore eds., *Taxation and State Building in Developing Countries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
[119] Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).
[120] Bruce Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectics of Domination* (London and Nairobi: James Currey and Heinemann, 1990).
[121] Stichter, *Migrant Labour in Kenya*, p. 17.
[122] Ibid., p. 31.
[123] Ibid., p. 33.

1922. Hut taxes were imposed on standing huts in homesteads, which, in most cases, were owned by men. Men who did not have huts, or who shared huts, were therefore exempted from taxation. This was to change with the introduction of the poll tax. The poll tax was a form of community charge, imposed on all males over the age of sixteen and who did not pay the hut tax. Poll taxes were first applied in Kenya in Kikuyu lands, but subsequently spread out to include Luoland in 1912–1913.

The introduction of the poll tax (officially through an ordinance of 1910[124] but in practice much earlier) increased the tax burden of households in Luoland because young men without reference to income or resources, and irrespective of ownership of a hut, became eligible for taxation. The 1910 tax amendment stipulated that taxes were to be paid on the first day of April and failure to do so could be punished with imprisonment. Imprisonment did not, however, mean that the tax had been extinguished. In fact, tax accumulated in the time an absconder was in prison as that period was also counted as a tax season. Furthermore, colonial administrators began adopting extreme measures to enforce tax obligations. Failure to pay hut taxes, for example, could result in a hut being razed to the ground,[125] an occurrence that was considered sacrilegious amongst the Luo.

The tax net spread over Luoland engulfed many; indeed, only a few could work to pay it off. The burden of hut taxes, for example, which were imposed on all huts without reference to individual circumstances, ultimately rested on healthy younger men who were forced to work not only for themselves but also for old relations, sick ones, or relations who were dead but whose huts housed their widows.[126] Other men had to work for male relations who were in school, but who were nevertheless still eligible for poll taxation. The increase of taxes up to the 1920s, and the simultaneous limiting of African subsistence production by reducing land size and restricting numbers of domestic animals they could keep, proved to be highly effective in pushing African men towards the wage labour sector. Luo men then felt immense pressure to participate in the wage labour market, and KURH's promise of higher wages guided their choice to migrate towards Mombasa.

A number of existing studies have underlined the nexus between the African ecological disasters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the relative ease with which European invaders subdued African ethnic groups and effected colonisation. Ofcansky's[127] study, for example, maintains that the rinderpest epidemic of 1889–1897 was the main cause of the destruction of African economic and political systems in the East and Southern Africa

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[124] Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, *East African Protectorate Ordinances and Regulations Vol 1 Jan 1 to Dec 31 1911* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1912).

[125] Hansard record of parliamentary proceedings discussing the hut and poll tax, 31 January 1934. Record accessed on 17 May 2022 from https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1934/jan/31/hut-and-poll-tax.

[126] Alfred Ohanga, O.I., 27 January 2019, in Siaya. Men built separate huts for their wives. If a man died, the wives' huts remained standing.

[127] Thomas P. Ofcansky, "The 1989–97 Rinderpest Epidemic and the Rise of British and German Colonialism in Eastern and Southern Africa," *Journal of African Studies*, 8, No. 1. (1981), pp. 31–38.

regions; and that this greatly aided the advance, extension, and later consolidation of German and British rule. In the midst of such devastation, he argues, the African population in these regions were too weakened to resist European domination and fell, in quick succession, under European control. Ambler's[128] analysis of central Kenya's landscape reveals a similar breakdown of society following the famine and rinderpest epidemics of 1897–1901. The consequence of this pandemic was an increase in British influence over Kikuyu and Kamba societies as the colonial machinery prepared for an influx of European settlers who were to live in the neighbourhood of these communities' lands. Hobley[129] and Hill[130] additionally reveal that, due to a devastating rinderpest epidemic and a damaging civil war, the Maasai, a much-feared group and one of interest to any traveller with sights on Uganda, lost considerable power at the time the Uganda railway arrived in Maasai country. Both scholars agree that it is for this reason that the Maasai resorted to collaborating with British authorities, as it gave them an option to receive protection from other communities' attacks while they endured their predicament. The Luo were also affected by the ecological disasters witnessed in the years preceding the colonial occupation of East Africa, and, like most ethnic groups, their ability to challenge British occupation was substantially diminished. These disasters were, indeed, the trigger that produced the changes in the social and economic livelihoods of the Luo and made migrant labour appear to be the most viable survival option in the new world that was currently confronting them.

Schiller's[131] study outlines some of the natural disasters encountered by sections of the Luo c. 1880–1920. His main argument is that the shocks encountered contributed to the changes that were witnessed in the community's political and socio-economic worldviews. In particular, the twin epidemics of famine and rinderpest revolutionised Luo economic lifestyle and initiated the radical turn from a primarily subsistence, mixed farming economy towards wage labour. Between 1890–91, rinderpest wiped out entire herds of cattle; cattle that represented both wealth and food, especially when farming proved inadequate or impossible. The rinderpest also decimated wildlife, hence game hunting, an erstwhile popular alternative means of subsistence, was no longer an option. The famine that immediately succeeded the rinderpest pandemic further exacerbated the situation as there was no cattle to provide reserves when the land became bare.

In addition to famine and rinderpest, several epidemics of sleeping sickness were also experienced in the period 1904–1912. The 1904 epidemic was described as most severe in terms of spread and mortality, albeit ended strangely abruptly. In an article written for the Annales of the Mission house in Roosendaal in 1905, Nico Stam, a Mill Hill missionary serving at the

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[128] Charles H. Ambler, *Kenyan Communities in the Age Of Imperialism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988).
[129] Charles W. Hobley, *Kenya: From Chartered Company to Crown Colony* (second edition) (London: Frank Cass, 1970).
[130] Hill, *The Permanent Way*.
[131] Schiller, *Gem and Kano*.

Kavirondo Vicariate, painted a picture of extreme devastation caused by what he considered a special kind of African sleeping sickness:

> *In my experience of the European sleeping sickness, the patient would usually fall asleep and apparently without suffering any pain at all, die. This was not the case for the African sleeping sickness. Here, the skin turns yellow, and the jugular glands swell. The sick experience extreme scratching and suffer from severe headache, and their bodies festers with wounds. In the last stages of the disease, the sick persons' muscles will either become stiff or contract convulsively. Death from this disease is painfully agonising*[132]

Documented interviews by the official government inquiry into the sleeping sickness pandemic revealed that the Luo believed the disease was zoonotic. It was reported that large quantities of dead fish floated on lake surfaces, and that there was an unusual spike in hippo deaths. People collected and ate the fish together with the hippo carcasses.[133] The consumption of dead fish and hippos certainly points to a situation of severe food shortages in the period preceding the sleeping sickness epidemic. Locals further expounded that the disease was spread through canoe traffic coming from Mageta and the Lolui islands on Lake Victoria, and moving towards mainland Luoland. Famine, therefore, was being experienced in several regions of Luoland, including the islands on the lake, and canoes transported those migrating in search of better prospects. The spread of sleeping sickness was thus connected to patterns of mobility among the communities living in the regions surrounding Lake Victoria.

The 1904 outbreak was swift and severe but, as mentioned, ended rather abruptly. Unlike in Uganda, where colonial administrators forcefully evacuated affected populations, little was done in Luoland to curb the spread of the disease. However, when another outbreak struck in 1911, people were more prepared. The second outbreak saw the voluntary migration of populations from affected areas, and, as the provincial commissioner for Kisumu wrote "[…] the native population actually shrink from actual mention of the disease and retire to a line they consider safe […]."[134] When the disease again broke out in Kisumu in 1920, and on Mageta Island in 1921, the whole island was voluntarily evacuated. For this group of refugees, selling labour as an alternative means of subsistence offered a chance to survive. This was how Jackton Omondi's grandfather came to Mombasa. Omondi says his grandfather moved from Kisumu after the sleeping sickness pandemic decimated half of his family. In fact, he was the only male member of his family to survive the pandemic, which killed his father and three brothers. He opted to work at the port in Mombasa because wage labouring would afford him the means to provide for his wife and aging mother, a duty that was now solely placed on him.[135] Certainly,

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[132] Frans Groot, *Stam of Mumias: A Hagiography* (Haarlem: Mill Hill Mission Society, 1990).

[133] G.D. Hale Carpenter, "Report on an Investigation into the Epidemiology of Sleeping Sickness in Central Kavirondo, Kenya colony. Senior medical officer, Uganda Colony," *Bulletin of Entomological Research*, 15 No. 2, (Aug 1924), pp. 187–208.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Jackton Omondi, O.I., 17 January 2018, in Changamwe, Mombasa.

labour recruitment agents thrived in periods of pandemic as the pool of reserve labour ready for conscription increased considerably.[136]

Famine was another major factor influencing the ethnic Luo's migration towards work at Mombasa's rail and port service. Cohen and Adhiambo asserted that hunger (in Siaya) extended and reproduced itself through the way people participated in labour and commodity markets, and transformed the social relations of household members into money exchange relations.[137] The famines occurring in the years between 1880–1920 certainly informed decisions on mobility in that period and Luo people were reported to have moved from place to place in search of other means of subsistence as their land became bare. The 1906–1907 famine, named *choka*, was particularly devastating. Missionaries reported emaciated corpses laying strewn on roads and homesteads evacuated.[138] The famines of 1918 and 1919 exacerbated the spread of sleeping sickness as it was carried along with populations moving from place to place in search of food. People notably moved closer to the lake shores, a breeding ground for the carrier tsetse flies, to look for food as there was nothing on the mainland to eat.[139] In 1920, there were reports of Luo men moving from place to place, actively seeking out recruiters who could provide employment. The PC for Coast province stated that the 1919–1920 famine was the driving force for the mass movement of Luo men to Mombasa.[140]

The famine and hunger experienced in Luoland in the first twenty years of the twentieth century were undoubtably aggravated by the decision to adopt new food production and farming systems. The embracing of maize as a staple grain and the simultaneous encouragement of cash-crop farming, destabilised communal food security and produced widespread hunger. Introduced in East Africa in the sixteenth century by the Portuguese, maize cultivation was not widely adopted in Luoland as preference was given to the hardy sorghum and millet whose risks of crop failure were low. The valorising of maize as a superior crop began when missionaries encouraged its production by introducing it in the school curriculum. Maize planting then became associated with those who went to school, i.e. the elites, and it soon became an esteemed product.[141] A combination of colonial pressure and its symbolic value saw maize becoming much more integrated into the diet of the Luo, with disastrous consequences. Maize cultivation required new farming practices and monoculture production, planting in rows, and weeding twice in a season to remove the undergrowth. Consistent following of these procedures was the only way one was able to get high yields of the crop, although this was never assured. Because planting maize was labour intensive, farmers ultimately neglected

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[136] KNA/PC/NZA/3/20/2/1 *Labour Agents*, 1920–1929. The Nyanza PC faults the rampant practice of recruiting visibly sick men, including those carrying infectious diseases.

[137] Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo, *Siaya*.

[138] Groot, *Stam of Mumias*, Stam recounts incidences where he encountered abandoned corpses on the road and had to bury them, pp. 85–86.

[139] Carpenter, "Report on an Investigation into the Epidemiology of Sleeping Sickness in Central Kavirondo."

[140] KNA/P/C/Coast/1/9/36 Native Labourers. The Transportation of the Labourers. Letter by traffic manager, Uganda railway dated 20 September 1920.

[141] Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo, *Siaya*, p. 65.

production of other crops. With a high risk of crop failure, hunger in Luoland, which had previously been sporadic, became the norm. The maize variant produced in Luoland was, moreover, of lower nutritional value, and was the cause of widespread malnutrition among the Luo.[142]

The cultivation of cash crops at the expense of food crops further undermined food security in Luoland and influenced the radical shift to wage labour as a substitute method of subsistence. With the introduction of the cash economy, the Luo were encouraged to grow cash crops to earn money to fulfil tax demands, but also to, ostensibly, improve their social standing and standards of living in the newly reformed cash-based economic system.[143] Large tracts of land previously used for food production were suddenly used to cultivate cotton, tobacco, and sisal.[144] The sale prices for these commodities, however, were dependent on world prices, and, in any case, Africans were offered lower rates for their produce. These cash crops eroded the fertility of much of Luoland, and there was a marked increase in episodes of crop failure.[145] In the face of hunger and lower-yielding lands, migrant labour became an attractive alternative means of subsistence. Mombasa's KURH, which, by now, valued Luo labourers and therefore offered them higher compensation, now became a destination for finding new means to survive.

2.3.3 A family affair

Studies have shown that community and kinship networks play important roles in migration processes. This is because individuals considering migration often reflect on community and are likely to move and settle in areas where their community is established. Choldin,[146] for example, reveals that Italian immigrants to Boston, USA, moved to the city with the knowledge that they could rely on kinfolk and shared resources such as housing, food, and money as they found their footing in their new residential lands. Herzig's[147] study of migrant Asian (Indian) labourers in Kenya also illuminates the kin chain connection, and illustrates that Asian immigrants to Kenya encouraged relations in India to join them and provided newcomers with accommodation while helping them find work. Keen to settle down and immediately integrate,

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[142] G.M. Culwick, "Nutrition in East Africa," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 14 No.7. (Jul 1944).

[143] Verena Raschke and Bobby Cheema, "Colonisation, the New World Order, and the Eradication of Traditional Food Habits in East Africa: Historical Perspective on the Nutrition Transition," *Public Health Nutrition*, 11 No.1, (July 2008), pp. 662–674.

[144] INF/10/156 Cotton Growing: An Important East African War Industry 1942; Paul Onyango, O.I., 16 January 2019, in Bangladesh Mombasa. Onyango's family farm was given over to cotton production. Luoland remains the centre for production of the above-mentioned cash crops

[145] CO/533/525/2 Labour: Conscription of Africans for Essential Services; Paul Onyango. O.I., Onyango's father came to Mombasa after devastating disease struck the cotton that they had planted on their entire farm.

[146] Harvey M. Choldin, "Kinship Networks in the Migration Process," *The International Migration Review*, 7 No.2, (Summer, 1973), pp. 163–175.

[147] Pascale Herzig "Communal Networks and Gender: Placing Identities among South Asians in Kenya," *South Asian Diaspora* 2 No. 2, (Jul 2010), pp. 165–184.

migrant Hadrajaye in Salamat also move into areas where other members of their community are established. For the Hadrajaye, community is important as it gives them a chance to preserve language and cultural identity even as they settle amongst another, dominant cultural group.[148]

Similarly, community and kinship networks would play important roles in the migration of Luo labourers to Mombasa. Family and community helped prospective migrants learn of opportunities at KURH,[149] and, additionally, provided transportation and initial accommodation to newcomers. Employment was also mainly contracted by means of social linkages with previous migrants.[150] The newspaper cutting in Figure 2.5 describes the journey of Ogot KÓgot to Mombasa, and reveals the key role that kin connections played in influencing decisions to migrate, and in helping KURH migrants settle in. KÓgot was having trouble providing for his family, including a sick child, in Yala, and was heavily indebted when he was persuaded to migrate by Ojendo, a Mombasa-based labourer working for the Kenya Landing and Shipping company in Kilindini. Ojendo portrayed a picture of fortune in Mombasa, and convinced KÓgot that he, too, could access such fortune if he started to work for Kenya Landing. With virtually no resources and not knowing anyone else in the town, or even where Ojendo lived, KÓgot borrowed money and set off to Mombasa with the assumption that the Luo community in the town would surely accommodate him. His journey, however, did not mirror Ojendo's illustrious depictions and he ran into various headwinds. For example, it took him five days of wandering before he could locate Ojendo's residence and, during that time, he had to beg for food from stranger Luo people. He also had to seek accommodation and sleep in various people's houses. Of note is that other than the fact that they were ethnic Luo, KÓgot had no other connection with his benefactors. The Luo community had already created a communal network in Mombasa that welcomed all new migrants and helped them establish a footing. It was the Luo community who also aided KÓgot in locating Ojendo, who eventually helped him secure casual employment at the port.

[148] K. Alio, "Conflict Mobility and Language: The Case of Migrant Hadrajaye of Guera to Neighbouring Regions of Chari- Barguirmi and Salamat, Chad," *ASC Working paper Series* 82, (Leiden, 2008).
[149] Joseph Otieno, O.I., 16 February 2019, in Magongo, Mombasa.
[150] Ibid.

DONGO JO CENTRAL NYANZA

No 28 DECEMBER 1951 HELA 10

Kamoro in bende wachni nene oyudi kata obiro yudi. Som gima nonwang'o Migosi Ogot Kogot e wuodhe kane odhi Mombasa.

Sigand ng'ama nodhi bandho gope Mombasa

Ogot Kogot ne tiyo tich boi ni Mig. Manningi modak Yala, kikadho Kisumu, higni auchiel makadho. Kinde nogo ne gitiyo gi Mig. Ojendo kaka boi mar aniyo Chieng' moro Ojendo jaka Oremo nonwang'o wach ni nyathindo tuo ahinya to jathieth ne dwaro Shs 30/- eka olos ni nyathi yath mondo oyudi ngima. Chi Ojendo bende ne dwaro pesa mag wuoth gi mag chiemo. To ka hawi marach e kindego Ojendo ne odhier ma kata hela ach'el onge e kirope. Kindego ne kor dwe kama omba'a tek yudoe ngang' to dweyono bende ema ne Ojendo ochakoye tich Bwana Manningi. Ojendo ne odhi ir Ogot Kogot mi onyi e chandruokge duto mag tuo nyathi kendo kaka pesa to oongego kata hela achiel e Iwete. Ogot Kogot ne en ng'ama nigi chuny maber kendo mahero ji ndi Bende ne en ng'ama Iwete ber ma jarit pesa ahinya.

Ogot Kogot ne owacho ni Ojendo ni en kod e onglochegge mako to ni kech koro kaka osewinjo chandruok maka mani man kuome ne oyikore mar hole. Wachni ne oduogo ngima e chuny Ojendo kendo ngimane ne oduogo machiegni. Nowacho mapiyo gi duol mayom mar lombruok ni mondo jalo ohole mana Shs 60/- eka didhi kode maber. Kane Ogot Kogot oseyie kod mano ne osingorene ka onyise ni obiro chule pesagi mos mos ka omiye Shs 15/- dwe ka dwe nyaka chieng' otiek gowi. Bang' mako pesagi Ojendo noloso gige aruya chuth. To kare kata ne Ogot Kogo timoni Ojendo kamanini Ojendo kare ne dhano adhana machal parone dwa lalne We Ojendo oa kani gi pesagi e mifuke. Ne ochako mar mak wachre mi nokethogo tichne. Mer maka manini ne ochuno Bwana Manningi mondo oriemba e tich mi Ojendo kane oseyudo pesane modong noswecho maling'ling' ma kata ng'ato ne ok miyo oriti kao.

Kane Bwana Manningi dhi Ulaya Ogot Kogot bende koro ne oweyo tich kendo ne odok dala kuom loso tijene maluno. Notemo matek ahinya nono kuma Ojendo nitieye to ok ne onyal winjo kata mana humbe nono. Bang'e ne oyudo jal moro mane oa Mombasa mama opo nono ka ng'adone ger Ojendo ni ni Mombasa to otiyo kuom joka Kenya Landing, Kilindini.

E kindago Ogot Kogot bende koro nene pesane orumo makata mar chulo osuru mar Serikal oongego. Bang' winjo humb Ojendo kamano ne oparo mondo odhi Mombasa kuro mondo obandhe pesage kande. Nochako loso wach wuodhe mar luwe kuro. Nochako wuoth ka okawe nyamburko koa Maseno thurgi nyaka Yala mondo okaw gari mane okawe Shs /-Bang'e ne ong'ado tiku mar gari aa Yala nyaka Mombasa Shs /-Ni kech ne okia ng'ato Mombasa ne oyudo chandruok ahinya e donjone kuro kapok oyudo kama Ojendo odakie. Notieko ndalao abich kapok oyudo kama Ojendo nitieye E kindego chiemo kod kar nindo ne ochande ahinya. Kawuono onindo kani, kiny orindo

(Odhi e Relatua 2)

Figure 2.5. Photograph of newspaper article describing Ogot KÓgot's journey to Mombasa. Source, KNA/DC/KSM/1/28/8 Newspapers.

Communal and kin pattern migrations were further influenced by the prevalent practice of ethnic profiling by the Kenyan colonial state. Colonial ethnographic studies had bestowed inherent features on group identities, and these features informed patterns of interactions developed between the group and the colonial state. The Nandi, for example, were regarded as martial and loyal to a fault, and this influenced the decision to incorporate them into the colonial security apparatus as *askaris* (administrative police), and into the military.[151] The Luo, on the other hand, were regarded as an industrious agrarian people. After having called upon them to

[151] Hal Brands, "War Time Recruitment Practices, Martial Identity and Post-World War 2 Demobilisation in Colonial Kenya," *Journal of African History*, 46 No.1 (Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 103–25; Timothy H. Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902–1964* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999).

work in the initial infrastructure projects in Seyyidie province, the trope that they were, by nature, beasts of burden, able to provide labour in the most extreme of conditions, was firmly registered. Colonial officers hence began making specific calls on members of the Luo community to participate in projects whose working conditions were particularly deplorable. Most notably, the Luo were called upon to perform the arduous duties of the carrier corps and pioneer corps for British East Africa campaigns during World War I and World War II.[152] In Mombasa, it was immediately assumed that the Luo would easily acclimatise to and perform the heavy work demanded by the KURH. KURH departments thus gave these jobs to the Luo, discriminating against other peoples.[153] As the interview with Joseph Otieno reveals, Luo labourers were indeed encouraged to call upon relatives still living in Luoland to come and join the rail and port workforce.[154] Because work was gained via references, and the likelihood of finding employment at the rail and port increased if one was a Luo, kin pattern migration was the main migratory trend bringing labourers to the rail and port service, and the Luo ultimately became the dominant ethnic group amongst workers at the KURH.

Conclusion

Mombasa, a port city with an extended history of trade and cultural exchanges, became a key component of the imperial strategy when Britain extended its cultural order to East Africa in the late nineteenth century. The town and, indeed, the entirety of the Swahili coast, had already become a major economic and cultural powerhouse in the Indian Ocean maritime trade network from as early as the thirteenth century, and this was evidenced by the abundance of material culture and architectural relics from a diversity of global cultures that existed in the region. Mombasa served as a trading portal for the lucrative import/export traffic of the Indian Ocean trade network, and Britain hoped to incorporate the town's infrastructure into its efforts to extend the colonial capitalist economy into the largely unexplored hinterland regions of Africa. This vision was to be implemented by constructing a rail line and expanding the port of Mombasa.

Labour was a necessary precondition for establishing the capitalist forms of production that were envisioned by the introduction of the railway and port infrastructure in Mombasa. However, at the turn of the century, Mombasa's labour market could only offer limited and, indeed, insufficient labour options to meet colonial capital needs. Initially, the political agreement between the sultan of Zanzibar and Britain, which essentially made Mombasa island a protectorate region rather than part of the colony proper, constrained Britain's efforts to secure labour internally. This was because Mombasa's affairs remained under the Sultan's control.

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[152]Meshack Owino, "The Impact of Kenya African Soldiers on the Creation and Evolution of the Pioneer Corps During the Second World War," *Journal of Third World Studies* 32. No.1 (University of Florida Press, 2015), pp. 103–131.

[153] KNA/PC/COAST/1/9/46 Returns from Port Labour Office Mombasa, 1913–1919. Contractors in Seyyidie specifically requested Luo labourers; Berman, *Control and Crisis*, p. 310. In the period of the emergency, for example, Luo labourers were preferred to their Kikuyu counterparts.

[154] Joseph Otieno, O.1.

Though receptive to British protection, the sultan was nevertheless apprehensive about upsetting established norms within his dominion, and this included slave trading and the employment of slave labour. Mombasa's labour market, moreover, was highly differentiated and distinctively stratified, and the diversity of identity groups resident in the town meant that different social groups provided specific types of labour. The Swahili, who were the majority ethnic group on the island at the time of British occupation, resisted the idea of providing manual labour which was needed for the rail and port projects, as this type of work had historically been reserved for slaves brought in from the hinterland. Nor could Britain mobilise labour from the coastal lands adjacent to Mombasa, as the numbers of indigenous African men there were low. In any case, the communities in these lands were largely uninterested in participating in the wage labour economy as they were engaged in other forms of family and communal production. Early administrators moaned of men deserting workstations, sometimes immediately after recruitment. The severity of Mombasa's labour shortages forced Britain to reckon with the fact that the colonial project was in jeopardy, and this could only be mitigated if they could find ways to incorporate more African labour into Mombasa's rail and port ventures. The colonial state therefore encouraged the development of interventions that eventually brought migrant Luo labourers into Mombasa's rail and port workforce.

Luoland experienced a series of catastrophic crises at the turn of the twentieth century. Recurrent droughts ravaged the region from the late 1890s, and successive rinderpest epidemics decimated cattle and wildlife. Moreover, the region was hit by sleeping sickness pandemics, which further weakened the community. The series of ecological disasters experienced were marked by the destruction of the Luo economic and political system, and the community was much too frail to resist the advance of British rule.

While the Luo were experiencing these ecological shocks, the European social order was simultaneously infiltrating their cultural world. The cash economy, for instance, was gradually integrating into Luo cultural practices. For example, cash was now used as a means of exchange in bride price negotiations, and was also needed to purchase newly "prestigious" products, including items like cloth and factory-made hoes. The erratic rural landscape thus pushed Luo men to sell their labour in order to survive. Mombasa's port and rail projects offered an alternative means to survive in the new world they confronted, and many Luo men followed the rail line to Mombasa when recruiters swooped in to mobilise labour to support East Africa's grandest colonial project. As the rail and port expanded in the 1920s, recruitment went into overdrive and the Luo gradually became the primary source of labour for KURH projects.

Though reeled in with a promise of fortune, Mombasa's labour landscape became volatile from the beginning of the 1920s as more prospective labourers flocked into the town, and the fluctuations in wages barely enabled survival. The colonial state was seemingly unprepared and was caught off-guard by the materialisation of colonial Mombasa's labour scene. It had not anticipated the controversies and contests that could arise from the merging of the colony's and the protectorate's productive forces. Mombasa hence grew increasingly volatile. In the following chapter, I will analyse how Luo rail and port workers influenced the development of Mombasa's tumultuous labour landscape, and I will evaluate how the colonial state attempted to mediate the violent clash between capital and Luo labour in colonial Mombasa.

CHAPTER THREE

A TOWN IN TURMOIL: LUO KURH LABOURERS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF COLONIAL MOMBASA'S LABOUR LANDSCAPE

3.1 Introduction

Barely twenty years after Britain took control of affairs on the coast of East Africa, remarkable events that, subsequently, would define Kenya's labour history began dominating Mombasa's labour scene. By then, the Kenya-Uganda Railway had become the key technological factor contributing to Mombasa's prominence as the chief commercial centre of East Africa.[155] As such, its workforce formed a major bloc of labourers influencing the development of the town's labour landscape. Three contentious issues – wages, working conditions, and housing – featured prominently in this labour scene, and transformed Mombasa into a theatre of great upheavals to rival other burgeoning and established colonial industrial towns, such as Lubumbashi and Kimberly.[156] This chapter discusses the development of Mombasa's labour landscape, which, at its core, was the product of contradictions between the needs of colonial capital and those of migrant rail and port workers. The arguments put forward will elaborate on how KURH's development and expansion played a key role in influencing the migration of huge numbers of Luo labourers into Mombasa and, subsequently, contributed to the proletarianisation of their labour. The chapter also discusses Mombasa's recurrent labour tensions and persistent contests over wages, working conditions, and housing, and it evaluates how these pressures stimulated migrant workers' labour and political organisation. Finally, the chapter scrutinises the strategies applied by colonial capital to control Luo labour, as well as workers' articulation of grievances regarding colonial labour policies in Mombasa.

3.2.1 Luo labour migrations: The contradictions of theory and practice

W.A. Lewis' model of economic development presumed the existence of surplus labour in the economy, the majority of whom, he argued, were in the disguised unemployment in the subsistence agricultural sector. His theory of development envisaged capital accumulation in the industrial sector by way of reallocating the excess and dormant labour found in the agricultural sector. He postulated that this labour mobility was to be influenced by economic forces as individuals would, presumably, readily leave the subsistence sector and seek employment in the capitalist sector if the wages rates in the latter were some 30–50 per cent

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[155] Karim Janmohamed, "The Emergence of Mombasa as the Chief Commercial Centre of East Africa," in Gerhard Liesegang, Helma Pasch, and Adam Jones eds., *Figuring African Trade; Proceedings of the Symposium on the Quantification and Structure of the Import and Export and Long-Distance Trade in Africa 1800–1913* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1986).

[156] Mining towns were the epicentres of often violent worker struggles throughout colonial Africa.

higher.[157] Building upon Lewis's model, Barber[158] hypothesised a framework from where he assumed the African urban wage labour force was developed. His theory similarly supposed that indigenous labour moves organically to the cash economy when incomes in that sector become marginally higher than in agricultural production. This supposition was explained in a four-stage process. The first stage was the organisation of African indigenous production, which, he contends, was self-sufficient even if outputs were low and tastes modest. The second stage begins with the introduction of the cash economy, which, he agrees, is initially tepidly received, but becomes more accepted when interventions such as taxation nudge individuals into moving towards ventures that result in cash acquisition. The third stage manifests when indigenous people actively pursue cash earning endeavours – which, at that time, meant either the sale of agricultural produce or the sale of their labour. People only choose to sell their labour if it brings in more income than would be achieved through selling produce. Barber is particular, however, in relaying the fact that this shift in productive labour is specific to male labour. This, he argues, was because men's role in community production was periodic, while the routine tasks of subsistence production were performed by women.[159] Traditional forms of agricultural labour organisation thus, create a periodic "unemployment of men" – the surplus labour implied in Lewis's model. The episodic withdrawal of a portion of this productive unit (less than 50 per cent) would therefore not irreparably interfere with or destabilise indigenous agricultural production. The last stage of Barber's labour mobility hypothesis was said to be attained when demand for African labour rose to more than 50 per cent of the total male population. Labourers need better wages, however, to offset the loss of income that would otherwise have come from agricultural output, and this, in turn, induces even more labourers to break away from indigenous agricultural production. This, Barber posited, was the reason for the rise in wages witnessed in a majority African towns in the period after World War II.

Lewis's and Barber's labour mobility models have been critiqued by a number of scholars studying the development of the African working class. Specifically, they have been accused of ignoring the structures that were deeply ingrained in the economic processes that developed the African wage-labour class. Arrighi, notably, disavows their assumptions of labour mobilities with the argument that, to a large extent, labour migration was the result of a process of primary accumulation in which the political rather than market mechanisms predominated.[160] Using the example of the development of the Rhodesian peasantry, Arrighi shows that the political created and progressively widened the gap between labour productivities in the peasant and capitalist sectors, and was hence the main driver for the labour mobilities witnessed in

[157] W.A. Lewis, "Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour," *The Manchester School*, 22 No. 2 (Wiley, 1954), pp. 139–191.
[158] William J. Barber, *The Economy of British Central Africa: A Case Study of Economic Development in Dualistic Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1961).
[159] Ibid., p.46.
[160] G. Arrigghi, "Labour Supplies in Historical Perspective: A study of the Proletanization of the African Peasantry in Rhodesia," *Journal of Development Studies*, 6 No. 3 (1970), pp. 197–234.

Rhodesia's colonial urban towns. The political, in this case, drove the economy of labour mobilities.

The first section of this chapter endeavours to use the aforementioned scholars' insights to evaluate patterns of Luo labourers' migrations to Mombasa and, specifically, to the port and rail service. What factors, for example, informed the development of KURH's particular labour market, and what role did the colonial state play in the development of these labour trends? What were the interactions and contradictions of the needs of Mombasa's rail and port management, the colonial state, and migrant Luo labourers, and how did these relations develop KURH and, by extension, Mombasa's labour landscape from the 1910s to the late 1950s? In simple terms, how did the workings of the market economy, and the fact of state coercion, contribute to the development of KURH and, by extension, Mombasa's tumultuous wage labour economy?

3.2.2. KURH and the development of a migrant African working class in Mombasa

The success of the colonial project in Kenya in the nascent years of British occupation generally rested on the colonial state's ability to mobilise the manpower needed to run its most crucial imperial infrastructure projects: the railway and the port. A pronouncement by Lord Delamere, one of Kenya's pioneer settlers, demonstrates the important role that Kenya's railway and port were to play in the development of settler agriculture and in facilitating the development of the colonial extraction economy:

> *It is vital for this country to place the end of the Uganda railway upon the deep waters so that no hand […] stands between the produce of the vast regions that are tapped by the Uganda Railways and the ships.*[161]

Because the railway and the port were key instruments in the expansionist project, the colonial state did not leave the intricacies of labour demand and supply solely to market forces. Instead, the state took an active role in ensuring that labour in Mombasa was, firstly, available and, secondly, abundant and hence cheap. Thus, even though it can be correctly argued that Luo migrant labourers consciously chose to work in Mombasa's KURH because, as Barber postulates, the wages increased the overall family income, a majority of these labourers were nonetheless, inclined towards that choice because colonial structures had altered and progressively rendered traditional production as a means of subsistence, impractical.

In the years immediately proceeding its completion, the impact of the Uganda railway on the East African region it served could only be described as revolutionary. The rail line contributed to a reduction in haulage cost for goods from and into the interior regions, and thus facilitated the expansion of trade on a scale never witnessed before. While human porterage of one ton of goods from the coast to Uganda had previously cost about 180 pounds, the cost of rail transport

[161] KNA/AWS/24/1 Newspapers. Delamere's statement is quoted in a 1908 article in the newspaper *The Daily Leader of British East Africa*.

was significantly lower, at 17 pounds a ton.[162] A greater part of the German East African trade also began to flow towards Mombasa as freight charges on this line were considerably cheaper than on the German Tanganyika line. As import and export volumes increased, the ports in Mombasa gradually became the lifeline supporting the highly profitable exchange of goods between the metropole and East Africa. Mombasa's growth in the first twenty years of occupation was huge and it sounded the death knell for Zanzibar as the East African hub for the Indian Ocean trade.

While the challenge of transporting goods to and from the interior had been effectively solved by the rail line, the issue of handling those same goods at the point of entry and exit nevertheless remained largely unresolved. Regardless of the revolutionary developments in the transport sector in the first two decades of the 1900s, Mombasa nonetheless still appeared lethargic in adopting measures to develop modern facilities for handling the large amounts of goods that were coming in and moving out of the territory. Up until the 1920s, human labour was still the chief method applied in the entire cargo handling process, which began with unloading goods from docked ships and ended with the goods at the railway sheds in Mbaraki. (The sheds would be moved later to expanded and modernised units in Kilindini.) The reliance on human labour for this arduous work, and its initially sparse availability resulted in higher wages at the rail and port service, which steadily increased in the first ten years of colonial occupation.[163] Shipping companies were forced to outbid each other in terms of the wages offered in an effort to ensure their cargo was unloaded first and fastest. The struggle to acquire workers was ideally informed by KURH's method of standardising dock charges and penalties, and rates were calculated for the number of days ships remained docked. KURH's primary labour force thus comprised workers stationed at the port, and whose main duty was the lightering of goods from ships. Other labourers included carriers of goods in the locomotive sheds – their main duties involved loading goods into trains and offloading those that had came in from the interior. This group of employees, the loaders and carriers, were all African. The Luo were favoured for this heavy work and, by 1930, they dominated most of the departments connected to the dockyard.[164]

African, and particularly Luo workers, were not only doing lower-cadre manual labour at the KURH docks, though, they were also distributed across various departments of the organisation. Port records revealed that, in 1906, 7032 were in construction, 9865 were engaged in maintenance, and 749 worked for the marine service.[165] From 1910, the rail committee began requesting the integration of African labourers into mid-level management positions at KURH.[166] The system adopted by the colonial state and rail and port management, where trained and skilled staff were recruited from overseas, was becoming unsustainable because it

[162] Janmohamed, "The Emergence of Mombasa."

[163] Wages flattened during WWI and were further reduced during the subsequent depression years. However, they were still comparatively higher than in other colonial urban centres.

[164] KNA/CQ1/19/25 Report on Native Affairs Mombasa, 1930.

[165] KNA/K/33/1/11/87-803 Report of the Labour Commission, 1906. Numbers stated are for the total African workforce. It is also stated that the Kavirondo Luo constituted a majority of these labourers.

[166] KNA/PC/COAST/1/9/62 Employment of Literate Africans in Government Departments.

was extremely costly, but it was also difficult to administer and insecure.[167] On several occasions, train drivers who had been recruited from England failed to take up their positions, which resulted in a severe shortage of drivers for the rail locomotives. In 1922, for example, the driver shortage meant that of the 115 available locomotives, only 85 were in use.[168] Consequently, the rail committee began requesting that Africans be fully integrated and trained in running the rail proper, rather than being restricted to the lower cadre, rank-and-file positions. In this regard, a labour department report prepared by Colonel Hammond suggested that the rail service should establish a scheme for training African "artisans". KURH was encouraged to take in "boys" with a certain level of literacy for training for this specific role. Contradicting the colonial policy of migrant labourers' temporary residential status, the report suggested that KURH create a cadre of permanent employees in Mombasa. This special group, the report argued, was to be induced into taking permanent employment by being offered accommodation that was big enough for long-term occupation; meaning residential units that were not only suitable for them when they were single, but were also big enough for when they married and had families. Facilitating permanent residency was viewed as a crucial step in enhancing the smooth and continuous operations of KURH.[169] The rail and port service also needed higher cadre servicemen, such as clerks, and Hammond argued that it would be prudent if Africans were encouraged to apply for these positions.

Despite KURH's labour demands, the colonial state was however adamant on pushing through a policy that dictated that the majority of its migrant wage-labour workforce could not become permanent residents of Mombasa. For reasons related to the social control of urban populations,[170] colonial officials instead leaned towards developing a temporary class of urban resident labourers who were firmly rooted in their respective rural reserves. These labourers were to only live in Mombasa for the period they were in service to the colonial capital and were expected to return to rural subsistence production when their labour was no longer needed. This policy contradicted Mombasa's rail and port labour demands as KURH's needed to maintain a continuous and constant flow of labour, not least to achieve its goal of maximising profits. This glaring contradiction was the foundation for the development of a key feature of the urban landscape of Mombasa and its adjacent districts[171] from as early as the 1920s, i.e. a

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[167] KNA/AWS/24/1/Newspapers. Colonel Hammond's report is published in the *The East African Standard*, 1920.
[168] Ibid.; Editorial in the newspaper *The Daily Leader of British East Africa*, 1922.
[169] Ibid.
[170] A severe shortage of European personnel informed the colonial state's adoption of indirect rule, and the dependence on rural mechanisms of social control to manage response to colonial policies. The urban environment and, in the particular case of the Luo, the element of spatial distance threatened to disrupt this control structure. The colonial state hence favoured the maintenance of rural and urban linkages, ideally to enable the extension of rural frameworks of authority to the urban worker. How this linkage worked to control Luo rail and port workers will be discussed in detail in the final section of this chapter.
[171] Osodo Dami, O.I., 12 January 2018, in Changamwe. When the colonial state began taking measures to control the flow of labour into Mombasa through registration certificates and issuance of work permits, Luo labourers intent on heading to the town acquired permits to work on plantations in the neighbouring districts of Kwale, Voi, and Malindi, where demand for labour was also high. Plantation owners paid their transportation costs to these

large number of migrant Luo labourers resident in the town. The following section elaborates on how the labour practices of KURH and the stevedoring companies, the colonial state policies on African labour, and the work of recruiters, collaborated to create this key feature of colonial Mombasa. Figures 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 below are testament to how the utilisation of huge numbers of migrant Luo labourers in Mombasa contributed to KURH'S tremendous growth.

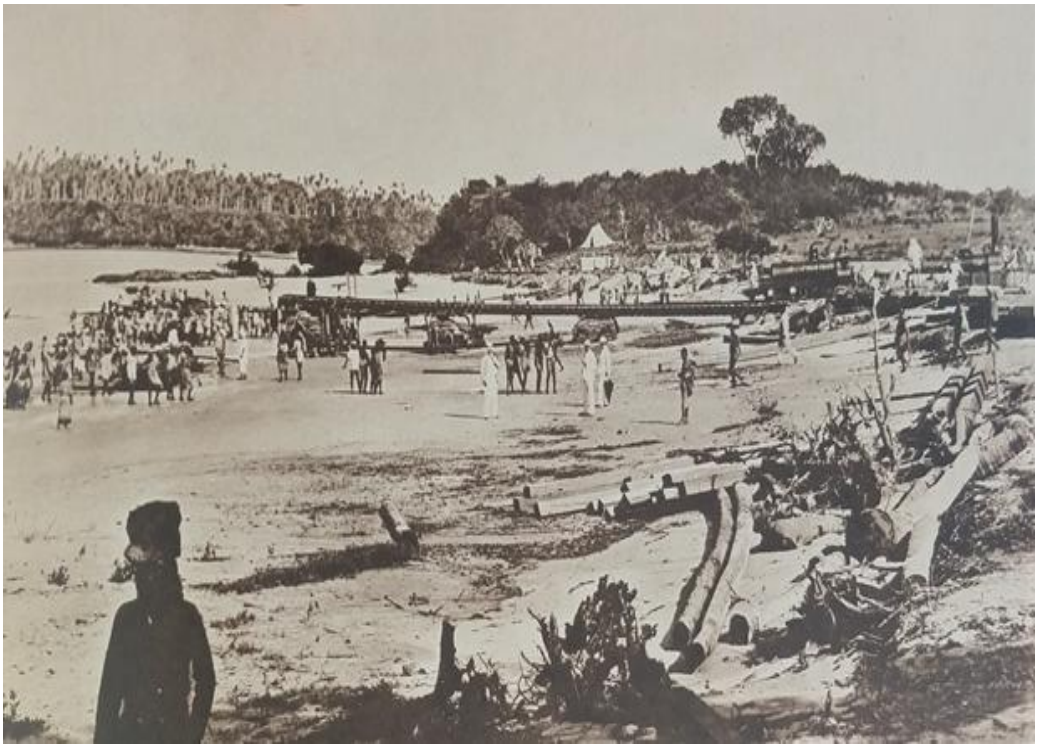

Figure 3.1. Kilindini, 1898

work stations. At the end of their contracts, a majority of these farm workers disappeared into Mombasa's urban maze instead of repatriating back to their respective reserves. The reserve labour for KURH thus included not only the population resident in Mombasa, but also the labourers working on plantations in adjacent districts. Osodo Dami, for example, testifies that a number of her extended family arrived in Mombasa via this route.

Figure 3.2. Kilindini, 1900

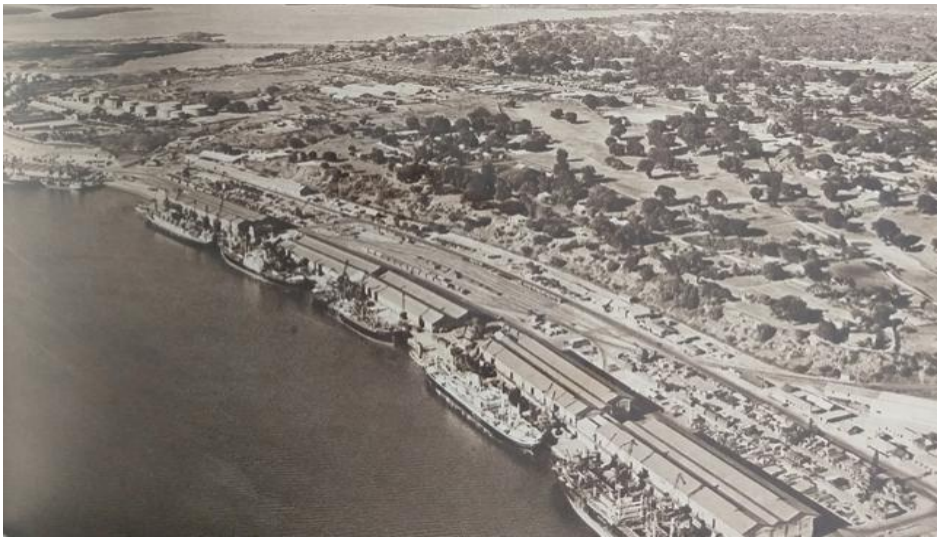

Figure 3.3. Kilindini, 1946

Photographs of Kilindini harbour in 1898, 1900, and 1946. A newspaper commentary describing the fast pace of the port's growth reported that, "if one has not been in Kilindini for a fortnight, then they return, they are surely to evidence unimaginable progress."[172] Photo source, M.F. Hill, *The story of the Kenya and Uganda Railway*.

[172] KNA/AWS/24/3 Port Control Kilindini, Newspaper Comments. *The East African Standard*, 7 September 1927.

3.3.1 The creation of surplus Luo labour in Mombasa

> *To a casual observer, the African city is made up of three basic population groups; a plebeian "urban mob," workers and artisans, and the elite. Rarely do the members of the mob move up into the latter categories but it is always possible for the urban African worker to sink to the mob.*[173]

Marxist social theory defines proletarianisation as the process of creation and expansion of the working class in a capitalist economy.[174] Marx and Engels argued that this process entails the dissolution of the intermediate class of small producers and self-employed artisans to create two distinct classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.[175] In Africa, the course of proletarianisation was triggered when colonial capitalist enterprise combined with state machinery to create structures that progressively destroyed traditional African modes of livelihoods and, in turn, pushed Africans into yielding to a cash-based economy. The result was the subsuming of different versions of African labour into the wage-labour economy. Though the characters and effects of proletarianisation were a feature throughout all African economies, scholars including Bundy[176] and Burawoy[177] nevertheless observe that colonial urban towns were the main sites where processes of labour proletarianisation occurred. This, they argue, was because colonial structures placed urban labourers in a position of dual dependence, i.e. relying on employment in one place and on an alternate economy in another. Burawoy, moreover, adds that, because capitalist economies function by maintaining their workforce by providing minimum daily subsistence, workers are inevitably forced to depend on a vicious system requiring them to continuously sell their labour in order to survive. Bundy's and Burawoys' arguments on proletarianisation are certainly applicable in the case of the migration of Luo labourers to Mombasa's rail and port service. As the committee looking into labour unrest in Mombasa noted:

> *[T]he organisation of wage labour proceeded on the assumption that […] the home of the native labourer will continue to be in the native areas. Thus, renumeration was pegged for a single man, which was assumed to be adequate for feeding and housing in their temporary place of employment. Wage rates were in addition,*

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[173] Peter Claus Wolfgang Gutkind, *The Emergent African Urban Proletariat*, *Occasional Series Paper No.8* (Montreal: Centre for Developing-Area Studies, McGill University, 1974).

[174] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, Vols. 1 and 2 (Hertfordshire:Wordsworth Classics, 2013).

[175] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin classics, 2014).

[176] Colin Bundy, "The Emergence and Decline of a South African Peasantry," *African Affairs* 71 No. 285, (Oxford University Press on behalf of The Royal African Society, Oct 1972), pp. 369–388.

[177] Michael Burawoy, "The Functions and Reproduction of Migrant Labor: Comparative Material for Southern Africa and United States," *The American Journal of Sociology* 81 No. 5 (The University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 1050–1087.

commensurate with standards of living in the reserves. Family income was assumed to be derived from the reserve.[178]

That the initial batch of Luo migrant labourers to Mombasa were involuntary immigrants is unquestionable.[179] The first groups were introduced to the town as tax-indentured labourers, and this group apathetically participated in the wage-labour economy, hopeful that it was only for a long-enough period to allow them to pay off accumulated debts with their wages. A letter written by the then Commissioner of the colony Charles Eliot reiterated that a majority of workers looked forward to returning to Luoland to resume rural subsistence production. Disinterest in Mombasa shifted, however, when the effects of the economic depression began affecting livelihoods in the years following World War I. Though directly triggered by the economic changes that proceeded the war, the shift was actually the outcome of a build up of gradual transformations occurring in a number of Luo economic and social practices in the twenty years or so after the beginning of the colonial encounter. A striking feature of these transformations was the modification of Luo economic and social practices by either partly or fully incorporating cash into these processes. Take the example of bride price payment; cash had become an elementary requirement for the fulfilment of this obligation.[180] Because community was grounded in family, and familial connections were now formalised in part by way of cash exchanges, the African family structure became firmly embedded in a cash-dependent system.[181] Cash was also needed to pay school fees, tax, and it was the medium of exchange for payment of fines and compensation. Because cash had become an integral part of Luo social and economic life, young men in particular were more or less pushed into pursuing ventures whose returns were in cash.

The search for all-important cash in Mombasa, as opposed to nearby towns like Eldoret, Kisumu, or even Nairobi, was influenced by the wages that KURH offered in Mombasa. Generally, labouring in Mombasa attracted higher wages than in other parts of the colony.[182] Moreover, the colonial practice of ethnically categorising African labour had ranked Luo labours higher than other African ethnicities'. Evidence from monthly contracts in Mombasa show that they the Luo were amongst the best-paid Africans from the inland regions. In 1908, for example, the Kikuyu received monthly pay of between 2–4 rupees for a ten-hour shift at the railway godowns, while the Luo received a salary ranging between 4–8 rupees for similar work. This pay was raised to 10 rupees as they gained experience.[183] This second amount is

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[178] KNA/K/331/892/2 *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Unrests in Mombasa* (Part two), (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1939).

[179] FO/2789/178, Letter from Sir Charles Eliot to C.W. Hobley dated 1 May 1902.

[180] Wilson, *Luo Customary Laws.*

[181] Bernard Magubane, "A Critical Look at Indices Used in the Study of Social Change in Colonial Africa," *Current Anthropology* 12 No.4/5, (University of Chicago Press Journals, Oct.–Dec., 1971).

[182] KNA/PC/COAST/1/10/166 Township Matters, *1913*. Letter from PC Mombasa to the Chief Natives Commissioner in Nairobi, 1913.

[183] The Foreign and Colonial Compiling and Publishing Company, *East Africa (British). Its History People, Commerce Industry and Resources*, (London: 1908–1909).

comparable to what the Swahili, a group categorised as non-African, received. These wages appeared lucrative for young Luo men, especially since the rural landscape of Western Kenya had been ravaged by drought in the period immediately following World War I. Young men thus moved in droves to work, in particular, at the port of Mombasa, which, by 1930, employed a majority of workers with roots in Luoland Nyanza.[184] The Luo willingness to migrate was further facilitated by labour recruiters and the organisational structure of the KURH. These factors were key reasons for the formation of a proletariat "urban mob" – a large pool of active and reserve African labourers – which was one of the key features of colonial Mombasa's urban space.

3.3.2. The role of Recruiters

The labour uncertainties that plagued Mombasa's biggest colonial infrastructure project in the first ten years of occupation were the product of the colonial state lacking European manpower to facilitate recruitment processes. This gap was to be hastily filled in the years running up to the close of 1910, when the Department of Manpower authorised agency recruitment. The first tranche of Luo worker gangs transported to Mombasa were therefore, mainly recruited through private labour agents. Agency recruitment was a fairly common practice throughout colonial Africa, but it was especially used in regions where there was a need for specific labour that was not easily available. In the Gold Coast mines of Tarkwa, for example, local labourers were unwilling to work in the unpleasant underground mines, and this decision informed the development of a thriving recruitment sector, with agents enlisting labourers from the Northern territories, French colonies, and from Nigeria. The demands of the Tarkwa mining sector significantly influenced the development of its distinct labour conventions, which included long-term contracts, harsh penal sanctions for desertion, and separate delegated administrative laws for mining labour camps.[185] In Kenya, recruitment agencies grew from understaffing and the unavailability of European personnel to manage sectors related to African labour at the Department of Manpower. The department therefore outsourced recruitment to agencies. Possessing little knowledge of the interior terrain and generally oblivious of the way of life of the communities from whom they were to mobilise labour, European agents gradually turned to Asian and African sub-recruiters, who were more willing to venture deep into the interior in search of working men.[186] Indeed, African sub-recruiters became a vital link in the shift towards embracing the wage-labour economy as they were cognisant of their societies' economic and social networks, positionality, and individual and collective aspirations, particularly with regard to the cash economy. They were thus considered the perfect intermediaries to entice their fellow

[184] KNA/RW/33/1 Labour Unrests and Commissions of Enquiry Since 1937.

[185] Roger G. Thomas, "Forced Labour in British West Africa: The Case of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast 1906–1927," *The Journal of African History*, 14, No.1, (Cambridge University Press, 1973). pp. 79–103.

[186] KNA/PC/NZA/3/20/2/1 Labour Agents.

kinsmen to enlist.[187] Among the labour agencies operating in Luoland were: Gulam Kadir Khan Labour Agents; R.E. Mclaland; Kisumu Trading Company Sasa Hivi Recruiting Company; J. Maxwell and Co. Labour Agents and Recruiting Company; M.F. De Souza Company; Ramji Dass; and Juma Remu and Company.[188]

As Mombasa's demands for Luo labourers continued to grow from the 1910s onwards, recruiting in Luoland became lucrative business and, inevitably, stiff competition ensued. Agencies adopted nefarious methods and began cutting corners and employing unorthodox means to get large numbers of men to sign up as wage labourers through their companies. Guidelines put out by the government to ensure that only qualified workers were recruited were invariably ignored as each company competed to enlist as many labourers as possible. A concerned senior commissioner for Nyanza noted that there were even agencies operating without fulfilling the minimum requirements of the official recruiter's licence.[189] The commissioner's report on the labour situation in Central Kavirondo revealed innumerable corrupt practices within his jurisdiction. Recruiters, for example, always ensured that labourers passed the requisite medical tests, even when they were clearly unfit for work. It was not unusual to recruit those who were openly sick or those who had infectious diseases. If a recruiter did not agree with the outcome of tests or the assessment of a particular medical officer, they simply arranged for a certificate of compliance from a more complacent one. Other unethical practices included bribing chiefs and headmen to limit recruitment within their jurisdictions to particular companies. Though strongly discouraged, juveniles and important figures in the community were also recruited.[190] Efforts made to reign in recruiters' behaviour by, for example, making the government medical officers stationed at the district offices the sole official authority on a labourer's condition and suitability for work, did little to deter underhand practices as recruiters were well aware of the severe personnel shortages, and how this presented challenges to implementation of outlined directives. Recruitment in Luoland was indeed a dog-eat-dog affair.

A significant number of the recruited Luo labourers arriving in Mombasa were juveniles. A key reason for this phenomenon was the normalisation of racialised assumptions that adultified[191]

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[187] Ibid. Letter to chief native commissioner in Nairobi from the Kisumu Senior commissioner outlining the practices of labour recruiters. Seemingly free from obligations placed on local populations (Luo sub-recruiters were, for example, excluded from provision of forced communal labour), a number of Luo migrants to Mombasa had been led to believe that labouring was a prerequisite to becoming a recruiter.

[188] KNA/PC/Coast/1/9/55 Labour Recruitment, Recruitment Permit for Labour Agents, 1915–26.

[189] KNA/PC/NZA/3/20/2/1 Labour Agents, Letter written to the Sasa Hivi recruiting company's owner John Riddock by the Senior Commissioner in Nyanza. Letter spells out conditions for renewal of their recruiter's licences.

[190] The British policy of indirect rule appropriated pre-existing indigenous power structures to control resistance and rebellion. They were thus more inclined to let authority figures remain within their respective communities.

[191] Though the term "adultification" is of recent coinage and its usage is mainly applied in analysis of the African American population (see Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia J. Blake, and Thalia González, *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood* (Georgetown law, 2017); Alison N. Cooke and Amy G. Halberstadt "Adultification, Anger Bias, and Adults' Different Perceptions of Black and White Children," *Cognition and*

African children and youth by viewing them as grown up. The adultification of African children was generally influenced by the necessity to subsume the various forms of African labour into the wage-labour economy and including youth/child workers, greatly increased the available labour pool. The use of juvenile labour thus became widespread not only in Kenya, but in many parts of colonial Africa. In South Africa, the 1841 Masters and Servants Act permitted parents to jointly sell the labour of children younger than sixteen along with their own, or to independently sell the labour of their children between ten and sixteen years of age for a period until they turned twenty-one.[192] The practice was also widespread in Central and West Africa, and here juveniles became essential in the transportation of exports in the expanded agricultural produce sector.[193] Juvenile labour was easily incorporated into the colonial wage-labour economy, as it aligned with the pre-existing concept of work as an epistemology of education and training in pre-colonial African societies. In the pre-colonial context, however, children and youth participated in subsistence production in secondary roles, with their involvement in farming, mining, trading, manufacturing, and caregiving serving primarily as learning processes in preparation for adult roles. With the introduction and expansion of the colonial capitalist economy, higher demands were placed on African labour, further intensifying the differentiation of lineage- and family-based division of labour by age and gender.[194] Children's participation in labour then shifted from its secondary, educational role to primary participation in family subsistence. Agitated Luo teenagers, of whom there were plenty, were regularly lured into wage labour, enticed by the promises of freedom and prospects of accumulation in a society ravaged by hunger and poverty. By the 1920s, the practice of recruiting juveniles had become so extensive that it began to raise concerns among provincial administrators. However, these concerns were mainly focused on the fact that juveniles contributed significantly to the growing numbers of destitute and vagrant individuals in Mombasa's urban areas.[195] In response, the state attempted to develop a system to determine the age and health status of all prospective labourers, stipulating that juveniles could only be employed if they were fifteen or older. When accused of underage recruitment, agencies often argued that they were unable to accurately determine the age of labourers and hence juveniles continued streaming into Mombasa hopeful of finding employment at the rail and port service. When efforts to halt the practice proved futile, the Master and Servant Ordinance of 1926 allowed the minimum age for juvenile employment to be cut off at twelve, i.e. boys who appeared to be of adolescent age.

Emotion, 35 No.7 (2021), pp. 1416–1422; Elizabeth Jean, *Young and Unprotected: The Psychological and Behavioral Consequences of Adultification Bias in Emerging Adulthood*, (Doctoral dissertation, Kent State University, 2022), the concept and similar assumptions were certainly present in racist views of black children and youth in colonial Africa.

[192] Lance van Sittert, "Working Children: Rural Child Labor Markets in the Post Emancipation Great Karoo, South Africa, 1856–1913," *Journal of Family History*, 4 No.1 (Dec 2015), pp. 39–64.

[193] Hugh D. Hindman ed., *The World of Child Labor: An Historical and Regional Survey* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

[194] Ibid.

[195] KNA/PC/COAST/1/10/166 Township Matters, 1913. DC for Mombasa notes that destitution victims are mainly women, youth, and children.

3.3.3 Labour organisation of stevedoring companies at the port

The rapid development of the rail and port network in Mombasa in the first three decades of occupation was undoubtably a key factor in facilitating the movement of great numbers of Luo migrant labourers to Mombasa. The swift expansion undertaken by the rail committee in the period 1902–1930, which included not only the extension of feeder rail networks, but also the building of godowns and warehouses where import and export goods were stored – required vast amounts of labour that recruitment companies in Luoland obligingly mobilised. Just two years after the completion of the railway, the total tonnage of import goods handled at Mombasa's ports stood at 426,380, while exports totalled just over 200,000 tons. In 1904, KURH also began constructing a new deepwater pier in Kilindini with the intension of increasing its maritime traffic flow towards this harbour.[196] This venture, too, required the mobilisation of substantial amounts of labour. Labour demands, moreover, increased in the 1920s when plans were made to make the port a 24-hour operation area rather than one that only operated during daylight. Indeed, the commentary "[…] if one has not been in Kilindini for a fortnight, then they return, they are surely to evidence unimaginable progress […]"[197] indicated that KURH had become heavily reliant on migrant labourers for the development and expansion of its core infrastructure. Migrant Luo numbers, hence, continued swelling in Mombasa as more took up the abundance of rank-and-file construction and porter positions at the KURH, while a few of the educated elite were absorbed into driver, conductor, and ticket collector positions.

KURH's growth notwithstanding, the organisational structure of the stevedoring companies operating in Mombasa's two ports was actually the main stimulus invigorating the movement of Luo labourers to Mombasa in the years leading up to the early 1930s. These companies were:

- The East Africa Lighterage company, which worked ships belonging to the Clan Ellerman line and handled cargo from Japanese and German ships.
- The African Wharfage Company, which handled cargo from the British-Indian line, the Union Castle lines, and the French and Italian lines. This company was also responsible for cooling steamers at Mbaraki.
- The Tanganyika Boating Company belonging to Holland-Africa, which handled cargo for all Dutch ships.

The operational systems of these companies largely informed the development of Mombasa's migrant urban proletariat. To begin with, each company worked independently and separately, meaning that each had to acquire its own pool of labourers to load and offload goods from their respective ships. This practice was risky, especially if the precarious labour situation initially experienced in Mombasa was anything to go by. The companies, moreover, were unwilling to commit to a cadre of regular employees. They instead relied on Arab labour agents *hamals* (s. *hamal*, also *hamali*, *amal*), who were the official licensed agents supplying casual labourers at the port. By the eve of World War I, *hamals* had established themselves as an important aspect

[196] KNA/AWS 24/3, Port Control Kilindini, Newspaper Comments. *East African Standard*, 16 August 1927.
[197] Ibid. *The East African Standard*, 7 September 1927.

of the ports' labour network.[198] Generally, this was because they had played a pivotal role in ensuring that the port had a constant supply of labourers, regardless of the labour scarcities experienced in the war period. The policy requiring ships to pay docking charges for each day a vessel remained berthed at the port worked to develop stiff competition amongst the shipping companies, and each rushed to mobilise gangs of casual labourers to enable quick movement of goods, which would essentially reduce accrued docking charges. Consequently, *hamals* were given the green light by stevedoring companies to quote high wages to attract potential labourers.[199] Mombasa's PC remarked that the high wages presented to labourers in Mombasa and the casual nature of employment at the port were the reasons for the influx of huge numbers of migrant labourers into the district in the 1920s.[200] Mombasa's casual labourers were such a notable feature of the town's labour landscape that, as World War I began, they constituted 28 per cent of the entire colony's and protectorate's casual labour force.[201]

The casualisation of labour in Mombasa's port operations thus created the framework for the development of a large pool of reserve Luo labourers in the town's general labour landscape. Casual employment numbers at the port leapt in the years following the end of World War I and, by the mid 1920s, their numbers jumped to highs of up to 2,900 workers in a day.[202] Casual labouring as a general operational practice continued well until 1927, when a new arrival, the Kenya Landing and Shipping Company, entered Mombasa's port business after obtaining a twenty-year contract to handle all government-related KURH goods. The entry of this company shook the port labour dynamic as, for the first time, a small group of African labourers became permanent employees in Mombasa. This move introduced new competition to Mombasa's colonial space, not least because it blurred the boundaries and positionalities of the African "indigene native" and the "migrant native." As permanent migrant workers took permanent residency, they began demanding political and economic rights in Mombasa's social space, with radical results. Though the company employed about 300 permanent workers, the largest share of its workforce nonetheless remained casual labourers. The Kenya Landing and Shipping Company offered monthly workers a 40-shilling wage for working 5 ½ days a week, while casual labourers received Sh. 1.50 per day for an eight-hour shift. In 1931, the casual employee rate was raised to Sh 2, but this was later slashed back to Sh. 1.50 as the recession of the 1930s brought a slump in trade and money circulation. No housing allowance was paid to either cadre of employees.

At face value, casual employment appeared lucrative, especially since one could take on extra shifts and additionally work overtime. In the initial years, when there were fewer migrant

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[198] KNA/PC/COAST/1/9/42 Hamals, Labour Bureaus, and Registration of Port Labourers 1916–18. In the war years, Luo labourers had been redirected to serve in the WWI carrier corps.

[199] Ibid. Letter from Mombasa DC to PC Coast province, dated 12 December 1917, details reservations with the general acceptance of *hamali* labour practices.

[200] KNA/PC/COAST/1/10/110 Registration of Natives , 1927.

[201] KNA/K/331/8/BOO, H.S. Booker and N.M. Deverell *Report on the Economic and Social Background Of Mombasa Labour Dispute* (Nairobi: Government printer, 1947).

[202] Ibid.

labourers, casual workers were indeed able to accumulate a tidy sum. The high returns received encouraged them to convince more of their kin to make the move to Mombasa. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, as more labourers moved into the district, a large pool of reserve labour was created. Luo labour at the port was now definitively proletarianised. Trained blacksmiths, for example, who just a few years before could easily find specialised trade positions at the KURH were forced to become goods carriers at the port.[203] The labour situation progressively deteriorated into the 1930s, and it was notably difficult to find work at the KURH despite renewed vigour in maritime exchanges as the world braced for World War II. Most casual labourers could only obtain work one out of five days a week, or six days a month.[204] This translated to incomes of about 12–18 shillings a month, barely enough for a single man to survive let alone one with a family. Luo labourers hence struggled to survive in Mombasa's labour landscape while, on the other hand, its famed wages continued pulling in more and more fortune hunters.

William Oduor owns his family's informal gate-making enterprise (referred to as a *jua kali* business) in Changamwe. Oduor learned his blacksmithing skills from his father, who arrived in Mombasa in the early 1940s. I interviewed him at his home in Changamwe and he informed me of how the KURH had crushed the aspirations and ambitions of large numbers of its migrant Luo workforce in the colonial period, by offering no more than goods-carrying positions at the port:

> *My father came to Mombasa just after the beginning of the big war [WW11]. He was initially a goods carrier at the Kilindini port but was lucky enough to later find employment as a steam engine fireman. He ran a small workshop at the back of our house in Railway estate where he recreated household items like cups, plates, cooking pots, and wash basins from scrap metals he collected. Blacksmithing runs through my lineage, actually. My grandfather was a well-known spear maker in Seme, and I passed on blacksmithing skills to my son, James Ochieng, who is the star artist in my workshop. He brings in the most business to the workshop! My father opened this* jua kali *shed in 1970 and ran it until 2000 when he handed over the day-to-day running of the business to me. He arrived in Mombasa hopeful that he would secure employment as a rail blacksmith, but quickly realised that such specialised positions were few. Because he had to survive in Mombasa, he took up casual employment as a goods carrier at the Kilindini port. He was able to preserve his blacksmithing skills only because work at the port was inconsistent and paid poorly, and he hence began collecting scrap metal and recreating household products, which he sold to those who could not afford factory-made utensils. I consider myself lucky because my father was only partially subsumed into the rail and port economy, and I was hence able to inherit a vital skill that later enabled*

[203] William Oduor, O.I., 20 January 2019, in Changamwe.

[204] KNA/K/331/4 Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Examine The Labour Conditions in Mombasa* (Nairobi: Government printer, 1939).

me and my son to eke out a decent living. Other people were not so lucky. My cousin Onyango was a trained and skilled mechanic, and he thought he would find a mechanic position at the KURH. He ended up being a goods carrier and died before he could fulfil his dreams. Others wanted to be painters, weavers, carpenters, and even entertainers for KURH workers, which wasn't possible in the 1940s and 1950s. The KURH drowned the ambitions of numerous skilled Luo workers.[205]

3.3.4 Labour increases during World War II

Though World War I had necessitated the mobilisation of manpower on a scale previously unknown in Africa (with the exception perhaps of recruitment for the South African mines),[206] World War II nevertheless opened the gates for unprecedented levels of Luo migration to Mombasa's rail and port service. These WWII-era movements were primarily influenced by Britain's decision to make East Africa the centre of the Allied powers' sisal production, after the loss of Malaya and the American colony of the Philippines.[207] The loss of these two territories to Japan had dealt a major blow to the Allied forces' war strategy, as it cut off the supply of jute and Manila hemp – materials used in the making of ropes, camouflage netting, sacking cloth, gunny bags for harvesting, and for other binding works. Britain hastily discovered that sisal was a good alternative to jute, and Kenya and Tanzania became the main centres of its production. East Africa's sisal was transported to various Allied processing destinations and military posts via the port of Mombasa. Figures 3.4. and 3.5 show workers in sisal factories getting the fibre ready for transportation to the port of Mombasa.

[205] William Oduor, O.I.

[206] Donald C. Savage and J. Forbes Munro, "Carrier Corps Recruitment in the British East Africa Protectorate 1914–1918," *Journal of African History*, 7 No. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp. 313–342.

[207] INF/10/156 Cotton Growing: An Important East African War Industry, 1942.

Figure 3.4

Figure 3.5.

Figures 3.4. and 3.5. Labourers working through fibres in a sisal factory in Kwale, 1942. The sisal was then transported to the port of Mombasa for redistribution to various destinations. Source: INF/10/156 Cotton Growing: An Important East African War Industry 1942, British National Archives in Kew.

The port had expanded its facilities tremendously by the time the war broke out, and this facilitated increases in cargo handling in aid of the war. Sisal was one of the most voluminous and most important cargos moving through the port. Because large volumes had to be quickly moved to various destinations, the port expanded opportunities for employment and took on more dock- and rail workers. A majority of these labourers were ethnic Luo.[208] The additional increase in money circulation, as a result of the presence of British soldiers and military personnel, stimulated local trade, both licit and illicit, and initiated local manufacturing. Sex work, for example, was widespread in this period, and this was the result of an influx of women, including Luo women, into Mombasa's urban space.[209] The growth of Mombasa's overall population, and the general expansion of economic life resulted in improvements to the social services offered to the African populace. KURH and the municipality of Mombasa increased and diversified their number of workers to include those providing social services. Street cleaning and garbage collection, for example, was extended to the rail service's living quarters, and the Luo took up these jobs. The influx of migrant labourers during the war was significant and by the end of World War II, the African population in Mombasa had jumped to 65,000.[210] Of these, 24,307 were employed on monthly terms in KURH departments, and a majority of these permanent employees were attached to the port.

More migration to Mombasa's urban space came in the years following the ending of World War II. Increased freedom of movement occasioned by the banning of the *kipande* registration system in 1946,[211] together with the lifting of the ban requiring inland Africans to vacate urban areas unless in active employment, extended leeway to young men seeking to escape the widespread poverty in rural Luoland. In the pre-war and war years, the rural landscape of Luo Nyanza had progressively deteriorated and young men were therefore ready to move out as soon as the war restrictions ended. Pre-war cotton planting had resulted in extensive damage to the area's soils, rendering farming an unfeasible subsistence option. The nationwide droughts of the 1940s, moreover, had ravaged Luoland and significantly interfered with local subsistence production. The then DC for Central Nyanza certainly agreed that Luoland was a potential danger zone requiring urgent attention.[212] Mombasa's port and rail service then offered

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[208] KNA/PC/NZA/1/34 Nyanza Province Annual Report 1939. The PC indicated that a majority of the men leaving the reserve were en route to work at the port of Mombasa. In 1939, for example, 2966 labourers left for Mombasa with recruiters to work in port railway construction.

[209] KNA/ABK/12/44 Labour Control-Urban, 1946–55. PC Mombasa remarks that the origins of the rampant vice of prostitution can be traced back to WWII, when the numbers of foreign soldiers in Mombasa increased.

[210] KNA/K/331/89 *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Unrests in Mombasa*, Part Two. Census data was rarely taken for African populations living in Mombasa; hence it is difficult to make a comprehensive numerical analysis of the increases from 1902 to the 1950s. The report of the committee looking into labour unrest in Mombasa, however, gives a glimpse of the patterns of increases in migrant labourers, and their report agrees that WWII was a defining moment in terms of the migration of inland ethnic groups to Mombasa.

[211] WWII labour recruits were required to report to their homeland District Commissioners before leaving for their workstations. Here, information on their registration certificates (*kipande*) was noted to enable surveillance of movement and to track labourers in case of desertion.

[212] KNA/PC/NZA/1/35/2 Notes on Land Utilisation, February 1951 (Nyanza province).

possibilities for generation of income, and there was the additional allure of the town's famed urban cultural space. Furthermore, the radical shift in the colonial governing framework witnessed after World War II, where the colonial state swiftly metamorphosised to become a welfare state, meant that there was an expansion of economic space and workplace positions for the urban African in the skilled departments and administrative structures of the KURH. Many young men therefore left Luoland to seek their fortunes in Mombasa, and in numerical terms the Luo continued to dominate Mombasa's rail and port service.

3.4. Mombasa's labour landscape and the growth of worker consciousness

Low wages, long working hours, dangerous working conditions, job insecurity were among the daily problems facing migrant Luo labourers toiling to make a living in various KURH departments in Mombasa. Much has been written on the development of this labour landscape and the worker conditions that culminated in the strike movement that began just before World War II and intensified in the post-war period. The works of Singh,[213] Stichter,[214] Clayton and Savage,[215] and Zeleza[216] are among the many outstanding narratives illustrating workers conditions and the growth of worker consciousness in Mombasa. Given the abundance of written texts in this field, this dissertation will discuss the issue of wages and work conditions in passing, and only focus on the subject of housing. The choice of housing is because the subject is directly related to the processes of creating a home, materially and symbolically, the outcome of which, in this analysis, was the development of a Luo diaspora in Mombasa. This topic will be discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation.

The aforementioned literature agrees that tensions between the colonial state and migrant Luo labourers in Mombasa were mainly rooted in the twin issues of wages and housing. They contend that these struggles were basically outcomes of the colonial state's policy on migrant labourers, where migrants were regarded as no more than sojourners temporarily living in urban areas while readying to return to their respective permanent abodes in the reserves. This assumption undoubtedly informed the colonial state's calculation of "fair compensation" for African labour that corresponded with standards of living in the reserve rather than, to quote Lord Hailey, "[…] that of civilised men fully depended on their wages for survival."[217] Wages were calculated on the basis that, for Africans, work was not as means of subsistence, but a way of obtaining tax money and acquiring a few extras for enjoyment. Family income was intended to be derived from the reserve, hence familial commitments were disregarded in calculations fixing reasonable wages. The principles guiding this wage policy glaringly contradicted the

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[213] Makhan Singh *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969).

[214] Stichter, *Migrant Labour in Kenya*.

[215] Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya.*

[216] Tiyambe Zeleza, "The Strike Movement in Colonial Kenya: The Era of the General Strikes," *Transafrican Journal of History*, 22 (Nairobi: Gideon Were Publications, 1993), pp. 1–23.

[217] William Malcolm Hailey, *An African Survey: A Study of Problems Arising in Africa South of the Sahara* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938).

realities of a majority of migrant Luo labourers working at Mombasa's rail and port service. As previous discussions have revealed, migrations were primarily triggered by the decimation of rural economies as a result of a combination of natural disasters and the introduction of the colonial capitalist economy. Consequently, wage labouring was regarded as neither a temporary means of survival nor a secondary supplementary subsistence method. Working at the KURH was in fact viewed as a primary adaption measure meant to allow survival in prevailing economic and social environments. The low wages (vis-à-vis standards of living) provided by the colonial state in Mombasa meant that migrant wage labourers in the town experienced some of the worst living conditions in the colony. These conditions were epitomised by the state of their housing. Dairy workers, for example, lived as outlined below:

> *The housing accommodation supplied to the employees by the dairy owners must be seen to be believed. It is not housing accommodation in any sense of the term, because the employees sleep on mats or pieces of corrugated iron, either above or amongst the cattle, and they have no protection from the weather.*[218]

Having moved hundreds of kilometres from their reserves, the question of housing was, naturally, the most aggravating of issues affecting the majority of migrant Luo labourers working in Mombasa's rail and port service. Murmurs of dissatisfaction with their housing situation began in the 1910s but grew louder from the 1930s when the number of migrant labourers exponentially shot up. Through chosen community leaders, Luo KURH labourers began officially demanding for better housing and living conditions, even as KURH management and the colonial state continued to disregard the rising numbers of people arriving and the obvious manifestations of a class of permanent workers fully dependent on their wages living in the town.[219] The 1939 general strike in Mombasa – the first large-scale industrial action taken by workers in the colony – was chiefly caused by the housing problem and KURH employees were only pacified when a salary increase of sh 3.00 was paid out in lieu of a monthly housing allowance.[220]

Whereas it can be correctly argued that Mombasa's housing problem was primarily caused by the colonial state's apathy towards its African workers, in reality the situation was an outcome borne of a set of complex interactions. Hence, even though the colonial state rightly bears culpability for the failure to plan for a more permanent workforce in Mombasa, its protectorate status nevertheless contributed immensely to the development of the town's housing crisis as it granted limited occupation on its lands. Legally, Mombasa's lands belonged to Arab and Swahili elites, thus migrant labourers and, to some extent, the colonial state, were allowed limited access, of which if allowed liberal leeway, could potentially have facilitated the

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[218] KNA/K/331/4, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Examine The Labour Conditions in Mombasa*.
[219] KNA/AWS/11/7/ Mombasa Island Revised Town Planning Scheme, 1925. The report of the town planning committee warned that the underestimation of Mombasa's housing situation may lead to disaster. The committee suggests that the colonial state finds land where they can settle their worker population.
[220] KNA/K/331/7/1, Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, *The Housing of Africans in the Urban Areas of Kenya* (Nairobi: The Kenya information office, 1946); Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya*.

construction of proper housing.[221] As it was, migrant Luo labourers could only access housing in the overcrowded areas of Majengo where they paid very high rents to Arab landlords. When they could not find housing in Majengo, they erected illegal temporary housing in the fringes of the African reserved areas in Mombasa. This resulted in the development of satellite living quarters, which quickly turned to slums. A local newspaper the *Mombasa Times*, described the conditions of these areas as "[…] bearing disgusting proximity to animal conditions."[222]

A health pamphlet produced in 1946,[223] after an official investigation looking into the high number of plague deaths in Mombasa, associated much of the migrant labourers' deplorable health status to their living conditions. Overcrowding and unsanitary conditions in the labourers' housing lines (including the official lines where rail workers lived) resulted in rat infestations, causing the ever prevalent plague pandemic in Mombasa. In addition to the plague, poor housing was the root cause of Mombasa's rampant respiratory infections, and the reason for the abnormally high mortality rates witnessed among the town's migrant population. Due to widespread theft, doors and windows of houses were rarely opened, limiting air circulation, which worsened sanitation. Conditions were further aggravated by the absence of proper waste disposal systems for human excreta and rubbish, as well as the use of shallowly buried water supply pipes. Waste was often heaped beside huts or scattered all over living quarters, creating fertile grounds for disease-carrying rodents.

Overcrowding was another key feature of the African housing crisis in Mombasa. A 1953 survey conducted in an area less than one square mile revealed over 6,000 people living in 475 houses, with an average four-roomed house being occupied by fifteen people.[224] Two houses captured in the survey encapsulate the extent of the housing shortage: in one house there were nineteen men, ten women, and six children; in another, 26 men, five women, and six children.[225] Homelessness also became a main feature of Mombasa's urban housing as many workers were forced to sleep on the pavement under the verandas on Kilindini roads at night,[226] while others whiled away on the beaches.

As one of the first groups of Mombasa residents to encounter the pressures of urban living, Luo rail and port workers were also among the first Africans to develop elementary forms of trade unionism. The Kavirondo Taxpayers Welfare Association (KTWA), which was borne out of the political Young Kavirondo Association (YKA), had a sizeable membership in Mombasa

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[221] KNA/AWS/11/7 Mombasa Island Revised Town Planning scheme, The DC urges the government to buy more land from Arabs to enable the settlement of the rising numbers of migrant labourers in Mombasa. The Crown lands Ordinance of 1902 declared all "vacant" land on the colony side crown land, but lands on the protectorate side remained under the ownership of the Sultan and Arab elites.

[222] KNA/AWS/ 24/3 Port Control Kilindini, Newspaper Comments. *Mombasa Times* editorial, 9 September 1939.

[223] K/331/7/2, Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, *The Housing of African Natives n Farms and Estates: Health Pamphlet No.3*, (Nairobi: East African Standard, 1946).

[224] C0/53/560/490 Press Office, Department of Information, 4 May 1954.

[225] Ibid.

[226] C0/533/493/25. Extract form the Nairobi chamber of commerce discussing Mombasa's housing problem, 1953.

by 1926. The association was the official mouthpiece of Luo labourers and spoke about conditions in Mombasa and, on several occasions, petitioned the colonial state to increase wages and provide better housing for Luo workers. Later, organisations such as the Luo Union were able to achieve a more structured sense of solidarity among Luo workers in Mombasa. Their activities were directly responsible for consolidating and unifying Luo identity into a single ethnic polity. This transformation enabled the Luo to leverage their most critical asset – ethnic numbers –in negotiations with KURH for better working and living conditions. Luo rail and port workers were also among the first to adopt organised methods of worker resistance. In 1934, they were the main participants in the first-ever strike in Mombasa, protesting stevedoring companies' proposal to reduce their wages from Sh. 2 to Sh. 1.50 a day.[227]

After the strikes of 1934, and following recommendations by various committees, the colonial government began to acknowledge what was happening in Mombasa's labour landscape, and admitted that the situation could only worsen and become more volatile if the African housing situation remained unaddressed. In 1937, amendments were added to the Employment of Servants Ordinance, the new stipulations obliging employers to either provide adequate housing or offer housing allowance to employees. KURH was specifically required to house their workers and the stevedoring companies were ordered to amalgamate into a single entity and, henceforth, engage a permanent labour force. The municipal council was advised to establish a municipal housing scheme to accommodate the labourers of smaller employers engaged with the KURH. These stipulations and recommendations never really materialised, however, as KURH and other private agencies working with them blatantly contravened them. The Sh. 3 housing allowance, for example, was only given to labourers whose salaries fell below Sh. 30. The Railway Department was actually willing to pay a housing allowance of Sh. 4 to its entire labour force but had to rescind this decision and go back to Sh. 3 after complaints from the municipality who wanted the rate to remain at Sh. 3.[228] This was the main reason for the subsequent strikes in 1939.

After the strikes of 1939, the labour situation in Mombasa was seemingly resolved, mainly because the colonial state had engaged rural authority figures to pacify agitated urban workers. In 1942, however, a further series of strikes began. These strikes were largely triggered by food shortages and the apparent apathy that employers exhibited towards their workers' grievances regarding the increased cost of living. Employees taking part in the 1942 strikes included workers from KURH, public works, and from the municipality. A year later, in October 1943, workers participated in yet another strike, this one related to the payout of KURH's war bonuses. African bonuses were given from the year 1942 while payments for other races were backdated to 1939. In 1944, there was yet further restlessness among KURH labourers, but the colonial state was able to contain the situation by, again, engaging the assistance of colonial chiefs. The peace was short-lived, however, and, in January 1945, signs of trouble were imminent. On 2 February, the first official demand for a wage increase was made at the general

[227] Singh, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement.*

[228] KNA/K/331/11, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Examine The Labour Condition in Mombasa.*

meeting for KURH's African staff. Other issues, such as quality of rations and food prices, came up, and the meeting was particularly stormy. The colonial state again tried to engage African chiefs and Chief Amoth (Central Kavirondo) and Agoi (North Kavirondo) were called in to pacify workers. Though the chiefs tried to mollify Luo labourers, they were nevertheless in agreement that current wages were insufficient to sustain migrant workers in Mombasa. They further agreed that if no improvement were made, then a workers' strike was almost guaranteed. A committee was therefore set up in April 1945, and its recommendations included raising the minimum wage to Sh. 40 for a single man.

On 13 February 1947, and with a suddenness that shocked employers in Mombasa, African labourers commenced a General Strike. All African employees, including those of the railway and the docks, workers in hotels and the hospitality industry, and even domestic servants, participated in this famous strike. As the *Mombasa Times* noted, rather admiringly, the secrecy with which this operation was executed was remarkable.[229] Employees had worked until knocking off time the previous day without giving an inkling of their intentions. The following day, no African port and rail workers showed up for work. Oil companies were without staff and factories fell silent. Hotels and houses were without servants. The report detailing the unrest contended that, on that day, Mombasa had suffered a *coup de grace*.[230]

The 1947 strike was undoubtedly the event that radically shifted opinions on the viability of continuing the established economic and social order in colonial Mombasa. It was now clear that labourers were conscious of the dynamics of the colonial economy and their positionality within the framework. Consequently, the colonial state was forced to recognise the controversies within Mombasa's labour economy. Of particular interest was the question of the place of migrant labourers in the town's economic lifeline, and the apparent need to shift methods and strategies for engaging them. At the same time, the newest entrant on the world stage, the USA, shone a spotlight on the empire and Britain found itself on the defensive, constantly justifying the continuation of colonial occupation. To counter these growing challenges, Britain settled on restructuring its hegemonic focus and moved from the politics of production to the politics of welfare.[231] In Mombasa, the colonial state moved to establish itself as an overseer and the progressive force that initiated the changes that were to inevitably come to Mombasa. The post-1947 strike era was therefore characterised by a reorganisation of relations with African labourers as spaces for participation in the political and economic spheres widened. The most transformative of these developments was reflected in the reforms instituted in land and housing policies. These changes significantly altered Mombasa's political and social dynamics, marking the decline of Arab supremacy and the rise of a political landscape dominated by migrant labourers.

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[229] KNA/AWS/24/1/ Newspapers, *Mombasa Times* editorial, 18 February 1947.

[230] KNA/RWW/33/1 *Labour Unrests and Commission's Enquiry Since 1937.*

[231] Fredrick Cooper, *Decolonisation and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1996) p. 173.

3.5.1 Strategies of labour control

As Mombasa's rail and port workers' modes of resistance became more belligerent in the latter years of the 1930s and continuing into the 1940s, colonial authorities in Mombasa were forced to reckon with the pertinent issues dominating Mombasa's labour landscape. Previously employed methods of ignoring and diminishing the severity of grievances,[232] or promising to look into workers welfare but never acting, were becoming increasingly difficult to sustain as labourers adopted new measures and embraced new mobilising strategies while pushing for better working and living conditions. As the antagonism of labour and capital played out in tense relations, the colonial state went on to adopt new approaches to assert its authority over migrant rail and port workers. Labour control strategies used in Mombasa's KURH were essentially deployed to regulate the supply, productivity, and political activity of particularly Luo labour, and each method achieved some degree of success. These strategies are outlined in the following section.

3.5.2 Co-option of ethnic ideologies and indigenous structures of authority

Berman postulated that there are definite limits on the degree to which a state can act as the direct agent of capitalist accumulation before its authority and the wider social order are threatened by the struggle of the dominated classes. To successfully and continuously manage resistance, states therefore rely on regularly expanding their scope of interventions by incorporating new elements into their systems of control. Referencing this point was his study on colonial chiefs in Kenya, where he observed that Britain recognised the essential role indigenous structures of authority would play in the transformation of pre-colonial labour and production systems to align with imperial needs without provoking social collapse and bitter resistance.[233] The study revealed that great pressure was put on indigenous authorities to reform society and incorporate them into the political economy of the colonial state. This process progressively eroded the authority and autonomy of chiefs and local leaders, turning them into agents of control for the colonial state. In Luoland, colonial chiefs and headmen were the primary agents in mobilising African labour and production for the colonial economy. They acted as mediators tasked with maintaining disciplinary control over their communities, ensuring compliance with colonial demands for labour and production. Chiefs organised communal tribute labour that was used to expand rural road networks,[234] collected taxes for the colonial government, and facilitated labour agents within their spheres of influence to recruit migrant labourers. Tieleman and Uitermark correctly hypothesise that while the formation of

[232] KNA/AWS/1/366 Labour Unrests Mombasa, 1945. Port managers often termed migrant labourer grievances as petty and their demands as having no basis. Indeed, many attributed the strike actions of the 1930s and 1940s to the "reserve labour" in Mombasa, which was not always needed and only called upon when necessary.

[233] Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya.*

[234] CO/533/490/2, Archbishop Owens letter to the Manchester Guardian on 23 May 1929 titled "Forced Labour: A Kenyan Episode.

modern colonial states restricted the discretionary power of chiefs as sovereign leaders, it afforded them greater authority as managers of land and gatekeepers of state bureaucracy.[235]

Individuals moving away from established native reserves were distancing themselves from indigenous structures of authority and means of social control. Concerns over these individuals becoming a differentiated group in the urban centres with weaker or, worse, severed links with rural areas, influenced the colonial state's subtle and sometimes overt plans to establish urban frameworks of communal authorities. This was achieved by creating a cadre of urban leaders and representatives. Membership to these positions and roles was selective, achieved through a process that combined indigenous elements of authority with components associated with urban prestige, such as education. Epstein's study of the Copperbelt town of Luanshya in Zambia epitomises this formation of urban leadership as a means to socially control urban workers. High levels of residential and occupational mobility in Luanshya had created environments conducive to urban decay, making vices such as prostitution, thieving, and excessive alcohol consumption commonplace in the town's urban landscape. To manage the rapid pace of these transformations, colonial authorities began encouraging the development of urban leadership structures to establish communal social control. A royal connection was regarded as an important attribute for participation in this urban leadership framework.[236] These efforts culminated in the creation of ethnic-based urban location elders and urban advisory councils. By analysing how the colonial control frameworks aimed to shape the social organisation of African urban populations, Epstein effectively highlights the origins of communal and ethnically inclined systems of administration, which became a general feature of Zambia's urban landscape. Similarly, Mombasa experienced progressive social decay, which was the reflection the material conditions of its dominant demographic – the migrant labourer. By the early 1930s, prostitution, trafficking of liquor, *ngoma* dances,[237] and thieving, among other social vices, had become prominent features of Mombasa town in so far that the most pressing legislations made in that period were connected to controlling these "vices" by way of limiting the immigration of Africans from the inland regions.[238] As it was in Luanshya, the colonial state in Mombasa also actively encouraged the creation of a group of urban-based ethnic representatives, their intended role being to control the behaviour of its members. This process was begun by propositioning and, later, approving the positions of community spokespersons.

> *Upcountry people have some form of organisation amongst themselves, but the existing system divided the tribe into several sections. It was decided that the government endeavours to appoint a spokesperson for each tribe as a whole. From here then, tribunals for hearing petty crimes can be established. Tribal*

[235] Joris Tieleman and Justus Uitermark, "Chiefs in the City: Traditional Authority in the Modern State," *Sociology*, 53 No.4 (Dec 2018), pp. 707–723.

[236] A.L. Epstein, *Politics in an Urban African Community*, (Oxford: Rhodes Livingstone institute and Manchester University Press,1958), p. 50.

[237] The positionality of *ngoma* dances in the Swahili social sphere is elaborated in Chapter Four.

[238] KNA/ABK/12/44 Labour Control-Urban, 1946–55.

> *spokespeople should be recognised by the government...The collection of elders is assumed to evolve as a council controlling the particular tribe. This development is preferred to the appointment of headmen who may not be acceptable to every person.*[239]

Institution and formalised social structures have profound ways in which they influence individual and group behaviour and stimulate social change. This is because they not only provide sanctions and enforce mechanisms which mould behaviour, but also in their provision of frameworks from where behavioural patterns can be adopted.[240] Luo welfare groups – including the Luo Union and the Ramogi African Welfare Association – served as the primary structures for producing a cadre of urban leadership, which were co-opted by the colonial state to control how migrant Luo labourers reacted to KURH labour policies, their general conduct, and their modes of resistance.

The Luo Union leadership's dalliance with the colonial state was conspicuous. In one public KURH *baraza* meeting in Mombasa, the presiding European labour official openly thanked the chair of the Union for being "[…] a loyal and devoted person who seems to take a lot of his time to keep his people within government policies."[241] Leaders, including Paul Mboya and Jonathan Okwiri, whose legitimacies were rooted in rural traditions, were regularly called upon to address discontent and pacify labourers demanding better terms of service and housing in Mombasa. For instance, when the rail and port workers threatened to go on strike in 1942, Luo Union's Nairobi and Mombasa leadership convinced them to return to their duties, arguing that the war trumped any personal grievances.

The urban leadership worked hand in hand with rural community figures to control the articulation of labourers' grievances in Mombasa. As Eggen suggests, when urban leadership faltered, the chiefs stepped in, invoking the language of custom, culture, and community.[242] Chief Amoth from Central Kavirondo emerged as the most prominent figure in this regard, and his authority was regularly enlisted by the colonial state, particularly whenever the invocation of custom was deemed necessary to control KURH labourers in Mombasa. Amoth's authority was particularly valuable in the years during and after World War II, when the labour landscape in Mombasa was particularly volatile as workers no longer accepted promises of improvements in the future and demanded immediate changes. He was twice summoned to Mombasa – accompanied by a retinue befitting his stature – to pacify the general Luo population in the town and convince them to continue serving in the Carrier Corps, despite the deplorable working conditions. He was also called in to mollify striking rail and port workers in 1945 after the urban

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[239] KNACQ/1/19/25 Report on Native Affairs Mombasa, 1930.

[240] Surjit Singh and Varsha Joshi (ed) *Institutions and Social Change* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2003).

[241] KNA/OP/AA/1/43 African Affairs: Associations, Societies and Public Bodies Luo Union, 1942–1956. Comments by Mr Coventry, labour official in charge of the safari planned in Mombasa by the Nairobi labour office.

[242] Øyvind Eggen, "Chiefs and Everyday Governance: Parallel State Organisations in Malawi," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37, No. 2 (June 2011), pp. 313–331.

leadership had failed to pacify them. In a meeting held on 5 August, Amoth appealed to workers by invoking renowned Luo values of diligence and good workmanship. He warned that "[…] the strike in Mombasa was being fermented [sic] by workers from Nyanza tribes who are in danger of blackening their names.]"[243] He insisted that the troubles in Mombasa were in no way caused by disaffection with wages or work conditions because, even as a chief, he did not get enough from the colonial state and he was fine.[244] Rather, he argued that the dissatisfaction witnessed in Mombasa was provoked by the large number of prostitutes, women, and girls who were coming down to Mombasa from their native homes in Luoland, and were exerting pressure on Luo men to provide luxurious lifestyles for them.

Urban and rural community leaders co-opted the principles of ethnicity and ethnic ideologies to manipulate Luo rail and port workers into conforming. Thus, ethnic patriotism became a powerful structure for controlling labourers behaviour in Mombasa. A letter from Governor Mitchell to the Colonial Secretary in London illustrated the popularly cultivated imagery of Luo ethnicity, which urban workers were expected to embody and adhere to: "The Luo people deservedly enjoy a good repute in their home district and wherever they go to work in the colonies because of their general excellent conduct and industry and the efforts they make to care for their young people."[245] This image of "Luoness" was the product of deliberate efforts by urban and rural ethnic leadership networks to cultivate and project a particular portrayal of Luo identity, especially in diasporic spaces. The version of Luoness encouraged clearly pandered to British paternalism and notions of good citizenry. Peterson's[246] study on revivalism in East Africa highlights a similar role that ethnicity played in maintaining conformity among ethnic Luo, particularly at a time when Christian revivalism as a form of colonial resistance began taking root in Western Kenya. Revivalists in Luoland, especially members of the Nomiya Church, positioned themselves as a distinct and righteous group within the Luo social order. However, seen through the eyes of conservative members of the community, the revivalist message was dangerous for its glorification of detachment and non-commitment to the natal community. Revivalists' ideas and behaviours were regarded as unpatriotic to the core values of Luo ethnicity, which emphasised unity, etiquette, discipline, and civil order. Ethnic patriotism was therefore deployed to supress the revivalists, whose actions were perceived as anti-social and divisive and setting people at odds by spreading disruptive and inflammatory testimonies. Luo patriots, positioning themselves as defenders of their fatherland's reputation and advocates for decency and civility, thus worked actively to defeat the revival movement in Luoland.[247] Patriotism to Luo ethnicity became a vital tool appropriated by the colonial state to manage and suppress resistance from urban workers to colonial labour policies. Amoth's

[243] KNA/AWS/1/366 Labour Unrests Mombasa.
[244] Ibid. Verbal report of speech made by Chief Amoth to Mombasa's rail and port workers, 5 April 1945.
[245] KNA/OP/AA1/43 African Affairs: Associations, Societies and Public Bodies, Luo Union. Governor Mitchell's letter to the Colonial Secretary in London.
[246] Derrick Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent 1935–1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[247] Ibid., p. 129.

characterisation of the Luo rail and port workers' strike action as "blackening the Luo name" was meant to stress the importance of engaging the colonial state within the approved boundaries of Luoness, which emphasised civility, etiquette, discipline, and hard work. The Luo Union in particular took extreme measures to promote this idealised image of Luoness. For example, young men were prohibited from drinking alcohol, going to dances, and engaging in cross-cultural communication.[248] Luo women, including the wives of KURH workers, were forbidden from buying tripe and bones from butcheries, as this was seen as a reflection of their husband's inability to provide.[249] These prohibitions worked to limit spaces for mutual interaction between workers that might have facilitated better organisation and resistance strategies. Patriotism to the perceived tenets of Luoness, including civility and the prioritising communal advancement over personal fulfilment, thus became a key framework co-opted by the colonial state to manage and suppress resistance by Luo rail and port workers against unfair labour policies.

3.5.3 Legislative controls and the use of coercive policing

Berman and Lonsdale note that the most striking feature of the colonial state in Kenya was its development from a simple administrative apparatus to a complex and sophisticated institution of social control and economic management.[250] This progression, they argue, was the function of the socio-economic forces operating on the periphery of the capitalist world system, which encouraged the development of practices and structural forms that shaped relations of production and processes of class formation. The colonial social order therefore developed to become a multifaceted system of control encompassing the use of both soft and hard coercive practices and structures of control. In Kenya, as in other colonies, legislation and public policing were the most common forms of coercive means of social control. Indeed, the police became the vanguard ensuring the success of the colonial economy by serving as the main agents of the state in civil and judicial matters. In doing so, they played a pivotal role in shaping the contours of the colonial social order.[251] Anderson contends that it was in urban areas where colonial police most directly enforced the moral and political imperatives of colonial capitalism. Urban social ills such as vice, vagrancy, and liquor were deemed as the enemy of the ruling class and the root cause of the instability that sporadically disrupted the accumulation of capital. These issues were largely attributed to the influx of unemployed Africans who had thronged cities and industrial towns, rather than being recognised as the direct result of capital's neglect of its

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[248] KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/316 Riwruok Luo (Luo Union) East Africa. Young men were specifically prohibited from interacting with the Kikuyu. This was driven by fears of rebellion, as the Mau Mau insurgency was gaining ground in Central Kenya.

[249] Samwel Okuro, "Misfit Mothers, Wayward Wives and Disobedient Daughters: The Construction of Gender Identity and the Reinforcement of Traditional Authority in Post War Seme Location," IFRA ed., *Kenya: Culture, Gender and Society* (Nairobi: French Institute for Research, 2006).

[250] Bruce Berman, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa, Book One: State and Class* (London: James Currey, 1992).

[251] David M. Anderson and David Killingray, *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority, and Control, 1830–1940* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1991).

workers' material conditions. The colonial state thus turned to laws and the police force as instruments of regulation and social control to shape the emerging structures in African urban spaces.

One of the most effective laws used to control labour in Kenya generally and specifically in Mombasa was the Registration of Natives Ordinance; the ordinance that effectively introduced the pass system. Passed in 1915, the ordinance required the registration of all African males from the age of fifteen, and the provision of a metal case *kipande* in which the certificate was to be placed and carried at all times. In addition to bearing information about a pass holder's family and ethnic particulars, the certificate also detailed employment records, including place and dates of employment, wages received, employer name, and commencement and discharge dates. Initially, the Registration of Natives Ordinance was only required for contractual labourers in urban areas but, in 1927, its scope was widened to include casual labourers. Generally applied to labourers in urban areas, the registration certificate restricted both a man's freedom to leave his work and his freedom to bargain with an employer for a wage not related to that of his previous employer. Consequently, employers held considerable power over employees, many of whom were afraid of openly disagreeing with them for fear of receiving bad references. Employers controlled labourers they deemed troublesome by giving them long leaves of absence without signing off their *kipande*. This was a way of securing their return as they would be unable to find employment anywhere else. The *kipande* therefore played the dual role of ensuring that any articulation of grievances remained minimal while, at the same time, limiting options for seeking better terms of service with a different employer. Figures 3.6 and 3.7 are photographs of pages of the registration certificate that were placed inside a *kipande.*

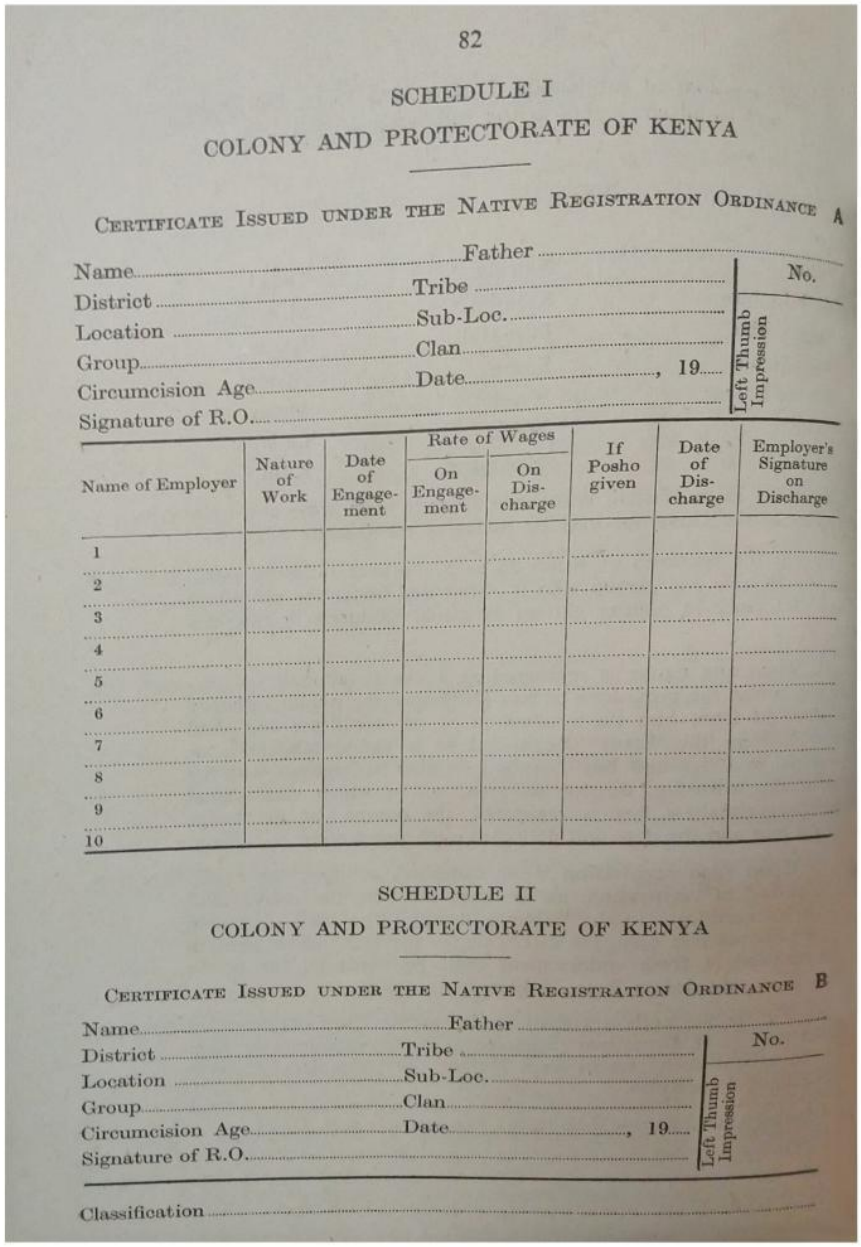
While the *kipande* system was generally applied to managing Luo port and rail workers in Mombasa, additional legislations were also enacted, which specifically targeted the in- and outflow of casual labourers in the town. When more casual workers were needed, laws were quickly formulated to favour their movement into the town, sometimes at the expense of other urban areas. During World War II, for example, restrictions were placed on employment in Nairobi for the sole purpose of encouraging movement of labour into Mombasa during a period when men were needed to work cargo ships as part of the war effort.[252] By contrast, when less labour was required, specific laws were made to limit the influx of casual labourers into the town. Generally, the colonial state was adamant that casual labourers were the reason for the turmoil witnessed in Mombasa. Frequent proposals were hence made to manage labourers in Mombasa, often focusing on repatriating them to their ethnic reserves and controlling their re-entry into the town's labour landscape by introducing separate pass laws.[253] Other suggestions included the recruitment of seasonal labour during periods of high demand at the piers, followed by their repatriation when demand for work was low.[254] For instance, it was recommended that workers be brought in between June and October and sent back upcountry once the busy season

[252] KNA/K/341/763 Colony and Protectorate of Kenya *A Handbook of the Labour Laws of The Colony and Protectorate of Kenya,* (Nairobi: Government printer,1945).
[253] KNA/CQ1/19/24 Report on Natives Affairs Mombasa.
[254] KNA/K/331/11 *Report of the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Examine the Labour Condition in Mombasa.*

ended, only to return for the next cycle of high labour demand. To facilitate this, several pieces of legislation were enacted, which the colonial state felt would go a long way to regulate labour and occupational mobility within Mombasa.

Among such laws was the Defence Limitations of Labour Ordinance, which stipulated that employers could not employ more than five casual labourers in a day. This ordinance was specific to and only applicable in Mombasa.[255] Another law, the Defence Casual Labourer Mombasa Regulations 1944, stipulated that all inland native casuals had to be registered before they could get employment.[256] The work permit issued afterwards, was to be renewed on an annual basis. Details of one's registration certificate, together with the permit, were then placed in their *kipande* disk container, which was to be produced on request by government authorities. Registration and granting of permits were left to the discretion of labour registrars, who had the authority to refuse permits if they believed someone was unlikely to get work. Additionally, the *kipande* disk could be confiscated for up to a year to verify the information provided. "Troublemakers" were therefore in constant danger of having their work permits denied or, even worse, having their disks confiscated, which would render them unable to find work anywhere in the colony.

[255] KNA/K/341/763 *A Handbook of the Labour Laws of the Colony and Protectorate*.
[256] Ibid.



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SCHEDULE I

COLONY AND PROTECTORATE OF KENYA

CERTIFICATE ISSUED UNDER THE NATIVE REGISTRATION ORDINANCE A

Name..... Father.....
District..... Tribe.....
Location..... Sub-Loc.....
Group..... Clan.....
Circumcision Age..... Date....., 19....
Signature of R.O.....

No.

Left Thumb Impression

Name of Employer	Nature of Work	Date of Engagement	Rate of Wages: On Engagement	Rate of Wages: On Discharge	If Posho given	Date of Discharge	Employer's Signature on Discharge
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							

SCHEDULE II

COLONY AND PROTECTORATE OF KENYA

CERTIFICATE ISSUED UNDER THE NATIVE REGISTRATION ORDINANCE B

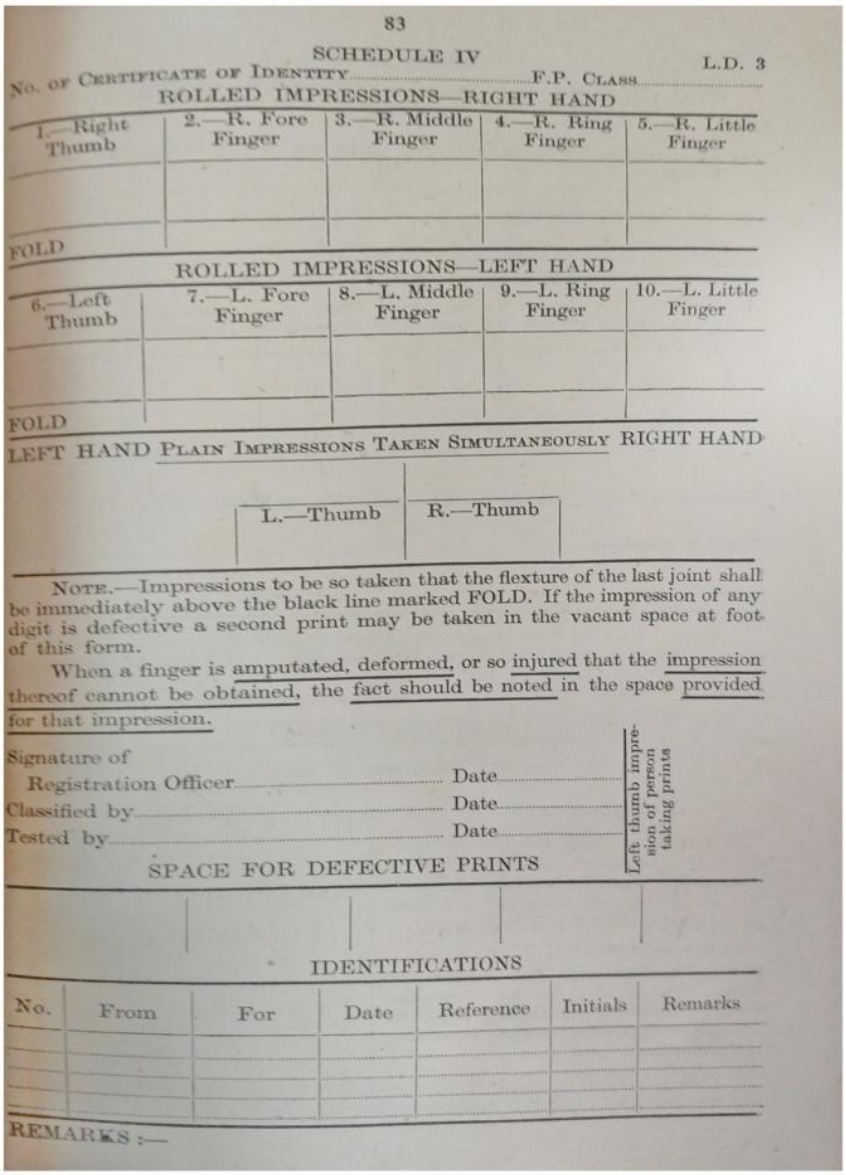
Name..... Father.....
District..... Tribe.....
Location..... Sub-Loc.....
Group..... Clan.....
Circumcision Age..... Date....., 19....
Signature of R.O.....

No.

Left Thumb Impression

Classification.....

Figure 3.6.



83

SCHEDULE IV

L.D. 3

No. of Certificate of Identity..... F.P. Class.....

ROLLED IMPRESSIONS—RIGHT HAND

1.—Right Thumb	2.—R. Fore Finger	3.—R. Middle Finger	4.—R. Ring Finger	5.—R. Little Finger

FOLD

ROLLED IMPRESSIONS—LEFT HAND

6.—Left Thumb	7.—L. Fore Finger	8.—L. Middle Finger	9.—L. Ring Finger	10.—L. Little Finger

FOLD

LEFT HAND PLAIN IMPRESSIONS TAKEN SIMULTANEOUSLY RIGHT HAND

L.—Thumb	R.—Thumb

NOTE.—Impressions to be so taken that the flexture of the last joint shall be immediately above the black line marked FOLD. If the impression of any digit is defective a second print may be taken in the vacant space at foot of this form.

When a finger is amputated, deformed, or so injured that the impression thereof cannot be obtained, the fact should be noted in the space provided for that impression.

Signature of Registration Officer..... Date.....

Classified by..... Date.....

Tested by..... Date.....

Left thumb impression of person taking prints

SPACE FOR DEFECTIVE PRINTS

IDENTIFICATIONS

No.	From	For	Date	Reference	Initials	Remarks

REMARKS :—

Figure 3.7

Figures 3.6 and 3.7 Copies of pages of the registration certificate that was placed inside a kipande. KNA/K/341/763 Colony and Protectorate of Kenya *A Handbook of the Labour Laws of the Colony And Protectorate of Kenya* (Nairobi: Government printer, 1945).

Anomaki vagrans!! (You will be arrested for vagrancy), a cautionary statement occasionally used by the current elderly in rural Luoland to persuade restless youth to conform, even if the underpinnings of the statement continues being lost to almost all recipients of the caution. Burton and Ocobock suppose that notions of vagrancy have long been embedded in British colonial imaginations of Africans.[257] They argue that the definition of vagrancy – and the subsequent implementation of rules to manage so-called vagrants – provided intersectional solutions to the socioeconomic and political challenges that arose as colonial capital mediated issues of urbanisation, workers, and criminality. Initially conjured to increase numbers of urban labourers by compelling anyone found unemployed in towns to work, vagrancy laws soon evolved into instruments used to control migrant populations. These laws targeted individuals deemed to be abandoning the African social order in favour of urban life and capitalism. The shift in the ordinance's purpose – from its original function of supplying extra labour to an instrument of social control – was particularly useful in Mombasa following the success of the 1939 strike, when rail and port workers intensified demands for improved material conditions, and mounted even more pressure on the colonial state.

Vagrancy legislation famously sought to exclude African 'undesirables'– hooligans, spivs, and loafers – from urban areas by repatriating them to their rural reserves.[258] KURH produced its fair share of vagrants – essentially, labourers who dared question the colonial social order or demanded better work conditions. These labourers were either sacked or given bad references if they agreed to quit.[259] Challenging the colonial social order thus almost certainly relegated individuals to the ranks of the unemployed urban mob; the very group that the vagrancy laws were made for. The requirements for permits for every labourer living in Mombasa and the additional provision of special badges for casual labourers, made it that it was virtually impossible for sacked employees to find other employment in the town. The intent was to make life in Mombasa unbearable, thereby forcing the "offending" person to return to Luoland. Contrary to expectations, however, vagrancy laws proved extremely challenging to implement in Mombasa. When Luo labourers were sacked from KURH departments, or if they were unable to find employment, most did not return to their respective ethnic reserves. Instead, they disappeared into the growing maze of African slums where they subsisted on petty trading, illegal trade in alcohol, and sex work. This was especially so if the migrant was also an undesirable element back in Luoland.

> *Men who were cohabiting with women they had eloped with, or those they had helped run away from marital homes in Luoland could definitely not return to the reserves. Kimirwa and Nyithi simba (children borne before their mothers officially*

[257] Andrew Burton, and Paul Ocobock, "The 'Travelling Native': Vagrancy and Colonial Control in British East Africa," Paul Ocobock and A. L. Beier, eds., *Cast Out: Vagrancy and Homelessness in Global and Historical Perspective* (Ohio University Press, 2008), pp. 270–301.

[258] KNA/PC/COAST/1/10/114 Vagrancy Regulations 1920–1928. In a letter to the resident commissioner to Mombasa, it was agreed that anyone declared a vagrant should be deported back to their reserve.

[259] Osodo Dami, O.I., 10 January 2018, Bangladesh, Mombasa.

> *married) and excommunicated men could never go back. Others chose not to return because of the shame associated with the inability to provide for their households.*[260]

The colonial state, moreover, lacked the resources and proper strategies to enable repatriation of the huge numbers of undesirable elements residing in Mombasa. This was especially because Luoland, where the majority of Mombasa's vagrants came from, was located in distant regions at the opposite end of the colony, and conducting repatriation exercises would have been extremely expensive. The Mombasa DC attempted to outsource this responsibility to Luoland Local Native Councils (LNC), urging them to allocate funds for repatriation of the unemployed back to the reserve.[261] His efforts were however unsuccessful. Consequently, Mombasa became a safe haven for vagrants, including those who had run away from other towns. Suleiman Magero recalls that his uncle, Hayange, was one such "vagrant":

> *He (Hayange) worked for the railway in Kisumu. He was sacked sometime in the 1950s for picketing in request for higher wages. He was actually supposed to be arrested, but quickly ran away to Mombasa where it was less likely for the police to find him.*[262]

By the early 1940s, the vagrant problem had become a key feature in colonial intelligence reports. The DC ultimately resigned himself to their existence and began advocating for the formulation of laws specific to Mombasa to restrict their movement within African areas in the town.[263]

Having implemented various legislation aimed at controlling labour with differing degrees of success, the colonial state also attempted to regulate the development of trade unions. After the first organised strike in 1934, KURH's management did not take steps to ameliorate workers' conditions. Instead, they intensified efforts and formulated strict policies to curtail the development of trade unions and their involvement in workers' organisation. The Trade Union's Ordinance of 1937, which was enacted as a direct response to the 1934 strike, stipulated that unions had to be registered and officially recognised by the state before they could act on behalf of workers. Unregistered unions were hereafter unrecognised and declared illegal. The movement of union leaders was also restricted. They could travel within and or outside the boundaries of their resident district only with the DC's permission.[264] It became illegal to hold meetings unless permission was given by the police, and collection of funds from members was also limited. To further limit union power, it was mandated that before any industrial action could take place, trade unions had to first present their grievances at a Dispute Arbitration

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[260] Osodo Dami, O.I.

[261] KNA/CQ1/19/25 Report on Native Affairs Mombasa, 1930.

[262] Suleiman Magero, O.I., 3 January 2019, Bangladesh, Mombasa.

[263] KNA/ABK/18/16 Reports and Returns: Intelligence Report by Labour Officers, 1941.

[264] C0/533/493/5 Memorandum on Trade Disputes Arbitration and Inquiry Ordinance 1939, submitted to the Governor of the Kenya colony by the chair of the Labour trade union of East Africa, Makhan Singh.

Tribunal. If the tribunal ruled that there was no cause for a strike, then any subsequent industrial action would be declared illegal. Union leaders were frequently harassed, imprisoned, and deported. Some, like Fred Kubai, were declared *persona non grata* in urban areas with large concentrations of labourers. Furthermore, a heavy propaganda campaign was launched to question the authenticity and intentions of trade unions, painting their leadership in a negative light. Between 1945 and 1947, several newspaper editorials accused striking rail and port workers of being unwilling to compromise and it was reported that their primary aim was to prolong the struggle to harm public interests.[265] The radical union leader Makhan Singh was particularly targeted. His citizenship was thoroughly interrogated as the state toyed with the idea of declaring him an Indian national with no right to intervene in Kenyan affairs. The genuineness of his intentions to create a multiracial and multicultural union were also questioned, and presented as a self-serving attempt to secure power for himself and the Indian/Asian population by exploiting the grievances of African labourers.

Once it was apparent that workers and union leaders were not giving in to the colonial state's demands to conform and return to the colonial social order, the state's next step was to co-opt the union movement by infiltrating its top leadership. Secret correspondence deposited at the National Archives in Kew reveals that the efforts of union leaders, like Makhan Singh and Fred Kubai, with genuine interest in improving worker conditions and building a vibrate union culture in Kenya, were frustrated, and that the state tactically introduced a rival leader, Tom Mboya, who was more aligned with its interests.[266] As an ethnic Luo, the colonial state was sure that Mboya would be able to persuade the majority of its wage labourers in Mombasa's rail and port service; the Luo, to abandon the more radical Singh and Kubai and close ranks when labour issues were tied to identity politics. Mboya's entry and meteoric rise in the trade union movement indeed suffocated the development of a vibrant trade union culture in Kenya.[267] His actions directly contributed to the emergence of ethnic mobilisation –a defining feature of Kenya's political landscape.

3.5.4 Monitoring of worker's social life

"An idle mind is the devil's workshop," is a well-known proverb that warns of the perils of not being constantly engaged in productive activity. The proverb suggests that idleness leads to overthinking, questioning things better left alone, and eventually, getting into trouble. The principles of this proverb were applied in response to grievances expressed by migrant Luo

[265] KNA/AWS/24/3 Port Control Kilindini: Newspaper Comments. Mombasa Times editorial titled "Mombasa African General Strike: Attorney General reviews events and steps taken for improvement," 30 January 1947; Letter to the editor *East African Standard*, 16 April 1945.

[266] C0/533/493/5 Trade Unions in Kenya. A series of confidential correspondences in this file reveal the colonial state's plan to introduce a more pliable Mboya into the Kenya Federation of Trade Unions with the aim of neutralising Makhan Singh.

[267] Gerard McCann, "Possibility and Peril: Trade Unionism, African Cold War, and the Global Strands of Kenyan Decolonization," *Journal of Social History*, 53 No. 2, (Oxford University Press, November 2019), pp. 348–377.

labourers in Mombasa. Their objections were typically ignored, deemed irrational and nonsensical, and attributed to their "idle minds" as they "[…] had nothing productive to engage in in the hours proceeding their official working hours."[268] Rather than addressing workers' concerns about their material conditions, colonial authorities believed that keeping workers constantly occupied would prevent them from organising and causing trouble. Thus, colonial capital began proposing the adoption of various after-work activities designed to ensure that labourers were constantly engaged. For Luo labourers at the KURH, this labour control strategy involved encouraging the development of spaces for the invigoration of Luo popular culture, and creating opportunities to participate in sporting activities.

Proposals to engage workers during their after-work hours began as early as the 1920s when the shocks of industrialisation that are usually felt in capitalist economies began to be experienced in colonial Mombasa. Measures to control Africans during their free time then became a key discussion point in the DC's office as officials began viewing unengaged Africans as a threat to security.[269] Security reports indicated that a majority of African workers loafed around in the streets playing cards, or they idled at dances and cafés where they mostly got into trouble. To address their restlessness, the development of a recreation building was proposed, where workers could be properly supervised in their free time.[270] The KURH management also sought to counter workers' resistance by promoting sports as a method of keeping them busy after working hours. The establishment of the Makadara Football grounds in the 1920s was part of this strategy, providing a space where African labourers could compete in inter-tribal games.[271] The teams playing at Makadara were mainly comprised of labourers from the railway and harbours.

Football in Mombasa transformed from a simple activity meant to engage Luo rail and port workers in their off-hours into a powerful platform for reinforcing and celebrating Luo ethnic identity among the diaspora. This ethnicization of the sport was apparent in its progression from small workers' football clubs to its pivotal role in the development of the Luo Union Football Club (later Re-union, currently Gor Mahia). Luo Union players were mainly drawn from Luo labourers in the diaspora (KURH included), and their support base extended across ethnic Luo communities in urban areas throughout East Africa.[272] Njororai's analysis of the origins of Kenya's ethnic football teams and their support bases highlights key factors that drove the progression from awareness to attraction, attachment, and, finally, team allegiance. The factors that shaped club loyalty include demography, community, and individual motivations.[273] For

[268] KNA/CQ1/19/24 Report on Natives Affairs Mombasa
[269] KNA/ABK/18/16 Reports and Returns, Intelligence Report by Labour officers, 1941
[270] KNA/CQ1/19/24 Report on Natives Affairs Mombasa
[271] KNA/AWS/24/3 History of the Railway: Paper Cuttings 1920–1927.
[272] Francis Nandi, "Reunion FC. This was the home of Kenyan football," in *Kenyan Star Online News*, 4 May 2012, accessed at https://web.archive.org/web/20140109162029/http://www.kenyanstar.co.ke/retracing-our-roots/reunion-fc-this-was-the-home-of-kenyan-football.
[273] Wycliffe Simiyu Njororai, "Colonial Legacy, Minorities and Association Football in Kenya," Kausik Bandyopadhyay ed., *Why Minorities Play or Don't Play Soccer: A Global Exploration* (London: Routledge, 2010).

the Luo in the Mombasa diaspora, football matches created spaces for ethnic interaction. Playing football also provided an avenue for free expression in the highly controlled colonial environment. Indeed, football served as an alternative outlet for workers to vent frustrations stemming from their challenging material conditions. Although Luo workers were generally viewed as compliant, their behaviour during football matches transformed, and they were notorious for their hooliganism. Ironically, this conduct was tolerated by the colonial state. At one point, the Arab *hamali* team threatened to stop playing against the Luo rail and port workers team because of their quarrelsome behaviour, but their complaints fell on deaf ears.[274] Football also offered opportunities for excellence, fostering admiration and support as young men found heroes to look up to. Through peer and family socialisation, football acquired ethnic loyalty and became symbolic of nativity. For instance, the Luo Union FC and its later iterations were seen as extensions of Luo ethnic identity. This association was so strong that when Re-Union signed Edward Wamalwa, an ethnic Luhya player, in 1976, it sent shockwaves through Luo community circles and the broader Kenya football scene.[275]

The challenge of maintaining spatial connections to family and kin in rural areas often leads to the formation of slightly differentiated groups within urban diasporas. Anderson described such diaspora groups as amorphous, and for them, the concept of "homeland" is not necessarily tied to the spatial configurations of the state.[276] In these contexts, popular culture becomes an important medium for reaffirming connections to the original group in rural areas. For Luo rail and port workers living in Mombasa, social halls served as vital intermediary spaces for invigorating and maintaining Luo ethnicity across local and diaspora spaces. Luo labourers came to heavily rely on social halls as venues where ethnic Luo could freely meet and interact, especially in the post-1939 era when the strike movement became much more militant and the colonial state began viewing all gatherings with suspicion.[277] Consequently, labourers were forced to seek alternative sites for interaction away from their own homes and *barazas*. Figure 3.8 is a photograph of the African social centre in Tononoka Mombasa, where Luo rail and port workers regularly convened.

[274] KNA/ CQ1/19/24 Report on Natives Affairs Mombasa, 1930.

[275] Bethuel Oduo, "Grappling with Inter-Tribal Football Transfers," in *The Standard Newspaper* (2013), accessed at: https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/the-nairobian/article/2000091690/grappling-with-inter-tribal-football-transfers?pageNo=1.

[276] James Odhiambo Ogone, "Intra-National Ethnic Diasporas: Popular Culture and Mediated Trans Local Spaces in Kenya," *Vienna Journal of African Studies*, 15 (Vienna: Wiener Studien, 2015), pp. 69–89.

[277] KNA/ABK/18/16 Reports and Returns, Intelligence Report by Labour officers, 1941.

Figure 3.8. The African social centre in Tononoka Mombasa, circa 1956. Photograph courtesy of a Facebook post by Odhiambo Levin Opiyo. Accessed on 14 December 2023 at: https://www.facebook.com/share/p/QEQGmnE2DykUbdDE/.

Initially promoted as spaces where labourers could participate in recreational activity while invigorating popular cultures, social halls in Mombasa gradually grew into sites where the diaspora community leadership worked to structure the behaviour of its membership. Kingsdale's analysis of the function of the saloon in American society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries mirrored similar roles these venues played in burgeoning American cities. Touted as "poor men's 'clubs," saloons significantly influenced the values and behaviours of the urban working class by shaping the nature of their leisure activities.[278] In much the same way, social halls in Mombasa provided a much-needed escape from Luo labourers' dirty, overcrowded, and poorly ventilated living quarters. They embodied a semblance of urban goodness amidst the overall deprivation that defined workers' daily lives. These halls became the main source of recreation and entertainment for migrant labourers, fostering an atmosphere encouraging "positive group activity." After toiling in deplorable conditions during the workweek, young men looked forward to weekend gatherings at the halls, where they talked and engaged with kin, watched films, or participated in dances. However, the colonial state exerted significant control over the operation of social halls through budgetary allocations and itinerary reviews. Welfare organisations such as the Luo Union were often allowed to organise ethnic *ohangla*, *orutu*, *nyatiti*, and *benga* music events in social halls. Yet, permits for these events were sometimes denied, particularly during times of labour unrest.[279] In these instances,

[278] Jon M. Kingsdale, "The 'Poor Man's Club': Social Functions of the Urban Working-Class Saloon," *American Quarterly*, 25 No.4 (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1973), pp. 472–489.
[279] David Parkin, *Neighbours and Nationals in an African City Ward* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).

community leaders would often use the promise of a dance or a movie to pacify dissatisfied Luo workers and deter rebellion.[280] By mediating access to spaces where labourers gained some reprieve from their daily drudgery, Mombasa's social halls hence became vital instruments enlisted by colonial authority to control the behaviour of rail and port workers.

Conclusion

The features evincing Mombasa's revolutionary growth as the town developed to become East Africa's chief commercial centre in the first decade of the 20th century were demonstrated in a duality. One part revealed a picture of turmoil and great upheavals, while the other was represented by unprecedented prosperity. The expansion of KURH which was facilitated by the labours of the migrant Luo was a key factor in the production of these twin features, even as the complexities of urban development contradicted official government policies to produce Mombasa's ever lingering chaos.

KURH labour dynamics were foundational to the development of Mombasa's tumultuous labour landscape, whose key feature was its significant population of a migrant urban proletariat. A substantial portion of this workforce comprised ethnic Luo labourers working for the rail and port service. This chapter revealed that this labour landscape was shaped by the interplay of various factors. Firstly, the wages offered by KURH, particularly to Luo labourers, was a key pull factor, encouraging a steady stream of this specific demographic of migrant wage labourers into the town. This migration was further facilitated by recruiters who actively scoured Luoland once it became apparent that Luo labourers were highly valued in Mombasa for their resilience to the harsh climate and severe labour conditions. Moreover, the labour landscape was shaped by the operational practices of stevedoring companies working at Mombasa's ports. Each company operated separately and independently and procured its own gangs of labourers for the day. This system depended on the availability of a large pool of labourers. Companies were furthermore reluctant to commit to a permanent workforce and instead depended on Arab *hamali* to procure casual labourers to load and unload cargo from their ships. Mombasa's share of casual labourers grew exponentially, reaching significant proportions in the 1930s that the town's DC even acknowledged that the casual nature of employment at KURH, was the main factor driving the influx of migrant labourers into the town. This fact contributed to making Mombasa the town with the largest proportion of casual employees in the entire colony and protectorate of Kenya.

The onset of World War II saw more Luo labourers move into Mombasa town, as the Allied forces moved to make East Africa a key centre for sisal production after the loss of Malaya and the Philippines. By this time, the port had significantly expanded its infrastructure, enabling increased cargo handing to support the war effort. Luo rail and port workers played an integral role in the maintenance of the transport network that delivered this vital product to various Allied destinations. Further migration occurred in the years following the war, as famine

[280] Osodo Dami, O.I.

continued to ravage Luoland, making rural subsistence increasingly untenable for the Luo. KURH then offered a lifeline, providing opportunities for the Luo to escape rural poverty. The prospect of Mombasa's famously high wages pulled in more labourers looking for alternative means of survival.

While the initial group of labourers managed to accumulate a modest sum in exchange for their labour, the situation shifted as KURH embarked on aggressive expansion in the years following World War I. The organisation then required a growing number of workers for lower rank-and-file positions, particularly for dockyard duties. Consequently, Luo labours gradually became proletarianised, with skilled craftsmen, including carpenters, painters, ironworkers, and masons increasingly subsumed into the rail and port economy as goods loaders. Mombasa's saturated labour market and KURH's reliance on casual employment further complicated the prospects for the multitude of workers seeking work at the docks. Most casual labourers could only secure work for a few days a month. As a result, Mombasa then became volatile as workers struggled to find work, better wages, and suitable housing. In response, Luo labourers began organising elementary forms of trade unionism. These early systems gradually developed into more structured organisations, becoming a formidable force by the late 1940s, as Mombasa entered the nascent years of the decolonial era. The strike movement in Kenya was notably refined in Mombasa, and KURH labourers, the majority of whom were ethnic Luo, were frontrunners in the development of this emergent form of workers resistance.

As Mombasa's rail and port workers expanded their modes of resistance and became increasingly belligerent during the late 1930s and into the 1940s, colonial authorities were compelled to confront the pressing issues dominating Mombasa's labour landscape. However, contrary to expectations that they would engage workers in dialogue, colonial capital responded with strategies aimed at reasserting its authority over migrant rail and port workers. Strategies employed included the use of coercive force, and this included legislative control of workers movement via the *kipande* system and the deployment of vagrancy laws. Other approaches included enlisting rural symbols of authority to control urban workers, and Chief Amoth from Central Kavirondo played a central role in this regard. He was often called upon to pacify Mombasa's rail and port workers whenever they threatened to go on strike, even though he acknowledged the need for improvements in their working and living conditions. The colonial state also attempted to influence workers' lives beyond the workplace. Sporting activities, particularly football, were integrated as important tools for controlling Luo workers during their leisure hours. These strategies were not entirely successful, and Luo labourers continued to demand better wages and housing and the strike movement gained momentum in the 1950s.

The underbelly of Mombasa's rapid development was difficult to conceal, despite colonial capital's attempts to dismiss or downplay it. Mombasa's tumultuous labour landscape revealed the dilemmas confronting colonial capital in their efforts to control African urban spaces and dictate the position of African labourers within the colonial social order. Luo labourers were brought into Mombasa without adequate consideration of how their mobility would shape the material conditions of the workforce, or how their presence would influence the town's economic and social landscape. The following chapter will analyse how Luo labourers' material conditions contributed to the development of a class divide in colonial

Mombasa, and how the divide was the central factor driving the development of resistance strategies that aided in the gaining of the monumental changes in the 1950s. Luo rail and port workers then moved from the periphery of Mombasa's political and social agendas to occupy the central position in the town's decolonial agenda.

CHAPTER FOUR
A TOWN DIVIDED: ETHNICITY IN MOMBASA AND THE CHALLENGE OF URBAN LIVING

4.1. Introduction

No sooner had migrant Luo rail and port workers set foot in Mombasa than it became evident that its reputation as an Eldorado – a place of fast living, abundance, and endless opportunities for rapid wealth accumulation – was nothing more than an elaborate illusion created for the sole purpose of luring them into its rail- and harbour-driven wage labour economy. Instead, Mombasa metamorphosised into the very embodiment of the colonial world described by Frantz Fanon.[281] Colonial Mombasa proved to be one of the most exacting places for Luo migrant labourers to live in, both economically and socially. The harsh realities of urban living arose from the convergence of entrenched and emerging class politics, which motivated the reimagination and reorganisation of established identity hierarchies and essentially transformed the town's economic and social landscape into theatres where differences between "local" *wapwani*, and "visitor" *wabara* identities were performed. Luo rail and port workers arrived in Mombasa burdened not only with the contemptuous *wabara* tag, but also by their positionality as the "African proper" within the colonial order. This status demanded far more from them, particularly in terms of labour and tax, both of which were crucial in maintaining the colonial economy. Their attempts to integrate and immerse themselves into Mombasa's social fabric – a privilege hitherto extended to visitors to the Swahili social scene – were rebuffed and fiercely challenged by coastal indigenes anxious to uphold both traditional Swahili norms and, more importantly, new colonial hierarchies of stratification. This chapter will analyse the colonial origins of Mombasa's local/visitor *wabara/wapwani* ethnic divide. By examining how visitor *wabara* and indigenous *wapwani* identities were articulated during the age of British imperialism, the chapter reveals how race and ethnicity structured opportunity and community access to resources, to produce Mombasa's delineated ethnic and racial lines. The material conditions of each group became the outward manifestations of these identities. Contests over these identity boundaries, particularly in relation to material conditions, sharply impacted Mombasa's cost of living, making it one of the most expensive colonial towns for Luo migrant labourers. The chapter will also discuss the changing nature of social interactions between visitors and locals in the Swahili social scene. This will be elaborated through the analysis of two institutions, *kafaáh marriages* and *ngoma*. Both were reconstructed in colonial Mombasa to reinforce social hierarchies, ensuring that *wabara* Luo remained at the bottom of Swahili and colonial social strata.

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[281] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin books, 1963). Fanon's *Concerning Violence* draws attention to the duality of the realities of life for colonised black and brown people of the world, and their white coloniser. He describes the colonised world as one of ill fame and depravity, and in sharp contrast to the coloniser's town, which is literally and figuratively well fed.

4.2. Colonial racialism in the development of Mombasa's *Wabara/ Wapwani* ethnic divide

20 June 2017. The electoral period is in full swing and campaigning in Mombasa has reached fever pitch. In Changamwe, community residents hold informal discussions to analyse the recently announced nominees for ward representatives. Conversation naturally shifts to ethnicity and ethnic balance among the Orange Democratic Movement's (ODM) nominees. ODM is the most popular political party in Mombasa, and its nominees are more or less certain of winning their respective seats in the coming August general elections. Of interest to a number of ethnic Luo in this conversation is whether ODM's nominee Fadhili Mwalimu Makarani, an ethnic Mijikenda, would represent the general interests of the Luo-dominated Port Rietz ward. Even as discussants stress the importance of negotiated democracy[282] in Mombasa's political scene, it is apparent to anyone familiar with Kenyan politics that this scepticism is not entirely misplaced, and that the fears of ethnic Luo living in Mombasa are valid. Memories of the Likoni clashes of 1997,[283] more recent sporadic violence against *wabara*,[284] and the secessionist Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) pronouncements of "*Pwani si Kenya"* (the Coast is not part of Kenya) and "*wabara kwao*" (Bara people should go back to their homes)[285] induces distrust of coastal indigenes and produces feelings of apprehension. Adding to this sense of unease is the persistent use of pejorative terms such as c*hura* (frog), *kafiri* (derogative for non-Muslim), *mshenzi* (uncivilised), *sokwe mtu* (ape man, in reference to the Luo's darker skin tone) by Arabs and indigenous coastal communities in Mombasa.[286] Within this scenario, the fear that Fadhili might neglect the interests of the Luo community once in office, is far from an overreaction.

Tensions, old and new, between inland communities (*wabara*, s. *m'bara*) and coastal indigenes (*wapwani*, s. *m'pwani.* The term encompasses the African population indigene to the coast, together with the Arab and Swahili populations) in Mombasa and the broader Swahili coastal region, are embedded in practices of race, ethnicity, and class relations amongst its diverse population and throughout the town's history.[287] The introduction of the European colonial

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[282] The term is widely used in Kenya to refer to the practice of making agreements to distribute political positions and share power in advance of elections.

[283] Human Rights Watch, *Playing with fire: Weapons Proliferation, Political Violence and Human Rights in Kenya*, (New York, 2002).

[284] BBC Africa, "*Kenya election*: *Hatred leaflets in Kisumu and Mombasa*," 22 February 2013. Accessed 15 June 2021 at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-21544847; VOA News, *Violence, discontent swell along Kenyan Coast*, 27 November 2012. Accessed 23 June 2021 at: https://www.voanews.com/a/violence-discontent-swell-along-kenyan-coast/1553839.html.

[285]Justin Willis, and George Gona, "Pwani C Kenya? Memory, Documents and Secessionist Politics in Coastal Kenya," *African Affairs*, 112, No. 446 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, January 2013), pp. 48–71; The Daily Nation, "*MRC maintains its stand of Pwani si Kenya*," 27 July 2017. Accessed 18 June 2021 at: https://nation.africa/kenya/videos/news/mrc-maintains-its-stand-of-pwani-si-kenya--1222018.

[286] Participant observation data collection method by researcher in Changamwe Mombasa, 20 June 2017.

[287] A more in depth understanding of Swahili identity hierarchies can be found in De Vere, *Swahili Origins*; Chapurukha Kusimba, *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1999); Jeffrey Fleisher, "The Complexity Of Public Space at the Swahili Town of Songo Mnara, Tanzania," *Journal of*

state, a wage labour economy, and an unprecedented number of *wabara* migrant labourers into this social landscape in a short span of years at the beginning of the 20th century created what can be only be described as a cataclysmic upheaval. Mombasa was then thrown into disarray as previously established economic and social interactions amongst its inhabitants were disrupted, leaving participants struggling to locate their positions in a society undergoing profound transformation. This displacement was particularly acute for the Swahili elite. Having lost their position at the helm of the towns social strata, the Swahili recognised that it was necessary to realign boundaries of interactions with members of the newly forming society. Each exchange was deliberated shaped to reinforce their perceived superiority over those they regarded as belonging to lower social strata, whether *m'bara* or *m'pwani.* Ultimately, migrant groups, and especially the Luo, would bear the brunt of the negative consequences of these interactions.

From as early as the 1910s, Mombasa's district annual reports documented the gradual deterioration of race and ethnic relations between "local" and "visitor" residents of the town. For example, by 1913, Luo rail and port workers had begun complaining about paying higher rents than other Mombasa residents.[288] The 1924 report, furthermore, revealed that coastal indigenes often refused to sell foodstuffs to Luo labourers during periods of "tribal" conflict.[289] Of particular note is the Mombasa District Annual Report of 1937, which details one of the first large-scale outbreaks of ethnic violence between *wapwani* and *wabara*. The fighting was apparently triggered when an ethnic Luo was found dead in a house belonging to an Arab landlord. Rumours then began circulating that he had been killed in dispute over rent. The incident escalated into violent clashes involving some 2,000 Luo and their sympathisers (most probably the (Aba)Luhya), against 500 Washihiri.[290] At the end of three days of fighting, twenty Arabs and one other Luo lay dead. The above examples confirm that altercations between migrant *wabara* ethnic groups and coastal indigenes in Mombasa were frequent and often resulted in mass fatalities, as was the case in the 1937.

The *wabara*/*wapwani* ethnic divide was a defining feature of colonial Mombasa's urban landscape. In a world where the majority of people in these two categories were phenotypically black and, at first glance, indistinguishable from each other, how were the differences between a *m'bara* and a *m'pwani* recognised? What did *wapwani* consider the key elements that separated their identity from that of *wabara*, and which particular attributes represented *u'bara*? Appiah argued that identities come with labels, and when one assigns an identity to another, their first action is usually to deliberate whether the person embodies the attributes associated

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Anthropological Archaeology, 35 (2014), pp.1–22; Matthew Pawlowicz, "Beyond Commoner and Elite in Swahili Society: Re-Examination of Archaeological Materials from Gede, Kenya," *African Archaeological Review* 36, (2019), pp. 213–248. The consensus in this scholarship is that there is a connection between the Swahili coastlines' involvement in maritime trade and the development of identity hierarchies based on ethnicity and race.

[288] KNA/PC/COAST/1/10/166 Township Matters, 1913.

[289] KNA/CQ/1/19/23 Annual Reports 1921–1927.

[290] KNA/CQ/1/19/25 Annual Reports 1931–1945.

with that label.[291] In Mombasa, these labels were often tied to material conditions. How one lived hence, became evidence of identity. Coastal indigenes therefore emphasised the duality of their identity in contrast to that of *wabara* by showcasing the refinement of their material conditions and way of life. This distinction was reinforced through the deliberate vilification of the imageries of the life of a migrant *m'bara.*

Before analysing the development of relations between *wabara* and *wapwani* in imperial Mombasa, it is important to provide some background on how relations between these two identities evolved over different historical periods. The term *wabara* was used by the coastal community proper to denote individuals who came from inland regions, i.e. the lands beyond the Nyika plateau, which, in the pre-colonial period, divided Kenya into two geographical zones. Though the origins of the word *wabara* remain unclear, the map of the 16th-century cartographer Jodocus Hondius I[292] showed *bara* to be a region somewhere in Central Africa, close to the Great lakes region, where Arab traders ventured in search of slaves. This points to usage of the term to refer to inland communities as far back as the 16th century. Prior to British occupation, *bara* populations were brought to the Swahili coast as servant workers, with many more shipped off to Arabia as slaves. With the advent of British occupation and the abolition of slavery, inland "*wabara*" arrived at the Swahili coast as wage labourers. This meant that interactions between *wabara* and the coastal proper populations were historically framed by master/slave or master/servant relations. Coastal indigenes' perceptions of *wabara* in the initial years of colonial occupation were hence influenced by their previous interactions. These attitudes seem to have been further reinforced by the coastal communities' own experiences within the colonial wage labour economy. As discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, coastal indigenes' ability to resist labour recruitments was often viewed as evidence of an inherent capacity for autonomy – a trait that the incoming visitors seemingly lacked.[293] To the coastal indigenes thus, w*abara* were a class of workers who arrived on the coast simply because they lacked autonomy and agency – characteristics strikingly similar to those associated with *watumwa* (slaves). This perception was further solidified by the colonial state's neglect of *wabara'*s welfare in Mombasa, which not only degraded their status but also reinforced the view of them as subhuman.

The hierarchisation of *u'bara* and *u'pwani* identities in Mombasa can be traced back to East Africa's precolonial interactions with the Arabic world. To assert their dominance and authority over conquered coastal city-states, Arab overlords established a system of social stratification based on particular reference categories. Affinity to Arabic biological, spatial, cultural, and

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[291] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity, Creed, Country, Color, Class, Culture* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2019).

[292] Jodocus Hondius, Kaart van Afrika, deposited at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. A digital copy can be found at: https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/mijn/verzamelingen/151424--angelica/maps-of-africa/objecten#/RP-P-1905-6608,0.

[293] Osodo Dami, O.I. This idea has been carried over to the present. In Mombasa today, the Luo are viewed as intruder beggars, dependent on *wapwani* benevolence. Allowing them to stay in Mombasa is for example, seen as an act of kindness.

ideological motifs progressively became the defining markers of status. These markers were further reinforced by the possession of wealth and military power.[294] On the East African Swahili coast, social hierarchy placed the Arab and Afro-Arab (Swahili) populations at the top, while African *wabara* slaves, far removed from these motifs of elitism, occupied the lowest rungs. In Mombasa, the upper class consisted of descendants of the Shirazi, Omani, and Mazrui Arabs, together with the Swahili, who were a mix of Arab and upper-echelon indigenous Africans. Arab and Swahili prestige and elitism were rooted in their prestigious international origins, literacy in the Arabic language, access to urban and international trading networks, and their social refinement, known as *u'ungwana*. This refinement encompassed inherent traits of gentility, generosity, and piety.[295] Prior to British occupation, Arab/Swahili elitism was generally fluid, and primarily based on an individual's material conditions. It was therefore possible to ascend from the lower echelons to the higher ranks of society. Even slaves who acquired wealth (e.g. through marriage) could potentially integrate into Swahili upper society.[296] Because class was primarily based on material conditions, the Arab/Swahili elite in Mombasa encompassed a wide range of racial and phenotypic variations. Some were seemingly "purely" Arabic, while others could not be differentiated, at first glance, from inland *wabara* Africans.

Colonial hierarchisation of racial identities significantly influenced the re-evaluation of the element of race within Swahili's configurations of elitism. As race became a main reference point for an individual's position within the colonial order, the Arab and Swahili populations experienced a heightened sense of racial identity. This shift fuelled a desire to reaffirm Arab/Swahili identity, leading to the reimagining and stricter delineation of its boundaries. The Swahili's racial ambiguity, in particular, inspired the development of practices aimed at asserting Arab identity and legitimising its perceived superiority in Mombasa.[297] Binaries of *wabara* and *wapwani* subsequently came to define interactions with and the treatment of migrant *wabara*, who, up until the early 1950s, were largely represented by Luo rail and port workers. In colonial Mombasa, class hierarchies thus transformed from being primarily based on material conditions to include race as a primary factor of social status.

In their efforts to integrate into newly defined colonial/racial stratification hierarchies, Arabs/Swahili sought alliances with the African *wapwani* (also referred to as *wanyika*), a consolidated group of nine coastal ethnic groups collectively known as the Mijikenda (which

[294] Francois Constantin, "Social Stratification on the Swahili Coast: From Race to Class?," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 59. No.2 (1989), pp.145–160.

[295] Nathaniel Mathews, "Imagining Arab Communities: Colonialism, Islamic Reform, and Arab Identity in Mombasa, Kenya, 1897–1933," *Islamic Africa*, 4 No.2 (Brill, 2013), p.137, pp. 135–163.

[296] Steven Fabian, *Making Identity on the Swahili Coast: Urban Life, Community and Belonging in Bagamoyo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[297] F. J. Berg, "The Swahili Community in Mombasa 1600–1900," *Journal of African History* 9 No.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 35–56.

translates to "nine tribes").[298] *Wanyika* occupied lands adjacent to the coastal Arab settlements, extending all the way to the Nyika plateau. For centuries, *wanyika* limited interactions with Arabs on the coast and with populations further inland, as they were quite determined to preserve their identity. They notably did not allow other groups, including the highly regarded Arabs, to settle amongst them.[299] *Wanyika* who had embraced Islam were requested to leave communal spaces as it was feared they may introduce the Islamic law of individual freehold, which would have threatened the groups' communal rights customs.[300] *Wanyikas'* indifference and laissez-faire attitude towards coastal elitism dramatically shifted as the impact of European racialism became more apparent in Mombasa's colonialist capitalist economy. Paternalistic and racist constructs, which painted Africans as lazy and indolent[301] who needed work to become "civilised" were exacerbated in Kenya by the pressures and difficulties experienced in acquiring labour for the development of the colonial economy. When the colonial state resorted to more violent methods to mobilise African labour, *wanyika* began rethinking their stance. Associating with Arab/Swahili elitism appeared to offer a potential avenue for escaping the fate of the "African proper."[302]

During much of the colonial period, the Mijikenda were largely confined to the Nyika Reserve, where they subsisted by engaging in peasant farming and rural food production. Few ventured into the coastal strip towns, including Mombasa, and when they did it was mainly as petty traders in, for example, food or *tembo* (alcohol), selling to the multitude of migrant labourers working for the KURH.[303] The Mijikenda, however, quickly recognised the potential influence of migrant groups and the dangers they posed to their own attempts at accessing Swahili elitism.

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[298] Mijikenda ethnicities include the Chonyi, Duruma, Kambe, Kauma, Ribe, Rabai, Jibana, Giriama, and Digo peoples.

[299] Robert W. Hamilton, "Land Tenure among the Bantu Wanyika of East Africa," *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 20 No.7 (Oxford University Press on behalf of The Royal African Society, 1920), pp. 13–18.

[300] Ibid.

[301] Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism* (Abingdon and New York: Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 1977); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York and Toronto: Pantheon Books, 1978); Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya.* In *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, Alatas argues that European views of Southeast Asians began shifting in the eighteenth century, when colonial capitalism required their labour for the establishment of plantation agriculture. Malay, Filipino, and Javanese aversion to working in the plantation economy was attributed to their inherent laziness, a view contradicting previous interactions where they had been praised for their contributions in developing Said's "Oriental world." The rhetoric of the lazy native thus only played to justify the oppressive practices required for the mobilisation of labour in the plantation economies of Southeast Asia. Similar attitudes of lazy natives were prevalent in colonial Kenya, and pioneer settlers, including Grogan, regarded African recruitment into the wage labour economy as civilising acts removing the native from docility. Clayton and Savage's study in fact revealed that Grogan was adamant that "…a good sound system of compulsory labour would do more to raise the African than all the millions that had for years, been sunk in missionary efforts."

[302] KNA/CQ/1/19/ 30 Report on Native Affairs Mombasa, 1930. The district commissioner for Mombasa agrees that owing to ambiguity of ethnic affiliations and variations of religions, it was extremely difficult to rigidly enforce "tribal" forms of administration on indigenous African populations in Mombasa. *Wanyika* positively worked to reproduce this ambiguity to escape the fate of the African in Mombasa's colonial economy.

[303] KNA/CQ/1/19/25 Annual Reports, Mombasa District 1932–1939.

This apprehension led to an emphasis on drawing clear lines of identity. The Mijikenda's class aspirations were conveyed through overt efforts to align themselves with the newly restructured Arabic/Swahili configurations of elitism. Material conditions and "purity of blood" therefore became critical points of distinction between them and the lower-ranked inland Africans. This distinction was reproduced in two ways. Firstly, the Mijikenda leveraged their advantageous position and community access to resources in Mombasa, and the coast region in general, to accumulate wealth while simultaneously dictating the material conditions of the migrant. Secondly, the Mijikenda drew strict boundaries with Luo migrant labourers, confining contacts to interactions within the established cash economy. The avoidance of all forms of social interactions with *wabara* was meant to block any chance of introducing *bara* lineage into their bloodlines. These firmly drawn *wabara/wapwani* distinctions prevented even the most elite of *m'bara* from receiving the social respect accorded to an average *m'pwani.*

The following section will give accounts of how ethnicity and race shaped the transactional interactions between Luo rail and port workers, on one hand, and Arabs, Swahili, and the Mijikenda *wapwani* on the other. The discussions will reveal how the tensions and highly charged contacts were specifically meant to convey the dichotomy between the perceived superiority of *u'pwani* identity, with its inherent *ustaarabu* (civilised nature), and the contrasting *ushenz*i (uncivilised nature) ascribed to the *wabara* Luo. The ethnic/race antagonism found expression in the duality of material conditions experienced by indigenes and visitor labourers in colonial Mombasa, and contributed to transforming the town into one of the most expensive urban areas for migrant labourers to sustain themselves.

4.3.1 Housing and the development of *wabara chura* ("inlanders are frogs") stereotype

As the influx of Luo labourers into Mombasa town steadily increased during the first two decades of the twentieth century, *wapwani* began to acknowledge the potential threat posed by their sheer numbers to the established social order and class politics of coastal Swahili society. As attested by comments of the town planning committee, even the colonial government had begun to recognise that the rising migrant population was driving Mombasa towards becoming an African town.

> *The African is destined, by virtue of his paramount portion of fitness and numbers in this country, to ultimately overwhelm all other races in competition with him as the labouring class. It will be wise to anticipate this march of events in Mombasa, for already, he no longer knocks at the gates from his long march from the hinterland – he has entered the citadel and will soon dominate it as universal labourer.*[304]

Under Britain, *wapwani* had encountered glimpses of outsider domination. In less than a generation, British colonialism had completely transformed the landscape of their homeland,

[304] KNA/AWS/11/7 Mombasa Island Revised Town Planning scheme, 1925. Comments by the Chair, Mombasa Town planning committee.

by ending slave trading, introducing a new economic dispensation, and reorganising the political and social structure of Swahili society. While their ability to resist British dominance was severely limited at that moment, they could still do something about the perceived looming threat of *wabara* dominance. In efforts aimed at confirming their position as the coastal elite and rightful owners of Mombasa, *wapwani* therefore resorted to interacting with *wabara* within the newly restructured social and economic power frameworks. The balance of power in relations between the two greatly disfavoured *wabara*, and *wapwani* continuously used their position and power of access to resources to dictate the material conditions of migrants.

Fanon's renowned anti-imperial essay perfectly encapsulates the dual realities of material conditions for the coloniser and the colonised.

> *The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity...they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible...The town belonging to the colonised people, or at least the native town, the negro village, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute...it is a world without spaciousness; men live on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other...the native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes of coal of light. It is a town of n****rs and dirty Arabs.*[305]

Fanon's concept of the colonial world as "a world cut in two," was a defining feature of colonial Mombasa's identity politics. These identity structures were the by-product of colonial policy on migrant labourers, combined with Mombasa's established practices of association amongst different groups within society. Together, these forces created contrasting living conditions for visitors and locals. In this context, one's identity gradually became not only the reason for their material condition, but also the outward manifestation of that particular identity. Where a person lived, who they interacted with, what they ate, how they dressed, and even the most mundane of everyday activity became markers of either *u'bara* or *u'pwani* identities.

As early as the 1910s, the material conditions of Luo KURH labourers in Mombasa generally mirrored the image of the native town described by Fanon. Located hundreds of kilometres from their ethnic reserve, Luo labourers were unable to access a critical resource for production and accumulation: land. The limitations of access to land made them entirely dependent on the *wapwani* for their livelihood, creating a power imbalance within the colonised population. This imbalance gave *wapwani* the means to dictate the material conditions of those they regarded as being on the bottom rungs of society. Housing, water, clothing, fuel, and food then became the commodities that determined one's social class in Mombasa.

Chura (frog), a common pejorative for Luo KURH labourers living in Mombasa, stemmed from disdain for their housing situation. From the 1910s to the late 1940s, many migrant labourers had been forced to seek accommodation in the undesirable swampy lands in and adjacent to

[305] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Frere town (Kongowea, and parts of what is now Kisauni constituency), and in Changamwe.[306] In Majengo, sanitation was lacking and open sewers ran through doorways where children played and domesticated animals roamed in search of food. The overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in these areas were, indeed, reminiscent of a frog's life. Chapter Three of this dissertation pointed out how Luo labourers' housing was a complex issue intrinsically connected to land, which, in colonial Mombasa, was almost exclusively Arab owned.[307] In Mombasa, land ownership and user rights followed Islamic tenure systems of individual ownership, and Britain, upon occupying the region, had been allowed to purchase of a few pockets of these lands as they too followed similar individual tenureship approach. The vast majority of lands, however, remained under Arab control and Britain was required to pay the sultan owner an annuity of £100,000 to operate and administer the terrain, which included Mombasa.[308] The lands in Majengo, where a majority of Luo rail and port workers sought accommodation upon arrival in Mombasa, were owned by the Kilindini Sites Company, Sousa Junior and Dias, Musajee Jevanjee, Morrison, and the Wakf Commission.[309] These landlords leased their plots to Arabs and *wapwani* Africans, who, because of the reserve policy, were the only ones granted tenancy rights. Figure 4.1. below shows the plans to expand the boundaries of Mombasa to enable access to non-Arab-owned lands, which would, in turn, provided a place for its exploding population to settle.

[306]KNA/MSS/115/19/33 Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, *Report of the Local Government Commission, Vol 1* (London: Waterlow and Sons Limited, 1927); KNA/AWS/11/7/ Mombasa Island Revised Town Planning Scheme.

[307] KNA/CQ/1/9/11 District Commissioner Mombasa. In the files concerning Mombasa's land matters, names and races of the majority property owners reveal that they were of Arabic origin. File 11, for example, titled *Tudor/Tononoka: Names, Professions, Races and Nature of Development of Property Owners*, reveals that 80% of named property owners were Arabs.

[308]James R. Brennan, "Lowering the Sultan's Flag: Sovereignty and Decolonization in Coastal Kenya," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 50 No. 4 (2008), pp. 831–861.

[309] KNA/K/331/11 Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Examine the Labour Conditions in Mombasa*, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1939).

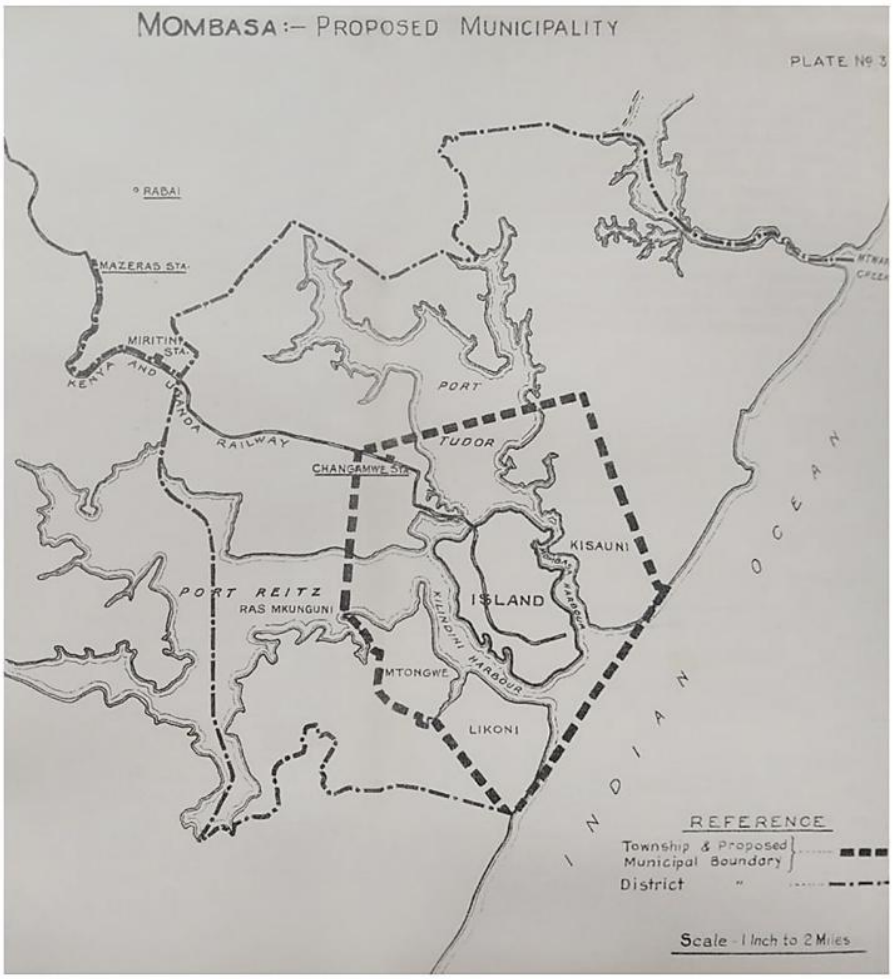

Figure 4.1. Image of a Mombasa Town planning committee proposal to expand Mombasa's boundaries to accommodate the growing numbers of migrant labourers. The committee suggested that these labourers be housed in the far north of Mombasa, near Makupa Bridge. The estates included in the expansion are now known as Changamwe, Tudor, Kongowea, and Bangladesh, and they remain predominantly Luo settlements. KNA/AWS/11/7 Mombasa Island Revised Town Planning Scheme, 1925.

To fully understand the contradictions of *wabara* and *wapwani* housing in Mombasa, it is important to first examine the colonial policy of African reserves. This policy was developed for the sole purpose of socially controlling African populations by limiting expansion to new lands and, thus, binding ethnic groups to specific regions. It promoted the entrenchment of group identities, particularly at the intersections of imperial domination. The reserve policy was part of a series of land legislation passed between 1897–1932, at a time when European settlement was becoming established in the colony. The official justification for the passing of these laws was that it was a scheme of trusteeship, meant to protect African people's land from encroachment by European settlers speculatively acquiring large tracts of land. This was certainly happening in Central Kenya around Kikuyu, Kamba, and Maasai lands.[310] The most significant laws were, of course, those that created African reserves. Reserves were defined lands with exclusive tenancy and user rights granted to specific ethnic groups. The first official reserve in Kenya was created for the Maasai in 1904 following the signing of the Anglo-Maasai Treaty.[311] This agreement saw the Maasai cede possession of the greater Laikipia and Samburu regions in return for exclusive rights to reserve lands created in Kajiado and Northern Laikipia. The creation of other reserves followed soon after, bolstered by the resignation of the commissioner for the Protectorate Sir Charles Eliot, who had vehemently argued against their establishment.[312] Convinced of the need to encourage European occupation, Eliot was of the opinion that they ought to be given the opportunity to acquire "empty" land for settlement in any region of the protectorate.[313] After the Native Land Trust Ordinance was passed in 1930, all ethnic groups in Kenya were given a homeland in form of a reserve. African tenure rights were only recognised within the boundaries of their designated ethnic reserve.

Reserves lands were allocated in areas deemed large enough to meet immediate grazing and cultivation requirements while allowing for future population growth and land-use expansion.[314] Nomadic and fallowing land-use systems were also accommodated within reserves.[315] Additionally, reserves were strategically positioned at a distance from European-held lands, creating a buffer zone between European and African territories. Britain justified the fixed and unalterable reserve boundaries by arguing that allowances had been made for present and future use and population growth. The claim that reserves were created to protect African lands against European encroachment was, however, a ruse, as subsequent events clearly revealed. In 1930, news of the discovery of gold deposits in the Ikolomani region of Kakamega triggered a rush of Europeans – reeling from the effects of the Great Depression –

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[310] Edwin W. Smith "Land in Kenya," *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 35 No. 140 (1936), pp. 246–250.
[311] Lotte Hughes, *Moving the Maasai: A Colonial Misadventure* (New York: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2006).
[312] J. D. Overton, "Social Control and Social Engineering: African Reserves in Kenya 1895–1920," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 8 No. 2 (1990), pp.163–174.
[313] L. Izuakor, "Colonial Challenges and Administrative Response: Sir Charles Eliot and 'Native' Trusteeship in Kenya, 1901–1904," *Transafrican Journal of History*, 17 (Gideon Were Publications, 1988), pp. 34–49.
[314] Overton, "Social Control and Social Engineering," p. 168.
[315] Morris Carter, *Report of the Kenya Land Commission* (London: Government Printer, 1933).

into the North Kavirondo[316] reserve. In response, the colonial government immediately amended the Native Land Trust Ordinance of 1930, which had established fixed reserves boundaries and excluded lands where minerals had been found from native reserves. The amendments, implemented by the infamous Carter Commission, allowed such lands to be annexed without compensating those affected with an equivalent area of land or even giving notice to the local native council.[317] Thus as Overton argued, spatial segregation by creation of reserves was nothing more than a colonial strategy of indirect rule, the main aim of which was to reduce the redirection of state resources towards the social control of African populations.[318]

Reserves were one of the most ingenious structures of control devised by the British colonial state. They not only facilitated spatial segregation of ethnic groups, but also extended indigenous structures of authority over individuals living beyond specified territorial boundaries. Their utility in controlling urban diasporas was most apparent in colonies where European administrative personnel numbers were low. In a process that Ranger has described as the "invention of tradition,"[319] reserves offered Africans new opportunities to reconstruct and recreate identities around their designated "native" homelands. In the case of ethnic Luo, the creation of the Central and South Kavirondo Luo reserves played a significant role in unifying the urban diasporas of the various ethnicities that spoke a variant of the Luo language.[320] This process of amalgamation contributed to the formation of a relatively homogenous polity that is now recognised as the ethnic Luo community. Previously, Luo identities were in a constant state of flux, and people moved in and out of an ingroup depending on circumstances.[321] Excommunicated men, for example, would normally seek refuge in other Luo groups as tenant *jodak (s. jadak)* far away from their original territorial units *pinje (s. piny)*. *Jodak* were rarely denied lands for subsistence in new *pinje*, allowing opportunities for new beginnings and the chance to integrate into a new community. In fact, *jodak* children would

[316] Exclusive rights for occupation of the North Kavirondo reserve belonged to a collective of twenty ethnic groups known as the Abaluhya, (also Luhya). Initially referred to as the Kavirondo of the North (the Luo were the Kavirondo of the South and Central), the term Abaluhya officially appeared in the 1948 census.

[317] Carter, *Report of the Kenya Land Commission*; Hansard records of parliamentary proceedings conducted on 20 December 1932, discussing amendments to the Native Land Ordinance of 1930. Record accessed on 22 November 2022 at: https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1932/dec/20/kenya-native-land-trust-ordinance.

[318] Overton, "Social Control and Social Engineering."

[319] Terence Ranger "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[320] Individuals originating from the South and Central Kavirondo reserves were classified as the Kavirondo Luo by the colonial state. Labour practices such as salary scales and housing arrangements, which, in urban areas, were based on ethnic identities, were similar for this heterogenous group. The group was therefore presented with a shared sense of identity, which they worked to amalgamate into a singular ethnic identity.

[321] Upon settling in Kenya, the Luo did not form a homogenous cultural or political unit. Each Luo group lived within a settlement called a *gweng* (pl. *gwenge*) and several *gwenge* formed alliances to create autonomous territorial units called *piny* (pl. *pinje*). *Pinje* were therefore multi-clan and multi-ethnic political groupings. The homogeneity of the Luo language was a twentieth-century phenomenon, as *piny* variants fell into disuse as a result of formal education and urban migration. The influence of Mombasa's urbanisation on the development of the constituency that became the Luo ethnic group is discussed in Chapter Five.

become fully assimilated into their new communities, becoming known by designations linked to their father's new *piny.* This system facilitated the disappearance of old identities and creation of new ones, complete with new lineages. In many cases, *jodak* moved to neighbouring Bantu groups, where they adopted Bantu identities while their Luo identities gradually dissipated. The creation of reserves, however, completely altered this fluid system of identity reconstruction. Reserves introduced rigid formations of identity tied to the soil of one's birth *piny*. Consequently, those who had left their ancestral homes in search of new beginnings in new locations were compelled to maintain communal connections. This system enforced a permanent connection with one's birth community. The reserve policy was thus a useful framework for ensuring that ethnic Luo remained Luo, even if they migrated to far off lands in Mombasa, or even Tanganyika where a sizeable number migrated to in the 1930s. Luoness was the main reason they were denied access to lands in Mombasa; they were forever tied to Luoland and could never integrate and become part of Mombasa society.

Returning to the question of housing, Arab landlords in Mombasa typically rented their land properties to *wapwani*. In the 1920s, the monthly rental rates for a plot ranged from Sh.5 to Sh.25.[322] The lessees then built houses on these plots, which cost approximately Sh.1200–2500. This money was usually borrowed from Asian moneylenders at very high interest rates. The houses built were no more than basic huts, made of mud with *makuti* (palm frond) roofing. Latrines adjoined kitchens and there was almost no light and ventilation. The huts were divided into several rooms and each room was rented out to a migrant labourer at rates ranging from Sh.2 to Sh.10. Given the low wages earned by most labourers, affording rent often required sharing rooms with others. This led to overcrowding, which became the most pressing problem facing migrant labourers in Mombasa during this period. On average, a single room accommodated approximately eight persons. It was not uncommon, however, to find as many as twelve. For example, during a fact-finding mission in 1925 to investigate the extent of the housing problem in Mombasa, the local government commission reported finding one house with six rooms, where four rooms were each occupied by a man, his wife and their four children, while the two remaining rooms were rented by sex workers.[323] Open defecation was widespread, especially along the seafront, due to shortages of latrines for migrant labourers.[324] The unsanitary living conditions among migrant Luo labourers were exacerbated by the colonial government's policy of not providing any municipal services to the African population in Mombasa, a policy that remained in effect until 1927.[325]

Such housing, where hygiene and privacy were disregarded, were particularly reserved for upcountry labourers, the majority of whom were Luo KURH employees. Arab housing in Mombasa's Old Town were in complete contrast and constructed following Islamic

[322] KNA/MSS/115/19/33 Report of the Local Government Commission.
[323] Ibid.
[324] KNA/PC/COAST/1/10/166 Township Matters, 1913. Letter from the superintendent of police to Mombasa DC.
[325] KNA/MSS/115/19/33 Report of the Local Government Commission, 1927

architectural styles that prioritised privacy. Arab family houses were multi-roomed, with private spaces and even separate entrances for women and men. Decent housing was not generally a problem among the African *wapwani* either as they rarely spent time in Mombasa and thus had little need for permanent accommodation of housing. Afro *wapwani* homesteads scattered on the mainland littoral were made of similar mud and *makuti*, but were cleaner and more sanitary because their ability to access land afforded them space for better ventilation and higher hygiene standards.[326]

Mombasa's housing problem exponentially increased at the beginning of World War II. Increases in transportation and shipping resulted in a rise in Luo migrations to Mombasa's KURH, which had become the logistical hub for British East Africa's war efforts. The subsequent rise in demand for housing caused rental prices to increase sharply and a labour officer recorded prices ranging from between Sh.8 and Sh.15 per room in 1939, with some rooms going for as high as Sh.20 a month.[327] The deterioration of the housing situation was the primary reason for rail and port workers strike actions during and immediately after World War II. Figure 4.2. is a table showing the wages and other allowances received by railway workers in Mombasa in the years 1939–1947. The housing allowance was clearly insufficient given the high rental charges in Mombasa.

Minimum wage (KSh.) for African Railway workers in Mombasa

	Basic Wage	Ration allowance	Fuel allowance	Housing allowance	War Bonuses
Before 1939 strike	15.00	4.00	1.00	-	-
After 1939 strikes	15.00	4.00	1.00	3.00	-
After 1942 strikes	15.00	6.00	2.00	5.00	5.00
1943	15.00	6.00	2.00	5.00	7.00
Jan 1947	18.00	6.00	2.00	5.00	7.00

Figure 4.2. Minimum monthly wages (KSh.) for African Railway workers in Mombasa. Figures drawn from KNA/K/331/8/BOO, Report of the Economic and Social Background of Mombasa Labour Disputes.

[326] KNA/AWS/11/7 Mombasa Island Revised Town Planning scheme, 1925.
[327] KNA/K/331/892/ Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Unrests in Mombasa (Part One)*, (Nairobi: Government Printer 1945), p.88.

Until the onset of World War II, the colonial government remained largely indifferent to Mombasa's housing problem. Its inaction was however partly due to the unavailability of crown land, as most of Mombasa's lands were privately owned. Attempts to control rent by instituting a Rent Controls Board in 1939 did little to alleviate the problem because a majority of Luo migrant labourers did not use its services. This decision was influenced by the flawed power relations between labourers and their *wapwani* landlords. Any KURH labourer who complained to the board was certain of eviction.[328] Many therefore quietly paid the unreasonably high rental charges, as finding housing was a much more immediate need. Furthermore, the labourers faced significant financial and legal barriers. They could not afford the mandatory advocate required to lodge a complaint, while their Arab landlords invariably had legal representation. The stipulation of depositing Sh.20 before making a complaint, moreover, dissuaded many from seeking help from the board. Even for those who managed to successfully file a complaint at the tribunal, it was almost impossible to get time off work to attend its proceedings. Contracted KURH labourers rarely got permission to attend to issues considered personal trivialities, while casual labourers were too involved in trying to find work for the day. Consequently, taking legal action against a landlord became a costly and lengthy endeavour, one that most labourers understandably chose not to engage in.

4.3.2. Access to water and the creation of the *wabara wachafu* (inlanders are dirty) trope

Commenting on the state of upcountry labourers living in Mombasa in 1945, the chair of the commission of inquiry looking into the cause of Mombasa's labour unrest pointed out that:

> *The upcountry labourer arrived in Mombasa in a semi-starved condition. They were liable to attacks of smallpox and other diseases. Until 1914, they were forced to consume polluted water from wells, which resulted in the high number of disease in the town. In 1910, the town had the unenviable reputation of having the highest cases of malaria in the whole country. Conditions did not improve for the next 30 years*[329]

The availability of water, has for centuries, been a key factor influencing patterns of mobility and settlement along the Eastern African coast.[330] Surrounded by salty waters, Gedi, Mombasa, Zanzibar, to name but a few, depended on freshwater wells dug at various points on the mainland or in the islands to facilitate the settlement of first African, then later Arab populations. Freshwater was so crucial for the survival of East Africa's coastal communities that thriving settlements were sometimes suddenly abandoned when supplies became

[328] Ibid.

[329] KNA/RW/3/1 Labour Unrests and Commission's Enquiry Since 1937, Vol 5.

[330] Thomas H. Wilson, "Spatial Analysis and Settlement Patterns on the East African Coast," *Paideuma*, 28 (1982), pp. 201–219.

depleted.[331] The declaration by the manpower department in the initial years of occupation, stating that "[…] procuring labour for the development of a water-work network to bring freshwaters into Mombasa was of prime importance to the colony and second only to the rail,"[332] shows that Britain was also greatly concerned with the water question and especially the availability of freshwater on the island of Mombasa. Water was particularly vital for supporting the projected population growth expected with the planned expansions of the port. Thus, the colonial state's first order of business upon establishing control in Mombasa was to set up a public works department to begin construction of a coastal waterway to connect the inland freshwaters of Taita Taveta, Kwale, and Kilifi, to Mombasa. The impeccable works done by migrant Luo labourers in constructing these waterways was the reason they later became the preferred workforce for the colony's rail and port departments.[333]

The public works department prioritised Mombasa's piped water network for European households, government offices, and other administrative areas. The migrant population in Mombasa together with the remaining segment of *wapwani* were left to fend for themselves. This second group hence sourced water from dug wells and from the few public works department's water kiosks at various points in the town. Unsurprisingly, this led to widespread water shortages for the majority of Mombasa's population. Access to water then became a critical marker of *ubara* and *upwani* identities, with water assuming both literal and symbolic roles. Purity and cleanliness hence came to signify the divide between these two identities. Because the *wabara* bore the brunt of water scarcity in Mombasa, they came to be perceived as a people who were physically and culturally "dirty."

Clearly, the *wabara's* uncleanliness (physical) was a natural consequence of the challenges placed on their personhood by the colonial state in collaboration with *wapwani*. The flawed organisation of the water department's operations set the stage for the *wabara/wapwani* class politics and the assumed difference between the two identities to play out. Public works water kiosks, designated for the non-European population, operated between the hours of 7.00 am–5.00 pm. Here, water was sold at 1 cent per *debi* (10-litre) container. The operating hours of the water kiosks, however, ran parallel to KURH working hours. In addition, until the beginning of the 1940s, the majority of migrant Luo labourers at KURH were either bachelors or they had left families in Luoland.[334] Thus, unlike *wapwani*, who lived with family and hence could easily

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[331] David Hatcher Childress, *Lost Cities and Ancient Mysteries of Africa and Arabia* (Stelle: Adventures Unlimited Press, 1989). Archaeologists working on Gede ruins have, for example, hypothesised that Gedi settlement in Kilifi was abandoned because of water scarcity.

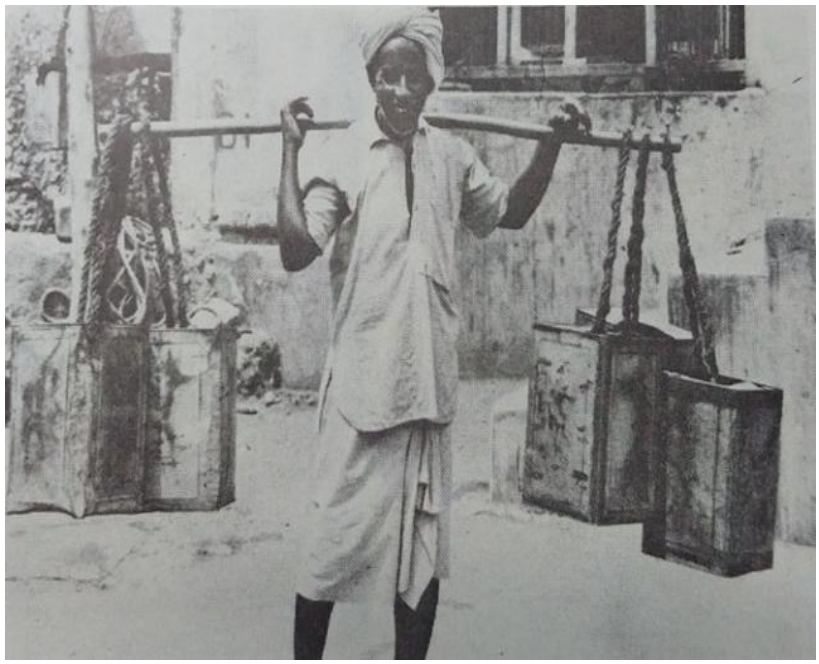
[332] KNA/PC/COAST/1/14/11. Report on Labour Camp: Shimba Water Works, 1913.

[333] Ibid. In 1902, camp chiefs began to specifically request Luo labourers for the construction of the Mombasa water network.

[334] KNA/AWS/1/366 Labour Unrests Mombasa, 1945. Excerpt from an editorial in the *East African Standard*, written by member of the committee set up to look into the affairs of unskilled workers in Mombasa. Dated 16 April 1945; Rose Muyuka, O.I., 4 February 2018, Changamwe. Muyuka says his grandfather came to Mombasa and left his grandmother in Uyoma. Leaving families in Luoland was common practice for migrating Luo men.

source water from water kiosks during operating hours, the migrant labourers were forced to rely on the growing black-market trade in water, an activity run mainly by Washihiri Arabs.[335]

Washihiri traders bought water from the kiosks in bulk, storing it in huge drums at their water vending premises, some of which were right next to the official public department kiosks. This water was then resold through water carriers, who carried the commodity to people's households. Because of prevailing notions of purity, this work was strictly reserved for *wapwani* men. Moreover, having water brought into one's house was perceived as a sign of high social standing. Thus, for reasons of prestige, migrant Luo labourers detested water-carrying duties, agreeing to the task only if the kiosk was located in a secluded location.[336] The price of water sold on the doorstep was however increased to 5 cents per *debi*. From 5.00 pm, when most Luo labourers were returning from their work stations, these prices shot up to between 12–20 cents per *debi*.[337] On average, households used two *debis* per day, even if they needed more; thus, water in Mombasa became a costly commodity that strained migrant Luo labourers' incomes.



A m'Shihiri water carrier in Mombasa, circa 1945

[335] Ibid, KNA/AWS/1/366 Labour Unrests Mombasa, 1945
[336] KNA/K/331/8/BOO Report of the Economic and Social Background of Mombasa Labour Disputes, p.65.
[337] Ibid.; KNA/AWS/1/366 Labour Unrests Mombasa,1945.

Through the commodity water, perceptions of prestige, embodied in cleanliness, were constructed and worked to reinforce *wapwani's* sense of superiority within Mombasa's social hierarchy. Water scarcity not only evinced *wapwani's* position as gatekeepers of essential resources for survival in Mombasa, but also directly influenced the health and well-being of migrant Luo labourers. Luo labourers could hardly afford to bathe, leave alone clean their environment, hence diseases including scabies, cholera and many others associated with hygiene were everyday norms in predominant Luo settlements. This situation further fuelled perceptions of them as "dirty" people. Curiously, despite the financial burden, Luo insistence on employing water carriers revealed their desires to associate themselves with Swahili motifs of prestige. For instance, labourers forbade their womenfolk from going to the kiosks to carry water for household use,[338] a task that could have greatly alleviated family expenses.

4.3.3 Food and other household consumer goods in the typecasting of *wabara* as *watumwa* (slaves)

Migrant labourers also fully depended on *wapwani* for the provision of their food and other important household consumer goods. Here, too, ethnicity played a pivotal role in guiding the organisation and dynamics of food access, offering yet another avenue for expressions of ethnic and racial differences between *wabara* and *wapwani.* Similar to the case of water, *wapwani* leveraged their advantaged position over Luo labourers to not only supply food and other consumer goods at very high prices, but to also undercut them through unfair weights and measurement. The food question in Mombasa –who produced it, its availability to migrant labourers, and at what price – was the cause of widespread poverty and malnutrition among migrant Luo rail and port workers, and this certainly contributed to the construction of their image as that of a people unable to take care of themselves and, in contrast to *wapwani*, wholly dependent on others for their survival – *just like watumwa slaves.*

Similar to housing, the food question in Mombasa was intrinsically tied to land. As previously mentioned, the reserve policy restricted access to Mombasa lands for migrant Luo labourers, as their tenure rights were solely recognised in Luoland. This effectively eliminated any possibility for them to engage in food production. Additionally, rail and port workers were unable to participate in small-scale, often-illegal farming on plots of absent landlords because they spent most of their days at their work stations. Consequently, these labourers thus had to rely on *wapwani* for the fulfilment of their entire dietary needs.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the wage labour policy in Mombasa assumed that a labourer's primary home was in their native reserve. Consequently, the colonial administration considered its responsibilities fulfilled if they were paid at rates sufficient to sustain a single man in their "temporary" place of employment. KURH hence assumed that its food responsibilities to migrant Luo labourers were discharged by providing monthly rations of food, which included staple starch (mostly maize but at times millet), tea leaves, and sugar. These rations were issued one day a month at the Mombasa railway locomotive sheds. The policy of provision of rations

[338] KNA/K/331/8/BOO Report of the Economic and Social Background of Mombasa Labour Disputes,

to wage labourers introduced a new dimension to the food question, particularly in its relation to class and the evolution of tastes and preferences of the labourers. Luo KURH labourers resented these rations, partly because they had begun to develop a preference for Mombasa's culinary repertoire, which was considered superior. But this was not the only contention. Because rations were disbursed one day a month and only at the locomotive sheds, only workers at the sheds were able to easily draw the rations. Despite this, the cost of the rations was deducted from all labourers' salaries at standard rates, even though the rations were of very low quality.[339]

Efforts aimed at shedding overt indicators of *ubara* identity among migrant Luo labourers led to an uptake of coastal culinary habits.[340] Such foods signified exclusivity and access to rare delicacies, which was one identifiable marker of *u'pwani* elitism. Instead of drinking maize/millet porridge in the morning (considered *ubara*), they began consuming milk tea accompanied with local *mandazi* and *mahamri* pastries. The wheat flour and ghee needed for preparation of *mandazi* were not, however, part of KURH rations. Many labourers therefore began eating at the various eateries that had sprung up along Kilindini Road, where a wide array of coastal dishes were offered.[341] Makupa, Mwembe Tayari, and Mwembe kuku, which had been prominent small-scale trading spots from as early as 1915, became popular stops for Luo workers looking to indulge in Mombasa's culinary experience on their way to and from work.[342]

As demands for Swahili-associated foods became high, hoarding and a thriving food and consumer goods black market emerged in Mombasa. In fact, this had begun during the depression years, when consumer goods were in low circulation, but the practice persisted into the 1940s, when it became apparent that *wabara* were anxious to associate with "elite" Swahili food. The commission of inquiry looking into KURH's labour unrest in Mombasa in 1939 reported that access to *wapwani* food was one of the major reasons for the widespread dissatisfaction among Luo labourers in Mombasa. The contents of this commission's report astonishingly elaborated the extent to which the *wabara /wapwani* divide played a key role in questions regarding food access in Mombasa, and how this caused Mombasa's unusual high cost of food. In the 1930s, the price of sugar and rice, two commodities the Luo particularly favoured as symbols of integration into Mombasa's culinary culture, sharply increased. Adulterated milk, which was hawked in the predominantly Luo settlements in Mombasa, was bought for as high as 10 cents for a quarter pint (40 cents a pint). On the mainland, where migrant Luo labourers were fewer, the same milk, unadulterated, went for 25 cents a pint. Sugar, too, was mainly found on the black market, where it was sold for 15 cents a cup. Meat was

[339] KNA/K/331/11 Report of the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Examine Labour Conditions in Mombasa.
[340] Juma Hamisi, O.I., 4 February 2018, Changamwe. The perceptions of *bara* and *pwani* food and its associations with class and prestige is a continuing theme in Mombasa's contemporary society. For example, Kenya's staple maize starch, *ugali/sima*, widely popular inland, is viewed as low-class *bara* food. Ethnic Luo in Mombasa with class ambitions strive to not consume it.
[341] KNA/K/331/892 Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Unrests at Mombasa; KNA/PC/COAST/1/10 Temporary Occupation Licences. File no.14 has licences given for occupation of plots for shops and stores.
[342] Ibid, KNA/PC/COAST/1/10 Temporary Occupation Licences.

bought in bulk from abattoirs on the island and from small-scale traders on the mainland and resold at extremely high rates in butcheries close to KURH labourers' quarters. Labourers who could not afford it, however, could instead purchase grilled meat on a stick, *mshikaki*, sold for 10 cents by traders along Kilindini Road. Alcohol bought at canteens run by *wapwani* went for 20 cents during the day, but prices shot up to 70 cents in the evening when Luo labourers began trickling in from their work stations. The price of vegetables, widely available among the Mijikenda, was unusually high in Luo settlements in Mombasa. Because of the high prices, food deficiencies were so common in Mombasa that a health survey in 1939 revealed that 90% of urban migrant labourers' children were malnourished.[343] The 10% of children who were getting enough food belonged to parents who were in the class of clerks and artisans at KURH, and thus received relatively higher wages. The table in Figure 4.3. shows consumption patterns and the monthly food budget for various African groups living in Mombasa in 1945. It reveals that the Luo labourer expended higher amounts on food items.

The prevalence of food poverty among migrant labourers was exacerbated by the practice of lending from shopkeepers, which had become rampant in Mombasa. Arab and Asian traders, who dominated the food trade, used a credit system to keep Luo labourers tied to their shops. Money lending by way of giving food kept many migrant labourers in debt as they were unable to find better solutions by dealing elsewhere for fear of prosecution. Labourers were hence kept in a cycle of debt taking and repayment, and were essentially restricted from breaking it even when unscrupulous dealers continued increasing prices of food at their expense.

[343] KNA/K/361/CHA Native Welfare in Kenya, 1944; KNA/DC/KFI/3/2 Administration.

Mdigo		*Mkamba*	
Man, wife, and four children		*Man, wife, and one child*	
Bread	15.00	Rice	6.00
Rice	20.00	Meat	6.00
Meat	15.00	Beans	1.80
Coconut	2.40	Vegetables	2.40
Vegetables	7.50	Ghee	1.80
Fruits	2.40	Coconut	2.40
Tea	1.80	**Total**	**22.10**
Total	**70.10**		
Mganda		*Jaluo*	
Man		*Man and wife*	
Bananas	1.50	Posho	5.00
Poatatoes	1.00	Rice	10.00
Rice	6.00	Meat	12.00
Meat	7.25	Fish	4.00
Total	**15.75**	Beans	2.00
		Vegetables	2.00
		Tea	1.50
		Milk	1.80
		Total	**38.30**
Kikuyu		*Luhya*	
Man		*Man and wife*	
Posho	6.50	Posho	5.00
Rice	5.00	Rice	5.00
Meat	2.00	Meat	6.00
Sugar	1.00	Sugar	1.00
Milk	1.20	Milk	1.00
Tea	1.00	Beans	1.00
Bananas	1.00	**Total**	**19.00**
Total	**17.70**		

Figure 4.3. Consumption patterns of food items and their cost for a number of ethnicities resident in Mombasa, 1945. The table reveals that food prices were significantly higher for ethnic Luo than for other wabara *groups. The* Digo, *whose amounts were highest are* wapwani *and their consumption patterns play within aspirations of association with those of the Swahili. Data derived from KNA/K/331/892 Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Unrests at Mombasa, 1945.*

4.3.4 Energy/Fuel

Energy is essentially the driver of human civilisation. Its availability and application is a primary factor determining civilisations' industrial capacity and thus, a society's material standard of living.[344] Since humanity's early mastery of fire, societies have progressively discovered new methods of harnessing and appropriating energy, in turn, effecting revolutionary changes to economies and environments. In colonial Mombasa, the availability of energy and fuel was a key concern for all segments of the population and each segment was focused on their particular needs being met. While European industrialists and administrators prioritised coal imports, the expansion of electricity networks and the development of the oil pipeline, Luo rail and port workers were primarily concerned with the availability of firewood. As migrant labourers made up the largest portion of Mombasa's population, firewood hence became the most sought-after source of energy in colonial Mombasa. The commodity was essential for cooking and lighting.

Firewood came into Mombasa by way of Arab merchants, who brought dhow-loads of the product to the Old Mombasa port. In the 1920s, the wood was sold to traders at a rate of Sh. 3.75 per score pieces measuring 4 feet by 3 inches. The product was then transported to the nearby market in Ndia Kuu, which was the biggest wood-trading market in Mombasa. At Ndia Kuu, the wood was split, bundled, and then sold to Arab traders who transported it to shops close to rail and port workers' quarters in Majengo and in other settlement areas. At Ndia Kuu, a three-piece bundle of split firewood cost 6 cents.

Due to work commitments, most Luo KURH labourers were unable to source their firewood directly from Ndia Kuu. Buying firewood from that particular location also required carrying the load to their living quarters, a long and tedious process for a labourer who lived, for example, in Changamwe, or even the much closer Majengo. Labourers with co-habiting partners could not even enlist their partner's help, as Mombasa society regarded carrying of firewood as lowly work. Indeed, Luo women refused to be seen carrying firewood.[345] At Majengo, the price of firewood trebled and this left labourers spending a disproportionate amount of their total income on firewood. The Willan Report revealed that, in 1937, workers who grossed Sh. 35 a month were forced to pay monthly costs ranging from Sh.7 to Sh. 8 on firewood. This was at a time when KURH employees were paid a fuel allowance of Sh. 2 per month.[346]

Fuel prices were part of the reason rail and port workers agitated for higher wages in the early 1930s. To manage this situation, the colonial government introduced control prices, and traders were liable for prosecution if they overcharged labourers for split wood. For instance, in 1939, two traders were prosecuted for price gouging, but this resulted in difficulties in obtaining

[344] Vaclav Smil, *Energy and Civilization: A History*, (London: Cambridge and The MIT press, 2017)
[345] KNA/K/331/8/BOO Report of the Economic and Social Background of Mombasa Labour Disputes
[346] C0/535/137/7 Extract from the report by the colonial office chief legal advisor, Mr. H. C. Willan.

wood, as traders refused to sell to workers connected to KURH.[347] The sale of fuel then went underground to the black market, where prices went up to 15 cents for a three-piece bundle.

4.4. Redrawing boundaries of social interactions

A common feature of development for many of East Africa's coastal settlements included the regular integration of groups of newcomers into the established social order.[348] For instance, Afro *wapwani* were often incorporated into Swahili elite society through marriage alliances. Similarly, former slaves, having adopted the distinctive characteristics of the slave culture of Islamic civilisations of the Middle East, could move from the ranks of *watumwa* slaves to *wangwana* (freeborn).[349] Mobility from one social category to another was thus a fairly ordinary process, albeit one that was strictly curated. Institutions facilitating integration were carefully monitored, controlled, and moderated. The higher echelons of society particularly emphasised integration through established structures, as it ensured a systemic balance of power amongst the different political and social hierarchies within Swahili society.

The introduction of British colonialism and the ensuing influx of large numbers of ethnic Luo into Mombasa's social sphere destabilised the established social order and power dynamics upon which Swahili society rested. Outnumbered by the incoming migrant workers and simultaneously constrained by British control, Mombasa elites became acutely aware of their waning ability to control the features of the new society developing around them. The colonial system's constant reliance on Luo labour certainly illuminated the crucial role this migrant group was playing in the development of a new modern Mombasa. Fearing loss of power to a group they had for centuries considered inferior, Mombasa elites responded to this situation by redefining the boundaries of social interactions with migrant groups, particularly those coming from the inland *bara*. A key feature of this reaction was the deliberate restriction of integration into Swahili society to *wapwani* alone. Two institutions –the *kafa'ah* system of marriage and the *ngoma* traditions – were the most impacted by these changes, as they had historically served as accessible vehicles for social mobility for commoners in Swahili society. Both institutions were indeed restructured to function as formidable barricades, safeguarding Swahili society against integration by inland migrants. In doing so, they hoped to preserve the distinctions of race, ethnicity, and social class central to Swahili and colonial hierarchies. The following discussions will reveal how the *kafa'ah* system of marriage and the *ngoma* traditions functioned

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[347] KNA/K/331/8/BOO Report of the Economic and Social Background of Mombasa Labour Disputes.

[348] Randall L. Pouwels, "Oral Historiography and the Shirazi of the East African Coast," *History in Africa 11* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 237–267; James de Vere Allen, "Swahili Culture and the Nature of East Coast Settlement," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 14 No.2 (Boston, MA: Boston University African Studies Center, 1981); Sarah Sadian, *Decoding Swahili Culture: An Introduction* (Joya Cultural Enterprise, 2014).

[349] Miura Toru and John Edward Philips, *Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa: A Comparative Study* (London: UNESCO, 2000). Unlike the Western world, where slave status was passed down through generations, slavery in Islamic society ideally lasted for a specified limited period.

to ensure that inland visitors were unable to integrate into Mombasa's elite society. This exclusion guaranteed that, regardless of their numerical dominance, migrant Luo remained at the bottom of Mombasa's social strata.

Kafa'ah marriages

In the early 1920s, one of the most striking features of Mombasa's demography was its abnormally high number of men. Of the 18,000 Africans enumerated in the 1921 census, for example, over 12,000 were men.[350] The majority of the women captured in this census were classified under the racial categories of Arab, Indian, and European, while African women populations on the island remained low. This image would be the official demographic face of Mombasa town throughout the 1920s, the feature being in glaring contrast to the numbers recorded on the mainland among the Mijikenda.[351] Despite extremely low recorded birth rates, Mombasa's population continued to grow through the 1930s.[352] These increases were entirely driven by immigration, particularly by Luo labourers coming to work at Mombasa's rapidly expanding rail and port projects. Up until the 1920s, a majority of these labourers lived as single bachelors throughout their service, while married men typically left their families behind in Luoland.[353] Singlehood was, however, not a lifestyle choice willingly embraced by these labourers. This was indicated by the prevalence of prostitution and sex work. As a Ramogi Welfare Association newsletter noted:

> *[A]s soon as these young men get employed in towns, they find they cannot do without women and begin keeping prostitutes […] all the money they earn is spent on them and perpetual drinking, where as their wives and children are suffering in the reserves without any help or information through correspondence.*[354]

Bachelorhood and prostitution were therefore only widespread because Luo labourers were denied access to *wapwani* women. This restriction was well articulated by Paul Ochieng.

> *One evening when I was about six years old, I was hurriedly shipped off to Nairobi to live with an uncle. In Nairobi, conversations regarding my mother were forbidden. It was quite strange. On coming of age, my curiosity regarding my birth mother's whereabouts were put to rest when it was revealed that she was a Giriama woman, and that she was forcefully removed from my father's house at the Mombasa Railway housing scheme where we lived. Her parents were displeased*

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[350] KNA/AWS/11/7 Mombasa Island Revised Town Planning Scheme, 1925.

[351] KNA/K/361/CHA. A.M. Champion, *Native Welfare in Kenya* (London: The Colonial Office Press, 1944). Among the *wanyika*/ Mijikenda ethnicities, the numbers of women were higher than those for men throughout the 1920s. This was considered a normal average.

[352] Ibid.

[353] Atieno Mwamba, O.I., 14 February 2018, Bangladesh, Mombasa. Though her father migrated to Mombasa sometime in the 1950s, Atieno's mother was able to join him in 1960. It was impossible to move earlier because the process of moving with family was expensive.

[354] KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/376 Institutions and Association, Riwruok Luo, 1945.

with the fact that she married a Luo man. My sister Akinyi, was carted off to Siaya where she lived with my paternal grandmother. My father worked as a clerk for the Kenya Railways until he retired in 1966. I remember when I was young, he was popular and well respected among his peers and fellow Luo; probably because he was one of the first young men from Anduro (Siaya) to be educated. His clerk job was also highly regarded. He was moreover witty and well dressed, and hence the envy of many a men as he was doing better than the average Luo labourer at the KURH. My father struck a friendship with my mother Kadzo, when he began frequenting her mandazi (local pastry popularly consumed as a tea accompaniment) stall. My uncle says that a relationship blossomed from their encounters, and he wished to marry her. My mother's family however forbade this union, insisting that she would not marry an uncivilised m'bara. After weeks of back and forth trying to negotiate with her family, she eloped and went to live with my father.

After cohabiting for more than seven years and two children later, my mother's family laid trap and forcefully removed her from our home, carting her off to some undisclosed location. Up to date, we have no idea where she is. I even tried making contact with the family in the 1980s because I wanted to reconnect with her, but my efforts were rebuffed. I have heard rumours that their initial plan was to take my mother and us in a common practise where the Giriama through rituals incorporate offspring of Giriama women into Giriama society while erasing identities erstwhile possessed.[355] *I and my sister escaped the kidnap only because we had gone off to play at a friend's house. That's why we were hurriedly shipped off to Nairobi and Siaya. My uncle told me that my father tried to lodge a complaint through the local Native Tribunal, but it was agreed that since he had not paid bride price (which my mother's family refused to negotiate) then she was legally, not his wife. They in any case, feigned ignorance of her whereabouts and insisted that she must have come to her senses and decided to abandon the "unholy" union with our father. My father refused to discuss this issue. He insisted he moved on with life, and he later married my stepmother who is a Luo.*

Social systems rooted in purity, hierarchy, and inflexibility tied to birth exist in numerous societies across the world. Most prominently, India's caste system, which is grounded in occupational hierarchy, assigns qualities to individuals, which directly influence their occupations and social roles.[356] The Indian caste system emphasises purity and avoids pollution of caste lines by limiting interactions within social and occupational groups.[357] A form of caste

[355] This practice of integration into Giriama society continues to date. Several interviewees revealed that Giriama women were the bane of inter-ethnic unions involving Luo men in Mombasa. Upon separation, which occurred quite often, Giriama women normally take the children of the union to their birthplace, where they are renamed and undergo rites to integrate them into Giriama society, thus losing their erstwhile Luo identities.

[356] R. K. Pruthi (ed), *Indian Caste System* (New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2004).

[357] Suraj Yengde, "Global Castes," in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 45, No.2 (2022), pp. 340–360.

system existed on the East African Swahili coast long before British occupation of the region. This system was passed down through generations and relied on the practice of endogamous family marriages. Endogamy was encouraged not only because it played an important role in binding family relations, but also because it ensured that kin and family wealth remained within extended family structures. Though endogamous marriages were the norm, it was not uncommon for marriages to occur between individuals from different families and social categories. Indeed, the Swahili emerged as a result of marriage alliances with Arab elites who wanted greater access to and firmer control over the East African coast's trade networks. Marriage, thus, was essentially a social institution with underlying economic motivations. However, when *bara* immigrants began arriving in Mombasa, the practice of endogamy changed focus. It became less about economic strategy and more about a pathological need to keep racial and ethnic lines pure. This new turn, was of course, the outcome of colonial racialism. Purity was institutionalised through *kafa'ah*, a social system aimed at minimising intermarriage between the so-called superior coastal bloodlines and the supposedly inferior *bara* bloodlines.

Kafaʾah was basically a gendered mechanism for regulating marriage, ensuring that women could only marry a social equal, while men – especially Arab men – could incorporate less prestigious groups using the mechanism of patrilineality.[358] *Wapwani* groups along the Kenyan coast would, however, begin reimagining *kafaʾah* and attributing new meanings to the practice in the wake of imperial domination. During this period, identities became core features for individual and group positionality in the colonial economy. Colonial classification of racial groups, and the subsequent duties and responsibilities assigned to each category –such as taxation, wages, labour provision– were the main drivers of these reimaginations of *kafaʾah*, and the attendant efforts by Arab and *wapwani* to keep racial and ethnic lines pure. In Mombasa, *wabara* Africans bore the brunt of colonial extraction and, moreover, lived in the most deplorable conditions. It thus became vital for *wapwani* in general, but *wanyika* in particular, to disassociate from this African identity.[359] Cousin and in-group marriages thus became reinforced and acquired new symbolism as the structure upholding not only social status, but also keeping racial/ethnic lines pure along the Swahili coast.

Ngoma traditions

From the *Rhaza* dance of Arab warriors readying for a raid, to the mocking *Taarab* songs used by women to challenge authority, to the celebratory *Ngoma ya fimbo* danced at Swahili weddings, music and dances have long been utilised on the East African coast not only as forms

[358] Nathaniel Mathews, "Imagining Arab Communities" p.139.

[359] KNA/CQ/1/19/25 Annual Reports Mombasa 1925-32. Several petitions made by Swahili and Afro Arab groups were requests for recognition of their Arab status and the reneging of their categorisation as African. The report of 1925 confirms the colonial governments' dilemmas of categorising *wangwana* as "..mostly, they (petitioners) are unable to trace unbroken pedigrees of descent through males from Arabs.." The presence of *"Bara"* blood in *wanyika's* lineage thus significantly diminished their chances of accessing Swahili elitism.

of entertainment, but also as frameworks for conveying particular political and social messages. In Swahili society, dances were meticulously and elaborately organised, with every aspect – from participants, to the costumes, performances, and even the audience – carrying within them some overt or subtle meaning. The right to participate in dance performances was in particular directly linked to Swahili ascriptions of privileges to an individual's position and social status.[360]

A new form of dance tradition, *ngoma* (pl. *ngomas*), emerged on the East African Swahili coast from the early 1910s, when British occupation began taking root. Its development was directly linked to *wapwani* efforts to navigate the newly forming urban society emerging from British colonialism and the influx of a significant stream of migrant labourers into their cultural space. The *wapwani* were particularly concerned about the potential blurring of stratified social lines caused by the growing presence of *bara* visitors, whose numbers increased annually as the colonial state scrambled to fulfil its insatiable appetite for cheap labour. *Ngoma* then became a framework through which distinctions between coastal *wapwani* and *wabara* identities could be asserted, and the demarcation of social lines performed. Among the many *ngoma* traditions to emerge in colonial Mombasa, the *Beni* and *Lelemama ngomas* were particularly relevant to the question of *u'bara* and *u'pwani* identities. *Beni* and *Lelemama* became avenues for social mobility for *wapwani* as they provided a pathway for marginalised members of this group to integrate into the higher ranks of Swahili society. *Ngoma* indeed, provided an avenue for the most vulnerable of the non-Swahili *wapwani* -the Afro *wanyika*- the opportunity to become Swahili.[361]

As previously mentioned, there were various avenues through which ordinary *wapwani* could access Swahili elitism. While marriage was the most common entry point, other methods included an individual making what was considered significant contributions to the development of Swahili tradition and refinement. For example, individuals could access Swahili elitism by showing exceptional bravery during battle, or even by being a great poet. Through *ngoma*, artistic talent and ritual expertise became vehicles for non-Swahilis to gain recognition and rescue their descendants from life at the bottom of the Swahili social order. Participation in coastal *ngoma* traditions was forbidden to migrant inland communities, including the Luo.[362] This was certainly aimed at hindering their chances of social mobility in Mombasa, while reinforcing the perception that *u'bara* status was immutable.

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[360] R. Skene, "Arab and Swahili Dances and Ceremonies" *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 47, (1917), pp.413–434. While dances were normally performed by certain identity categories, some dances could be performed by a wide array of individuals. The sites where shared dances occurred however, were the main codes revealing identities of the performers. The *Mwaribe* dance was for example performed indoors by freeborn women, but outdoors by slave women.

[361] Rebecca Gearhart, "Ngoma Memories: How Ritual Music and Dance Shaped the Northern Kenya Coast," *African Studies Review*, 48 No.3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 21–47.

[362] Strobel, "From Lelemama to Lobbying."

Beni is the Swahili derivative of the word "band." This *ngoma* was a competitive team dance involving men and women singers, dancers, and musicians. The performance featured men dancing in line formations while the women danced together in circular formations. *Ngoma* performances were generally displays of ethnic and racial supremacy, expressed outwardly by integrating symbols of power contemporary to that period. For instance, *Beni* bands incorporated European military motifs into performances, with participants wearing naval-style uniforms and playing brass instruments. In Mombasa, *Beni* street performances often included models of battleships.[363] Band leaders wore dignified attire, complete with caps of rank, epaulettes, and rows of fountain pens in their breast pockets. The *Lelemama* dance, on the other hand, was a women-only indoor performance that originated in Zanzibar and gained prominence between 1920–1945.[364] *Lelemama* dance festivities spanned several days, beginning with the preparation of lavish feasts and culminating in the performance of the dance. During the performance, women had the opportunity to purchase prestigious titles by contributing money to the dance group.

This dissertation does not aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of the system and organisation of *ngoma* dances, as this has been thoroughly addressed in previous works. Notably, Ranger[365] studied the emergence and history of *Beni* dances in Mombasa and Zanzibar; Strobel[366] examined practices of *Lelemama* dance in Mombasa; and Franken[367] surveyed the general features of an array of Swahili dances, including *ngomas*. The focus here is limited to *Lelemama* and *Beni ngomas* in so far as the dance relates to *wabara* Luo labourers. Specifically, this discussion analyses how *ngoma* performances restricted their attempts to integrate into Swahili society and hindered their efforts at social mobility in Mombasa's stratified society.

As Luo KURH labourers began to dominate Mombasa's demography and economic landscape, *wapwani* adopted *ngoma* traditions, using them as protective frameworks to guard against the unregulated social change instigated by those they considered outsider strangers. Through *ngoma*, the definitions of *u'Swahili* (the state of being Swahili) were reassessed and Afro *wapwani* of low status – some of whom had previously been ranked amongst slaves – were given an opportunity to become part of an elite in-group.[368] This prospect was not extended to migrant Luo, who were strictly excluded from participation. *Ngomas* also became platforms for members of the coastal elite to showcase their wealth and social status, which as previous discussions have revealed, was something migrant *wabara* did not possess. For instance,

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[363] KNA/CQ1/19/25 Annual Reports 1931–1945. The 1939 report talks of the notoriety of street *ngomas* in Mombasa.

[364] Strobel, "From Lelemama to Lobbying"

[365] Terence O. Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa 1890–1970: The Beni Ngoma* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975).

[366] Strobel, "From Lelemama to Lobbying"

[367] Marjorie Ann Franken, *Anyone Can Dance: A Survey and Analysis of Swahili Ngoma Past and Present (Africa, Kenya)* (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, 1986).

[368] Gearhart, "Ngoma Memories"

funding a *Lelemama ngoma* was considered to be a significant contribution to the advancement of Swahili culture, an act that conferred immense respect (*heshima*) and elevated the sponsor to the respectable ranks of Mombasa society. As a result, Afro indigene *wapwani* competed to fund *ngoma* dances, which were exorbitantly expensive affairs, in order to buy *heshima* in Mombasa's social sphere.

Ngomas were a notorious feature of Mombasa's social landscape from the early 1920s, growing steadily in popularity through the 1950s. The performance styles accompanying these dances were deemed scandalous by local administration, prompting repeated discussions about banning them.[369] Their proliferation in the exact same period as the surge of *wabara* immigration revealed *wapwani* efforts to reassert established boundaries of social interaction by reinvigorating notions of class and cultural purity. Ranger has argued that the incorporation of European military themes into *Beni* dances was indicative of desires for new modes of life aligned with the powerful European.[370] These military motifs simultaneously served as allegories for the Swahili community's readiness to embrace militancy to defend coastal elitism against *bara* infiltration. The blocking of migrant Luo from participation in *ngoma* traditions became a potent metaphor for their inability to integrate or alter their social status within Mombasa's social ranks. In probable reference to their losing of the battle for ethnic and racial superiority, *ngoma* traditions of the *Beni* and *Lelemama* variants suddenly disappeared from Mombasa's social scene after the gaining of independence, which saw the incorporation of the Mombasa section of the Zanzibar protectorate into the Republic of Kenya. Today, remnants of these *ngomas* can only be seen at festivals, where their performances are stripped of the original references and symbolism of class.

Conclusion

The interaction between colonial racialism and Swahili identity hierarchies worked to produce the defining character of Fanon's "Manichean colonised world" within Mombasa's social landscape. Colonial Mombasa indeed manifested a duality of social privilege and material conditions, with migrant Luo rail and port workers occupying a marginalised position contrasted against their *wapwani* counterparts. The motifs representing Luo *u'bara* identity were informed by marginalisation, symbolising exclusion and deprivation. In contrast, the markers of *u'pwani* identity were grounded on elite exclusivity.

Mombasa society actively participated in upholding the structural systems that functioned to ensure that their *wabara* counterparts' material conditions appropriately reflected their assumed social standing. Migrant Luo labourers, for example, were offered limited housing options and, consequently, lived in conditions so deplorable that the *Mombasa Times* likened them to animal

[369]KNA/CQ/1/19/25 Annual Reports, Mombasa District 1932–1939. Mombasa Annual Report of 1933. The DC is of the opinion that *ngoma* should be banned as it was the reason for the rise in poverty levels amongst the poorer sections of coastal indigenes. Afro *wapwani* in particular allotted considerable resources towards funding *ngoma* activities in pursuit of acceptance into the upper echelons of Swahili society.

[370] Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa.*

habitats. These were some of the worst living conditions ever recorded for urban wage labourers in the entire colony and protectorate of Kenya. The housing options offered to Luo labourers included accommodation in overcrowded Majengo, and lodgings in the swampy lands adjacent to Frere Town and in the fringes of Mombasa town where social amenities were non-existent. Sanitation was generally lacking in these areas and, consequently, diseases including tuberculosis, cholera, and plague caused by rat infestations were rampant. *Wapwani* additionally maintained systems that made it difficult for migrant KURH labourers to purchase reasonably priced water. Water was sold cheaply in the hours when Luo workers – a majority of whom were bachelors – were engaged at their workstations, but prices dramatically shot up in the evening when these labourers clocked out. The stigmatising of water carrying, furthermore, left the Luo indirectly obligated to use the services of water carriers, and a significant portion of their meagre income was thus spent on acquiring this vital commodity. The disparity in access to resources like housing and water created a stark visual representation of the duality between the "dirty *m'bara*" and the "clean *m'pwani*."

Luo labourer's *ubara* identity was further evident in their poverty and hunger. This was because ethnicity played a central role in shaping the organisation and nature of interactions relating to food access, presenting yet another avenue for expressing ethnic and racial differences between *wabara* and *wapwani*. Food was categorised as either unassumingly local or elite, with variations coded in elitism being sold at very high prices. Mombasa operated a lucrative black market for goods associated with prestige, such as sugar, which was intentionally priced to restrict access for the urban proletariat. Luo labourers were often driven into debt and kept in a constant debt-for-food cycle, which made it nearly impossible to engage other traders for fear of prosecution. Beyond food, other essential consumer goods were also sold at exaggerated prices in colonial Mombasa. Firewood, for example, which was the main source of fuel for Luo labourers, was sold at very high prices in areas closer to their quarters and was cheaper where *wapwani* lived. The price disparities between goods available to Luo labourers and those accessible to *wapwani* were so pronounced that even the elite cadre of Luo KURH labourers, i.e. those who earned what was considered higher wages, were reported to have malnourished children.

Swahili elite society nevertheless recognised the need to expand its base to protect itself against the rising numbers of Luo migrant labourers coming into the town's social landscape. Invitations to Swahili exclusivity were therefore extended to the African *wanyika* population, granting them access to *kafaʾah* marriages and *ngoma* traditions. The exclusion of Luo labourers from these symbols of inclusion served as a marker of their perpetual marginalisation and reinforced the notion that *ubara* identity and social position were immutable. By the early 1930s, however, marginalised Luo rail and port workers began to mobilise and adopt strategies to challenge their positionality in Mombasa's social landscape. The following chapter will analyse these responses and survival strategies, exploring how they enabled the Luo to survive Mombasa's social hierarchies. These efforts played a significant role in the transformative demographic and political changes that reshaped Mombasa in the years running up to Kenya's independence.

CHAPTER FIVE

A KAVIRONDO TOWN: MOMBASA URBAN LANDSCAPE IN THE CREATION OF A DIASPORA LUO COMMUNITY

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter elaborated on the matter of colonial racialism and how it functioned to develop class hierarchy and the attendant *wabara/wapwani* ethnic divide that was a hallmark feature of colonial Mombasa's social and identity politics. Missing from that analysis, however, was KURH migrant Luo labourers' response to this established system of class hierarchisation. How did they navigate the challenges presented by their *ubara* identity in Mombasa? What measures were taken to counteract *wapwanis'* rejection of their personhood? What were the counternarratives offered as representations of Luo ethnicity in Mombasa? In simple terms, what were their survival strategies in Mombasa, and how did these strategies contribute to the development of Mombasa's demographic and social landscape? The answer to these questions can be found by scrutinising KURH's migrant Luo labourers' efforts to build community. This chapter will hence analyse the processes by which a diaspora[371] Luo community developed amongst KURH labourers in Mombasa. The diaspora urban Luo community was the cumulative outcome of the responses of Luo labourers to counter the colonial order, and Mombasa's resistance of their integration into Swahili elitism. Among the responses adopted was the embracing of a pan-Luo identity, accomplished by consolidating fragmented and morphable features of various existing Luo identities into a single, concrete cultural entity. This process worked to create numerical strength, a most valuable currency that was later effectively used for political mobilisation and the negotiation of better terms of service at KURH. Other responses included the foundation of a *new Luoness*, a neo-Luo identity as it were, which redefined the material and cultural markers of Luo identity to align with modernity. A modern "Luoness" challenged Swahili stratification indexes in Mombasa, and, in the years after World War II, offered the Luo an opportunity to participate in the Africanisation[372] programme adopted by KURH in preparation for Kenya's independence. Ultimately, however, the emergence of a diaspora community was driven by the migration of Luo women into Mombasa town. These women were the intermediary force that solidified the community's presence and contributed to the emergence of permanent Luo households in Mombasa, a factor that

[371] The term diaspora is used within the framework of African reserves. Because ethnic groups were confined within specified native reserves, the Luo community in Mombasa was therefore a group dispersed from the Kavirondo reserve.

[372] Britain introduced the Africanisation policy after World War II as part of its decolonisation agenda. Africanisation included the integration of Africans into the bureaucratic apparatus of the state. For example, more Africans were allowed membership to the legislative assembly. Regarding the KURH, Africans were finally allowed seats on labour councils discussing railway workers' conditions. It was also in this period that the first Africans rose to management positions at KURH.

eventually produced the dramatic shift in the town's demographic and spatial map. Mombasa transitioned from its previous Arab/Swahili numerical dominance to cement its identity as an African town. These demographic changes gradually contested the town's positionality as part of a sovereign protectorate. The resulting tensions dramatically played out in the late 1950s as the struggle for Kenya's independence took shape.

5.2. Mombasa and the making of a Kavirondo Town

Walking into the infamous[373] Bangladesh informal settlement in Mombasa, I am greeted by the sounds of "*Bim en Bim*" a classic *benga** tune by the famous Luo musician D.O. Misiani. The song, heavily laden with political metaphor, electrifies the already charged political atmosphere as the 2017 general elections loom. Misiani, originally from Shirati, a region in Tanzania's Mara province, built his music career in Kenya, where the Kenya Luo constitute a majority of his fan base. A few paces ahead, fishmongers try to entice potential buyers with remarkable displays of *omena* (Lake Victoria sardine) and *budo* (smoked tilapia), sourced all the way from Lake Victoria in Western Kenya. Overheard snippets of conversation confirm that Dholuo is Bangladesh's de facto lingua franca. For any ethnic Luo venturing into this locale, there is an instant feeling of familiarity, an instant sense of belonging – dare I say, of home. Bangladesh has *seemingly*[374] translocated Western Kenya's Luo landscape – language, culture, community networks, and interactions, amongst other ethnic symbols – into the diaspora. This setting is mirrored in other settlements in Mombasa that have a majority ethnic Luo population, such as Magongo, Kongowea, huge parts of Port Rietz, Owino Uhuru, and *Kisumu Ndogo* "small Kisumu," all of which exhibiting similar cultural aesthetics.

Beyond the scene in Bangladesh, a discerning visitor to Mombasa cannot help but notice the conspicuously large number of ethnic Luo living in this coastal city. The Luo occupy spaces in trade and business – Kongowea market, for example, boasts a sizable number of its Luo traders. As the third largest voting block in Mombasa, the Luo are also key players in Mombasa's political scene. A number of current members of Mombasa's County Assembly (MCA's) are ethnic Luo, while since the introduction of multi-party politics, political affiliations have leaned towards support for Raila Odinga. Odinga is an ethnic Luo politician whose charisma and personality is larger than life, to the extent that he has been described as the "enigma in Kenyan politics."[375] Hezron Bollo Awiti, a Mombasa-based ethnic Luo politician and businessman who once served as the Member of Parliament (MP) for Nyali constituency, entered Mombasa's

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[373] Bangladesh was thrown into the national limelight in 2010 when community members of a local CBO adopted their own currency of exchange, known as Banglapesa.

*Benga is a popular genre of music amongst ethnic Luo.

[374] This chapter will reveal that "Luoness" does not owe its origins to the rural; it is rather a product of interactions and exchange between the urban and the rural.

[375] This title is directly lifted from Babafeni Badejo's *Raila Odinga: An Enigma in Kenyan Politics* (Lagos and Nairobi: African Books Collective, 2006). Raila Odinga has been a consistent figure in the history of the development of Kenya's democracy.

gubernatorial race in 2022 with ambitions to clinching the Governor's seat by merely capturing the Luo vote.[376] Unlike the Mijikenda (majority in Mombasa) and Kamba (second majority), who split their votes among the various political parties, the Luo typically vote as a block, and Awiti based his campaign on the expectation that this pattern would hold. The Luo are also visible in Mombasa's general social landscape. A regular feature of the coastal town's nightlife, for example, includes nightclubs hosting traditional Luo *ohangla* and *benga* bands. A curious observer might wonder how Mombasa's landscape came to be littered with pockets of Luoness, despite Luoland being situated hundreds of kilometres away, on the farthest edge of Kenya from Mombasa.

The features of the current Luo community in Mombasa, like all societies and cultures, are the result environmental adaptation.[377] The development of these features can be traced back to migrant Luo rail and port workers' attempts to adapt to Mombasa's hierarchical social space. The town's identity politics systems and networks had relegated Luo labourers to the bottom of its economic and social hierarchy, and until the late 1940s, they embodied Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. By hierarchising Luo labourers' personhood vis à vis that of the *wapwani*, Mombasa inadvertently incentivised the Luo to adapt in order to survive. In pre-colonial Luoland, community building had proven effective for navigating precarious conditions, and migrant Luo port and rail workers began reproducing similar community-building efforts when they encountered challenges to their *ubara* identity in Mombasa. Surviving in Mombasa therefore required Luo labourers to employ strategies that had been previously used to survive strenuous conditions in Luoland, while simultaneously incorporating newly introduced concepts of elitism to shape an identity fit for modern times. These undertakings not only helped the Luo endure, but they also elevated their position within Mombasa's colonial hierarchy. By the early 1950s, KURH migrant labourers' concerns had effectively moved to occupy Mombasa's highest political and administrative priorities.

The ecological landscape of Luoland has historically been inconsistent, marked by periodic cycles of abundance and scarcity. Early missionaries' journals and scholarly anthropological works reveal that, in the latter years of the 19th century, rainfall patterns varied significantly. Some months experienced abundant rainfall, facilitating extensive agriculture, while other months were characterised by dry spells and extreme heat.[378] The environment closer to Lake Victoria was particularly arid, and weather patterns there tended to be more erratic. In response, Luo social and economic systems evolved to create structures that could sustain communities

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[376] Onyango Ochieng, "Luos in Mombasa Divided over Shahbal, Nassir, Omar," in *The Star Newspaper*, Kenya, 24 January 2022. Accessed on 20 November 2022 at: https://www.the-star.co.ke/counties/coast/2022-01-23-luos-in-mombasa-divided-over-shahbal-nassir-omar/.

[377] Robin I.M. Dunbar, "Behavioural Adaptation," Howard Morphy and G.A. Harrison, *Human Adaptation*, (London: Routledge, 1998).

[378] Charles W. Hobley, "Kavirondo," *The Geographic Journal*, 12, No.4 (London: The Royal Geographic society, 1898), pp. 361–372; KEN.2.1. Life story and personal reflections of Father Arnold Witlox (1870, 1903–1938); NST.1.1-1.32 Collection of Bishop N. Stam's papers and personal letters to family while living in the mission of the Kisumu Vicariate, 1902–1939. Mill Hill missionaries archive in Oosterbeek.

and ensure continuity of life through the seasonal cycles of plenty and want. Family relations and communal living became highly regarded, and social networks developed to become the primary framework for social welfare and communal social protection.[379]

Southall argued that a community's social systems and economic structures determine its ability to adapt and respond to change.[380] Agreeing with this sentiment, Sheikh provided compelling arguments evincing the embeddedness of traditions in modernity. He posited that modern states are not solely shaped by external hegemonic powers, but rather that local cultures contain the seeds to spur development towards modern outlooks.[381] Moreover, Sheikh emphasised that local traditions exist within and shape modernity. Luo social structures and ethos of communal living – anchored in communal networks as the main social protection mechanisms – became important blueprints when it came to adapting to Mombasa's rejection of their *ubara* identity. The experiences and adaptive practices of migrant Luo port and rail workers certainly influenced the consolidation of previously differentiated populations of Luo language speakers into a single constituency, which came to identify as the ethnic Luo community. This consolidated ethnic constituency played a major role in driving changes within the KURH especially after World War II, and migrant labourers' welfare moved to dominate conversation and administrator's concerns as the colonial state gradually moved to become a welfare state in the decolonisation era of the 1950s.

5.3. Early attempts at Luo unity and formations of a homogenous Luo identity

Efforts to create a single homogenous ethnic Luo identity had been attempted by various Luo-speaking groups prior to contact with European colonists. These attempts met with varying degrees of success. For example, they were able to assimilate the Kagwa, an originally Bantu group living in Asembo and Uyoma but the Nyan'gori rebuffed their integration efforts and instead advanced further east as the Luo moved to settle in their previous homelands around Lake Victoria.[382] The search for Luo unity was significantly revived with the advent of British colonialism. Carotenuto convincingly argued that this cultural and linguistic group originated in the community networks moulded in Kenya's colonial urban areas, and that the group emerged in response to colonial labour and social policies.[383] The colonial urban environment, where a majority of Luo men had been compelled to seek fortune and better life, encouraged the amalgamation of the various heterogenous Luo-speaking groups into a single, consolidated unit. In Mombasa's particular case, the distance between Luoland and Mombasa, and the migrant labourer's marginalised position in Mombasa's colonial and Swahili social spaces, created the framework for the development of a previously elusive Luo unity. Because migrant

[379] Bethwell A. Ogot, *History of the Southern Luo* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967); Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, "Luo Tribes and Clans," in *Rhodes Livingstone Journal*, 7, (1949).
[380] Aidan Southall, *Social Change in Modern Africa* (London: Routledge, 1961).
[381] Haroon Sheikh, *Embedding Technopolis: Turning Modernity into a Home* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2017).
[382] Ogot, *History of the Southern Luo*.
[383] Carotenuto, *Cultivating an African Community*.

Luo port and rail workers largely reproduced existing cultural methods for surviving strenuous circumstances, a proper study of the processes that shaped this urban Luo identity demands knowledge of earlier attempts at these endeavours. Therefore, this section will begin by providing a portrait of early pre-colonial attempts to consolidate Luo identity.

The Luo language is part of a cluster of languages belonging to the Western branch of the Nilotic family, collectively referred to as the Lwo language.[384] Lwo speakers are spread out across various parts of Eastern and Central Africa, ranging from the Upper Nile Valley in the Sudan to Central Uganda, North-eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Western Kenya, and the Mara region of Northern Tanzania. Ethnic groups speaking the Lwo language include, among others, the Shilluk and Bor (Sudan), the Anywak (Sudan, Ethiopia), the Lang'o, Acholi, Padhola and Alur (Uganda), and the Luo of Kenya and Tanzania. While each Luo ethnicity shares linguistic roots, they have evolved distinct cultural tenets of identity over time. Since this study focuses on the Mombasa rail and port Luo labourers, whose origins can be traced back to Western Kenya, this chapter does not delve into the early history of the entire Lwo group, but rather it will centre specifically on the identity formation of the Luo of Kenya. Henceforth, the term Luo will denote the Luo of Kenya.

The pre-colonial boundaries of Luo identity have been established through interdisciplinary studies of the tradition of various Lwo groups. Historians and anthropologists, including Ogot,[385] Okello-Ayot,[386] Mboya,[387] Evans-Pritchard,[388] and Wilson,[389] have produced work that is generally accepted as authoritative, despite ongoing arguments challenging their methodological approaches. Notably, Okot P'Bitek posited that it was impossible to fully understand the exact origins of Lwo people (including the Luo) because traditions, in particular oral traditions that survived until the 19th century (at the time when professional study of the Luo began), were more concerned with legitimising institutions that existed within Luo society than on the fundamentals of the origins of the people.[390] Okot's assertions are supported by other scholars, including Campbell, whose analysis of the oral traditions of ethnic groups, including the Tutsi, exposed a similar trend. Campbell revealed that Tutsi traditions were skewed towards aligning with the European Hamitic theory, which granted them perceived racial superiority in relation to their counterparts in Central Africa.[391] Regardless of the gaps in

[384] C.C. Wrigley, "The Problem of the Lwo," *History in Africa,* 8 (1981) p. 219.
[385] Ogot, *History of Southern Luo,*
[386] Henry Okello-Ayot, *A History of the Luo Abasuba of Western Kenya: From AD 1760–1940* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1979).
[387]Mboya, *Luo Kitgi gi timbegi.*
[388] Evans-Pritchard, "Luo Tribes and Clans," .
[389] Wilson, *Luo Customary Laws and Marriage Laws*.
[390] Okot p'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1971).
[391] John R. Campbell, "Who are the Luo? Oral Tradition and Disciplinary Practices in Anthropology and History," *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 18, No. 1 (Taylor and Francis, 2006), pp. 73–87.

scholarship on Luo identity, the aforementioned interdisciplinary works provide a window through which we can get a glimpse of the early attempts at forming a consolidated Luo identity.

The Luo's first dispersal point is believed to have been the Bahr-el-Ghazal region of Sudan. From the 15th century, the Luo began a southward movement through Uganda, with some groups settling at various points through their journey, while others continued pushing further south. This movement was primarily driven by conflict and diminishing resources, culminating in their arrival in Western Kenya at the beginning of the 16th century. Upon settling in Kenya, the Luo did not form a homogenous cultural or political unit. Each patrimonial group or *Oganda*, lived within a settlement called a *gweng'* (pl. *gwenge*), and several *gwenge* formed alliances to create autonomous territorial units called *piny* (pl. *pinje.*) *Pinje* were therefore multi-clan and multi-ethnic political groupings.[392] By the end of the 19th century, several *pinje* dotted the regions of Western Kenya surrounding Lake Victoria. Each *piny* was governed by a group of elders from the *gwenge* and this formed an assembly known as the *buch piny*. This assembly was the primary political institution, responsible for maintaining law and order and managing the affairs of the *piny*. For example, the *buch piny* had the power to declare war or to tweak existing customs to adapt to contemporary needs. *Pinje* in Kenya – examples include Asembo, Uyoma, Gem, Alego, Nyakach, Kano, Ugenya, Kisumo, Seme, Karachuonyo, Karungu – were responsible for teaching the youth about their community history, including their migration to Siaya, their first settlement point, and their dispersal throughout the Central and South Nyanza regions.

Initial attempts at forming a homogenous Luo polity in Kenya are closely linked to Luo encounters with Bantu groups during their migratory movements within Western Kenya. The Luo arrived in three waves: the first group was the Joka-Jok, followed by the Joka-Owiny, and, finally, the Joka-Omollo. Another Luo group, the Abasuba, (also referred to as Luo-Abasuba) formed when the Luo living on Rusinga and Mfangano Islands on Lake Victoria welcomed and gradually assimilated Abakantu refugees from the Buganda Kingdom on the eve of colonial expansion. Abasuba dispersal continued well into the early years of the colonial era, and they are testament to the unification processes that shaped the Luo community in the 20th century. These processes were largely mediated by the urban Luo. The first wave of Luo migrants, Joka-Jok, endeavoured to establish political hegemony in Western Kenya by creating distinct Luo societies, a move vehemently resisted by neighbouring Bantu and Nilotic societies. Multiple conflicts ensued and Western Kenya became a hub of great insecurity.[393] The arrival of the second wave of Luo from Uganda, Joka-Owiny, however, created favourable conditions for dominance and the formation of a unified polity as envisioned by the Joka-Jok. The Joka-Owiny's arrival increased the population of Western Kenya, sparking new struggles for the limited resources around the lake basin and making it more difficult for small groups and family

[392] Bethwell Ogot, "The Construction of Luo Identity and History," *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 33.

[393] Matthias Ogutu, "Forts and Fortification in Western Kenya (Marachi and Ugenya) in the 19th Century," *Transafrican Journal of History*, 20 (Nairobi: Gideon Were publications, 1991), pp. 77–96.

units to survive independently. This scarcity facilitated processes of amalgamation and identity redefinition, eventually leading to the development of larger and more viable polities.[394] As the different Luo groups began to appreciate the importance of patrimonial lineages, memories of unity were traced back to their dispersal points in Uganda.[395] This sense of unity enabled the Luo to conquer neighbouring Bantu groups, who were either pushed further away from the lake or integrated within the ranks of Luo social and political networks. The Luo ultimately dominated the areas surrounding Lake Victoria. Despite this dominance, the assembly of Luo *pinje* still regarded each other as distinct ethnic groups, even though each acknowledged that they shared a common history and patrimony. On the eve of European colonisation, the Luo were, as shown in the map in Figure 5.1, a segmentary lineage-based, multiethnic community.

[394] Ogot, *The Jii speakers.*

[395] Gilbert Ogutu, *Ker Jaramogi is dead, who shall lead my people*? (Nairobi: Palwa Research Services, 1995).

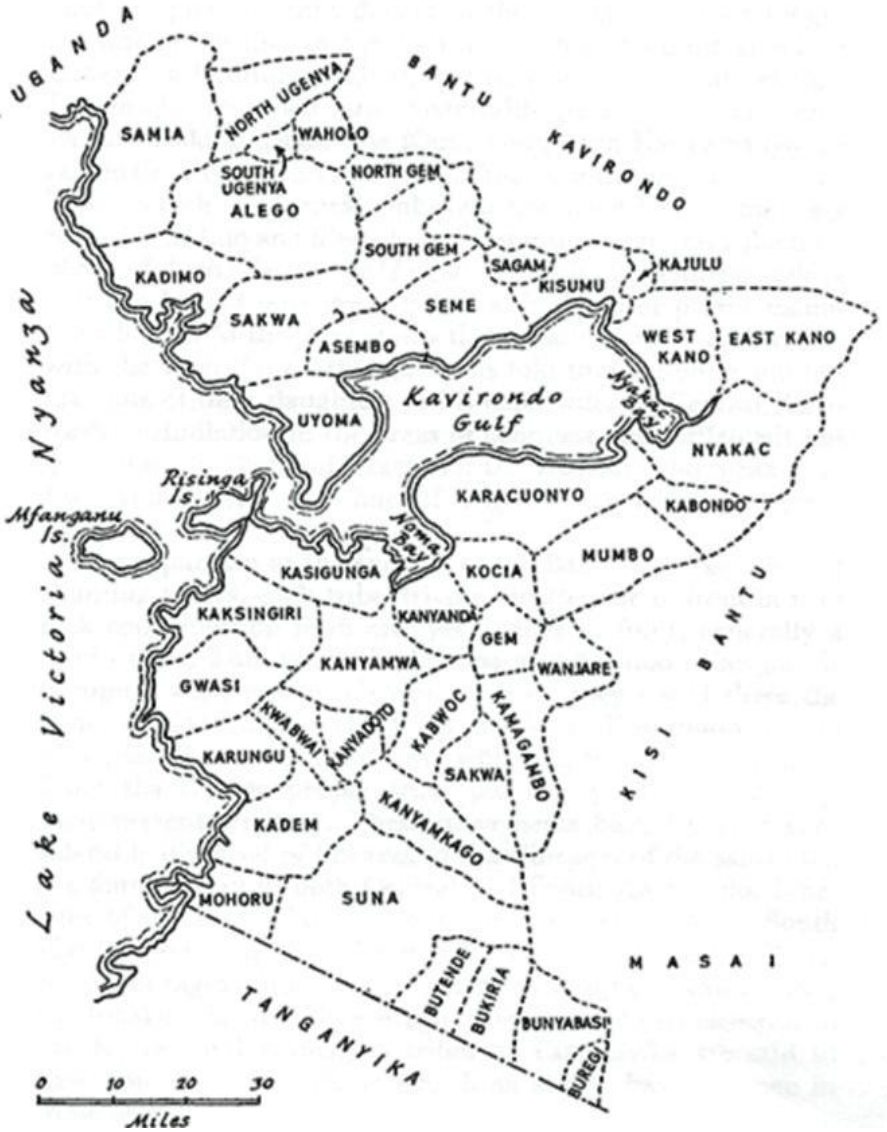

Figure 5.1. Evans Pritchard's mapping of Luo pinje*, and ethnic groups assimilated or partly assimilated by the Luo in the early 20th century. Differentiation continued during the colonial period. For example, by the end of the 1950s, the Samia had broken away to become part of the (Aba)Luhya. The Bunyabasi, Buregi, and Bukiria also incorporated to form the (Aba)Kuria ethnic group*. Map source: Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Position of Women in Primitive Societies and Other Essays in Social Anthropology* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 207.

5.4. Mombasa's colonial landscape in the construction of KURH labourers pan-Luo identity.

Africa did not present its conquerors with the framework of an indigenous imperial state, nor a uniform system of centralised rituals of honour and rank.[396] How, then, was Britain to integrate its worldviews into African social, legal, and political systems? How were Africans to assimilate British ideologies of social hierarchy, which was the framework that was to be applied in determining positionality in the colonial economy? Ranger postulated that this end was achieved by formulating and inventing traditions of nativity for African peoples. He argued that Britain's conception of "nations" for the multiplicity of cultural and linguistic groups occupying certain regions was intended to create frameworks of control that could be easily incorporated into British imperial ideology. In Kenya, the nationalities/ethnicities thus created were a significant factor in determining positionality within the colonial enterprise's organisational framework.[397]

The British colonial administration ascribed the term "Kavirondo" to the multiplicity of cultural polities residing in Western Kenya. It is not clear when the usage of this term began, but missionary and trader journals from as early as the 1870s referred to the "Kavirondo people."[398] Because of the linguistic variations evident in the so-called Kavirondo group, the unit was further differentiated into the Bantu Kavirondo, a segment comprising more than twenty Bantu-speaking ethnic groups, and the Nilotic Kavirondo, who became the Luo. The fabrication and distinction of the two Kavirondos was an arbitrary classification in the sense that the Gusii, who also lived around the Kavirondo Gulf and shared cultural similarities with both groups, were excluded from the Kavirondo classification. The "Kavirondo nation" was thus a colonial fabrication, created to align African societies with British conceptions of the nation state for administrative purposes. Ranger argued that this distortion of history instilled Africans with a sense of modernity by presenting them with a constructed tradition and history similar to that of the "advanced" colonialists.[399] In the case of migrant Luo rail and port workers, essentialising ethnicity was a matter of co-opting and reproducing these British concepts of nationality, by appropriating the colonial experience of ethnic Luo in Mombasa and assembling these experiences into common memory to create a common identity.

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[396] Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa."

[397] Ethnic groups in Kenya were labelled and allocated specific inherent traits, which, in turn, dictated their perceived capabilities and hence assignment of duties. The Nandi, for example, were considered militant and therefore allowed entry into the military section of the army during WWI. In contrast, the Luo were labelled sturdy and industrious and so could only join the army as carrier corps. Meshack Owino, "The Impact of Kenya African Soldiers on the Creation and Evolution of the Pioneer Corps During the Second World War," *Journal of Third World Studies*, 32 No. 1 (location: University of Florida Press, 2015).

[398] NST.1.1.8 Mijn leven in Afrika. 1870, 1902, 1913. Personal journals of several early Mill Hill missionaries record their encounters with Kavirondo people.

[399] Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.

Appiah views identities as imagined commonalities that create unity within an in-group while ostracising those considered to be of a differing out-group.[400] He further argues that identities are fluid, evolving through alterations and additions to a primary idea. Using the example of the English, Appiah posits that the drastic industrialisation of 18th-century Europe, and the harsh realities of life in that period, influenced new ways of thinking about people and led to a renewed romanticism of the past. In the face of the encroachment of industry, individuals in Britain experienced a renewed enthusiasm for emotions, a reappreciation of nature, and a resurgence in the celebration of folk traditions.[401] These performances of recognition created feelings of belonging and provided stability amidst the otherwise unstable life of the English working class. Similar romanticised feelings of a faultless past and an urgency for its preservation were widely felt among the African colonised. Much like the English, Africans sought to essentialise and celebrate perceived identities of old. In Kenya, this effort gave rise to African-led ethnographic traditions in the 1920s, exemplified by works such as Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mt. Kenya* and Paul Mboya's *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi*, which aimed to essentially reaffirm "native" identities and record them for posterity. For the Luo, situated at the centre of Mombasa's colonial labour economy, nostalgia for an idealised past combined with the need to integrate into the modern world inspired the creation of a reformed neo-Luo identity. The contours of this new Luoness were (re-) defined and reified through new ritual performances, and Luo identities began stressing the importance of bonding networks – kindred, spatial, and cultural – with their supposed homelands in Western Kenya. These efforts were spearheaded by the rail and port workers' chosen community leaders, who Petersen has aptly described as "cultural entrepreneurs."[402]

5.5. Social cohesion and growth of an urban Luo diaspora

Amid the chaos of dilapidated housing, low wages, minimal social amenities, job scarcities, and urban ethnicity, systems of social organisations began to emerge in the rail and port workers' environments as early as the first decade of the 1900s. These structures later extended to their living quarters,[403] providing frameworks through which the forming Luo community could co-exist within the *wabara/wapwani* boundaries. These organisations also became platforms for members of the new ethnic constituency to negotiate with the KURH, which, in Mombasa, was an unofficial surrogate of the colonial state. Having arrived in Mombasa as second-class *wabara*, communal cohesion was crucial for surviving Mombasa's hierarchical social landscape. The many prejudices and stereotypes developed around *wabara* people served to reinforce ethnic solidarities, prompting the majority of Luo rail and port labourers to maintain interactions within patrimonial kin and social groupings whose origins could be traced back to

[400] Appiah, *The Lies that Bind.*
[401] Ibid., pp. 79–81.
[402] Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival.*
[403] KNA/PC/COAST/1/9/7 Housing of Upcountry Labourers, 1912–1913. The PC notes the existence of migrant labourer's social organisation frameworks when he suggests that KURH management liaise with the various ethnic associations while examining the question of urban housing.

the same rural localities. Social networks inevitably formed within these boundaries, creating fertile conditions for the consolidation of Luo ethnic identity. This process was significantly mediated by Luo welfare groups in conjunction with the colonial state. The Luo Union and Ramogi African Welfare Association played the most prominent roles to this end.

The conditions of Luo labourer's living quarters were a key catalyst in the development of a pan-Luo identity amongst KURH labourers in Mombasa. The high degrees of occupational mobility within KURH departments, particularly those affiliated to the port, created environments where urban poverty and its associated social decays thrived. Theft, drunkenness, prostitution, and violence became everyday realities in the rail and port workers' living quarters in Majengo, Changamwe, Magongo, and sections of Kisauni, prompting colonial authorities to encourage community members to devise mechanisms to control the behaviour of their associates. District commissioner reports from as early as 1908 frequently attributed much of the theft and insecurity in Mombasa to urban migrant labourers, among whom Luo KURH workers were the majority.[404] Majengo residences, which had been reserved for rail workers up until the 1920s (see map on p.8), were particularly notorious and were described as breeding grounds for many of the vices plaguing the town. In 1925, the Mombasa district commissioner, fed up with Majengo's infamy, toyed with the idea of demolishing the entire settlement and relocating its inhabitants.[405] The colonial state hence urgently needed to find workable mechanisms to control the urban migrant labourer.

Within this framework of urban decay, Luo rail and port workers began taking measures to foster community cohesion among their members in Mombasa. At the heart of these concerns was a desire to encourage members to present a particular picture of Luo ethnicity, one that was clearly aimed at pandering to the British colonists. Paul Mboya, a leading proponent of the formation of Luo unity emphasised this point, stating that the Luo urban labourer was supposed to "[…] act a particular way to get the attention of the government."[406] Similar sentiments were echoed by elders chosen to represent urban Luo people, who generally agreed that minority habits that, in their view, destroyed tribal ties, were not to be tolerated.[407] Ethnic Luo from various *pinje* thus began organising themselves to control group behaviour, and they applied rural mechanisms of social cohesion and incorporating elements of modernity into the framework. Educated men were especially valued because they possessed knowledge of the English language and could therefore parley with KURH management and negotiate better terms of service for Luo people. The committee of inquiry looking into Mombasa's labour conditions in 1939, for example, reported that Luo rail and port workers had insisted that a Luo representative be included in the committee formed by the labour office, as the majority of workers in these two government agencies were Luo.[408] Elders were picked from groups of

[404] KNA/CQ/1/1/22 Memorandum from the Native Affairs Office, 1908.
[405] KNA/AWS/11/7 Mombasa Island Revised Town Planning scheme, 1925.
[406]KNA/ PC/NZA/3/1/376 Administration (Ramogi African welfare), 1945.
[407] Ibid.
[408] Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Examine the Labour Conditions in Mombasa,* (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1939).

older labourers and assumed similar roles to those of traditional elders in Luoland. Their main function was the institution of communal controls in urban spaces, and their duties included resolving conflict in line with customary laws, guiding community members on Luo customs and nationalism, and acting in stead of family whenever required.

Susan Adhiambo is a community elder living in the Railways estate in Changamwe. Her authority partly stems from personal charisma, but it also comes from the fact that her deceased father, a former Kenya Railways employee, was a respectable elder for the now defunct Kamagambo Community Welfare Group. The welfare group members were drawn from the rail workers who could trace their origins from Kamagambo, in Western Kenya. I interviewed Adhiambo at her home in Changamwe on 17 July 2017. Her responses revealed the processes involved in forming community networks amongst KURH labourer's in Mombasa:

> *My father worked as a railway mechanic beginning the 40s and retired from service in 1984. He was a respected member of the Kamagambo Community Welfare Group. The group was very active up to the 1990s, actually. The younger people do not seem very interested in keeping the tradition of helping and looking out for members of the clan. These days, local communal network are better received as representative of the people's voice, probably because we see ourselves as Mombasa Luo first and members of our rural clan associations later.*

Susan's interview highlighted the significant role that elderly and retired members of community organisations have played – and continue to play –in maintaining cohesion within the wider Changamwe area. Reflecting on a moment her father regarded as a highlight of his career –even though this was before he became an elder – she revealed that her father participated in the grassroots mobilisation for the successful Mombasa general strike of 1947. Records of parliamentary proceedings in Britain reported that the strike was sudden – no demands were made by the registered unions and a strike notice was not given, workers just woke up on 13 January 1947 and refused to work.[409] Adhiambo says her father shared details of this monumental event with her:

> *The planning for the strike were conducted in welfare group meetings, where members were cajoled into participating and also sworn to secrecy. Participation in the strike was actually presented as service to the Luo community as they were the majority workers at the rail and port service and hence if their demands for better wages and housing were met, then the Luo would be the elite African in Mombasa, whose standards of living would be more or less similar to that of the European. Community members in the grassroot organisations were watchful of persons not participating in the strike, and these were, with the blessings of the*

[409] Kenya (General strike Mombasa), 22 January 1947. Hansard record of parliamentary proceedings. Accessed on 12 June 2022 at: https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1947-01-22/debates/9d4850b3-665f-4874-aaa4-58114a3d9ec3/Kenya(GeneralStrikeMombasa).

> *elders, confronted and beaten to submission. My father is proud of this moment because he reckons the strike was successful only because the KURH Luo community was able to hold each other accountable and presented their grievance as a singular unit.*[410]

The ranks of communal social authorities among KURH labourers soon expanded to include diviners, healers, and medicine men. These figures played a crucial role in building communal cohesion by providing guidance for navigating urban life while also maintaining connections with rural communities in Western Kenya.[411] Adhiambo's father, for example, was instrumental in mediating and settling conflicts among Luo rail and port workers, especially those arising over burial and inheritance rights in Mombasa. He also coordinated with medicine men to facilitate the performance of rituals for restorative justice whenever a community member violated social norms:

> *There was always a* jabilo [*loosely translates to medicineman/woman*] *ready to give* manyasi [*medicinal concoction*] *whenever one erred.*

This approach was particularly effective in reintegrating social outcasts back into the Luo community networks formed by the rail and port workers. The urban landscape thus gradually connected to the rural landscape and rural community networks were reproduced and translocated into the urban space.

The colonial state further facilitated the consolidation of Luo labourers by officially recognising chosen urban elders as "tribal" spokespersons. This recognition reflected the state's recognition of the critical role that these leaders could play in regulating the behaviour of what they considered the most important category of labourers in Mombasa. As the DC for Mombasa remarked in 1930:

> *The significant role they (tribal spokespersons) played is relayed in the affirmations that such collection of elders will tend to evolve as a council controlling the particular tribe, and it is thought that development of administrative control in these lines is to be recommended rather than the appointment of a number of headmen, none of whom would be wholly acceptable to the people*[412]

On taking up his position as governor of the Kenya colony in 1944, Sir Philip Mitchel wrote to the colonial secretary in London, reiterating that: "The Luo people deservedly enjoy a good repute in their home district and wherever they go to work in the colonies because of their general excellent conduct and industry, and the efforts they make to care for their young people."[413] This strategy of assembling a diverse group under a single authority and labelling it as a constituency marked the beginning of a diaspora Luo community. Urban Luo leaders

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[410] Susan Adhiambo, O.I.

[411] Ibid.

[412] KNA/CQ1/19/25 Report on Native Affairs Mombasa, 1930.

[413] KNA/OP/AA/1/43 African Affairs: Associations, Societies and Public bodies, Luo union.

became the chief mediators in the regulation of Luo group behaviour, especially in aligning labourers' responses with government policy. The elders played a pivotal role in extending the materiality of this pan-Luo identity to rural areas, facilitating exchanges between the urban and rural that gradually forged a unified ethnic identity.

5.6 Luo welfare organisations in the creation of Mombasa's rail and port workers neo-Luo identity: A special mention of the Luo Union

The wage labour economy in Mombasa offered what can be considered some of the worst work and living conditions for migrant labourers in the Kenya colony. KURH migrant labourers, most of whom were Luo, were regarded as sojourners in the town. Consequently, the colonial administration provided the bare minimum to ensure their basic survival, as strategy designed to discourage permanent relocation to urban areas. Housing in Mombasa was scarce, social amenities and services were virtually non-existent, and wages could barely sustain even a single migrant, let alone support families back in the reserves. Migrant labourers in urban centres and towns closer to Western Kenya, like Kisumu and Mumias, and those in colonial farms in the Rift Valley, often subsidised their incomes by having food transported to them from their families in the rural areas. Food was generally cheaper in inland urban centres, which were often situated near European agricultural zones. Labourers in Mombasa were not so lucky. Faced with these challenges, they began organising welfare organisations, initially aimed at look into the well-being of associate members within the town.

Welfare organisations began with individuals from the same *piny* coming together to ensure that members of the community "did not get lost" in urban areas. As they gradually gained legitimacy as the voice of the urban collective, the organisations transformed to become powerful mediums of social control. Luo welfare organisations in the urban exerted considerable pressure on migrant labourers to conform to behaviour patterns and philosophies considered beneficial to community, and compliance was achieved within a form of patron-client relationship that grew out of the need to survive in urban environments. Initially, most early migrant labourers to Mombasa's port and rail service had little to no education. The majority-the goods porters- were in fact, unskilled labourers who had no formal education at all. Localised in Mombasa and isolated from their kin in Western Kenya, these labourers struggled to maintain regular contact with their rural communities. Correspondence between urban and rural areas was only possible by via mail services or the press – avenues typically accessible only through interactions with members of welfare groups whose leaders had, in most cases, attained some form of education.[414] This situation is exemplified by Elijah Juma, a 70-year-old former goods porter who worked at Kilindini harbour until his retirement in 1990:

> *I was born in Gem just after the big war. I moved here (in Mombasa) when I was 16 and came to join my father who worked at the port. My children were born and have lived their entire lives in Mombasa. My (four) sons have visited my rural home*

[414] Elijah Juma, O.I., 5 December 2017, in Magongo, Mombasa.

in Akala, Gem twice; once to burry their mother, and one time to build the customary bachelor's pad, simba. My 30-year-old last-born daughter from my second marriage is however yet to visit my home. The farthest she has gone is actually Nairobi.

Juma's visits to Luoland since moving to Mombasa have been irregular, and he confesses that the pattern mirrors that of his sons. He insists that this is common and nothing out of the ordinary for most of the Luo people he knows in Mombasa. Juma conveyed the fact that his father had a similar story of irregular attachment to the rural area when he moved to work in Mombasa.

My father, came to Mombasa just before the beginning of WWII, and because of financial difficulties, was unable to bring my mother and us a long to live with him. He rarely came home afterwards, but he kept regular contact with us through letter correspondence. I remember on several occasions people who I knew to be my father's colleagues visiting our home with a letter from my father. The letters were always read by my cousin Ochieng who went to the mission school in Yala.

The letter-reading moments are forever etched in Juma's memory, because they were events:

The entire family sat under a mango tree, and the emissary guest was given one of my mother's prized cushioned seats to sit on. We were never allowed to sit on that chair! The guest first gave greetings from my father and followed with a few stories of workplace adventures and misadventures they had with him. The letter was then handed over to Ochieng, who proceeded to read it with a lot of theatrics. We were always eager to learn of how he was doing in Mombasa. After the readings, my mother was then given the letters for safe keeping.

Juma acknowledges that his father was illiterate and confirms that the letters were written by members of his welfare group in Mombasa.

Welfare organisations, moreover, helped incoming migrants find lodgings and work in Mombasa. As documented in other parts of Africa, potential migrants often rely on information provided by peers before deciding on embarking on a migratory journey.[415] Similarly, Luo labourer's intending to move to Mombasa were influenced by family and community connections. These linkages were a key factor in boosting the chances of better economic outcomes in Mombasa's saturated labour market. By maintaining systems to enumerating members, for example, Luo welfare organisations knew locations of a majority of ethnic Luo in urban areas. This information was invaluable in helping incoming members find kin who they could stay with while looking for employment.[416] For example, Elijah's move to Mombasa was facilitated by another member of the Kanyakuta port workers welfare group, who brought

[415] Goolam Vahedi, "Family, Gender and Mobility among Passenger Migrants into Colonial Natal: The Story of Moosa Hajee Cassim," *Journal of South African Studies*, 42 No. 3. (2016), pp. 505–522.
[416] Elijah Juma, O.I.

him to the town and deposited him right on his father's doorstep. The same welfare group helped him secure employment using their networks at the port. Additionally, welfare organisations functioned as social protection mechanisms for urban Luo populations. They helped out members who had fallen on hard times, for example, by providing food and sharing lodgings. Young men, who often arrived unaccompanied in Mombasa, were normally given lodging in the houses of members of the welfare group, who then helped them to settle in until they could find work at the port. Elijah, for example, shared that he has housed numerous young men from the rural areas who were looking for work in Mombasa, and that his father did the same. The Mombasa town planning committee stated that helping new labourer's settle in was already common practice amongst migrant Luo rail and port workers in the 1920s.[417]

By the 1930s, migrant Luo rail and port workers had become fully aware of the importance of group unity, even as welfare organisations continued to play a prominent role in helping them survive Mombasa's urban landscape. To gain more traction as the collective voice of the urban Luo community, small localised welfare groups began amalgamating into larger organisations. Local clan-based welfare groups, for example, joined to form district-level welfare groups, and by the beginning of the 1940s all Luo-affiliated welfare groups had united under the umbrella of the all-encompassing Luo Union. Like all grassroot organisations, the Luo Union aimed to provide safety nets and spaces for Luo-speaking people away from their homeland in Western Kenya. Indeed, the Union registered its objective as being "to promote the welfare of the Luo individually or collectively in their places of residence."[418] In the specific case of Mombasa, the Union's organisation of dances, football matches and other sporting activities, and community meetings, enabled the communion of KURH labourers in Mombasa and provided a platform where linkages could be maintained with kin back in Luoland. Parkin has argued that while members were often aware of what (welfare) association's manifest functions were, they were less conscious of the unintended social consequences arising from an association's mere existence as well as its activities.[419] For the Luo Union and KURH labourers, these interactions eventually evolved into a patron-client relationship, and the Union increasingly fortified its position as the spokesperson of the urban labourer collective. Soon, the Union began influencing the personal lives of migrant workers, shaping their behaviour and limiting their freedoms. For example, Luo rail and port workers were discouraged from marrying non-Luo women in urban areas because boundaries of Luoness had to be adhered to. This discouraging of cross-cultural interactions was an extrapolation of colonial calls for the maintenance of ethnic and racial boundaries. By adhering to these rules, the Luo could remain in the colonialists' favour. The rules of ethnic purity were ruthlessly applied to women, and many were forcefully returned to their rural homes on mere suspicion of entertaining interest in non-Luo men.[420] Men who lived and even had children with non-Luo women were considered unmarried, and their

[417] KNA/AWS/11/7 Mombasa Island Revised Town Planning Scheme, 1925.
[418] KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/12 Administration, Riwruok Luo, 1945–51.
[419] Parkin, *Neighbours and Nationals.*
[420] Elijah Juma, O.I.

kin constantly berated and urged them to spare the family shame by marrying within the community.[421] Sixty-four years after the fact, Christopher Okumu struggles to narrate how he was forced out of his job at the railway's godowns, and forced by his family to return to Siaya based on the Luo Union's say-so. He recounts falling out with his brother, who he was staying with at the time he began courting Njeri, a Kikuyu woman, and how the Luo Union influenced the ending of this relationship. The Mau Mau rebellion, which began in the early 1950s, had placed considerable strain on ethnic Kikuyus' reputation among the settler and administrator colonists. Pandering to the colonists, the Luo union reproduced similar biases against the Kikuyu, discouraging ethnic Luo, and especially young Luo men, from associating with them.

> *When I began courting Njeri, my elder brother first attempted to reason with me, advising me that it was in my best interest to stop the relationship as the police were suspicious of every Kikuyu. He was afraid that I could be suspected of partaking in Mau Mau's underground activities. I couldn't stop seeing her though. I loved her. My brother escalated the situation when I continued courting Njeri. We quarrelled a lot. One day, he took me to the home of an elder of the Luo Union, I do not remember his exact names. I was shocked to learn that a baraza meeting had been convened to specifically indict me and the relationship I was pursuing. They threatened me with repatriation if I continued courting Njeri. Two days after the baraza and before I could make a decision, I was forcefully put on a train together with two other members of the association and sent back to Siaya with explanation that I was acting as a vagrant in Mombasa. In Siaya, I found a woman chosen for me as a wife, a woman I had never met before. She was already living in my simba. I was doing so well in Mombasa and the repatriation resigned me to my present life of poverty.*

Okumu managed to maintain his arranged marriage until 1994 when his wife died, but he was still visibly bitter about this episode.

The Luo Union activities greatly impacted urban Luo labourers, playing a pivotal role in the formation of the neo-Luo identity witnessed in urban areas. In the specific case of KURH, the union's unifying call, *Riwruok e teko* ("unity is strength"), was rigorously employed to consolidate Luo ethnicity in Mombasa and to pressure individuals to present a particular picture of modernity amongst the Luo. The union was instrumental in reshaping Luo ethos and ideologies to align with those of the Europeans, and in the reconstitution of materiality of Luo ethnicity in Mombasa. These activities resulted in the relative homogenisation of Luo cultural practices and social interactions and, soon enough, migrant labourers from several *pinje* began regarding themselves – and acting – as part of a wider Luo ethnic group. Gradually, the Luo labourer became the model African in Mombasa's urban space. Whenever Luo rail and port workers had grievances, for example, union leaders often counselled them against acting out their disapproval to KURH management. For instance, when they threatened to go on strike in 1942, Luo Union's Nairobi and Mombasa leadership managed to convince workers to go back

[421] Christopher Okumu, O.I., 27 February 2018, Banana, Siaya.

to their duties, arguing that the war took precedence over labourers' personal grievances. Luo women were also admonished by the union, and accused of being the villains fuelling rail and port workers disaffection with the colonial state, by "[…] exerting pressure on Luo men to provide luxurious lifestyles for them."[422] It was imperative that Luoness in Mombasa be presented as characterised by civil order, discipline, and etiquette,[423] and those Luo women who they felt jeopardised these efforts were to be sent packing from the colonial urban space. Though the Luo Union began as a medium to navigate Mombasa's urban landscape, it gradually transformed into the voice of Luo sanction and ideology, preserving and representing what its leadership regarded as common corporate interests amongst migrant rail and port workers in Mombasa.

5.7.1 Materiality and imageries of a neo-Luo identity amongst KURH labourers in colonial Mombasa

Material objects have always been vehicles for human cultural meanings.[424] As Hirsch and Smith posited, objects make us, giving us a material basis for social relations.[425] The choice of objects as points of reference for historical analysis has been embraced by various scholars. Nkwi, for example, argued that social and spatial mobilities witnessed in Bamenda Cameroon were, in fact, the products of materials – including roads, motor vehicles, and bicycles – that were introduced by the colonialists.[426] Objects such as the contraceptive pill and the sanitary towel have also featured as powerful focal points in the history of women's struggles and the feminist movement.[427] With regard to Luo identity amongst rail and port workers in Mombasa, what mattered? What were the material perceptions of this identity? Rejecting the *wapwani* visualisation of Luoness, how did they otherwise define it? The following section tackle these questions and presents some of the elements that played significant roles in materialising Luo ethnicity amongst rail and port workers in Mombasa. The possession of such material elements eventually came to define Luo identity, even in the rural areas.

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[422] KNA/ AWS/1/366 Labour Unrests Mombasa, 1945.

[423] Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival.*

[424] Francois G Richard and Kevin MacDonald, *Ethnic Ambiguity and the African Past: Materiality, History and the Shaping of Cultural Identities* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

[425] Shirin Hirsch and Andrew Smith, "A View Through a Window: Social Relations, Material Objects and Locality," *The Sociological Review*, 66 No.1 (2018), pp. 224–240.

[426] Walter Nkwi, *Kfaang and it's Technologies* (Doctoral Dissertation, Leiden University, 2011).

[427] Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas, *A History of Women in 100 Objects* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2018).

5.7.2 Language

Barth considers ethnic groups to be organisational, with actors within groups using specific identity markers to categorise themselves and others for purposes of interaction.[428] The markers highlighting differences between in-members and setting them apart from an out-group are usually not objective, but chosen and regarded as significant only by the actors. Language is commonly acknowledged to be an important marker and outward symbol of group identity.[429] Simpson asserts that a natural sense of solidarity is stimulated amongst members sharing a single variety of speech, and this can be manipulated to create feelings of belonging to populations larger than the local.[430]

In its current form, the Luo language is relatively homogenous, with diction, symbols, and meanings of words communicating a similar message across speakers from several *pinje*. This is in contrast to early Luo history where each *piny* used a local dialect and words borrowed from neighbouring Bantu groups featured prominently in the diction of specific *pinjes.* In the early 1900s, a Luo from Alego spoke a language that was slightly different from an individual from Suna.[431] Early Luo migrants to Mombasa's rail and port service were, therefore, no more than a multiplicity of individuals coming from the Kavirondo region of Western Kenya who spoke a variant of the Luo language. Their experiences, challenges, and uncertainties about Mombasa's economic and social landscape informed their creation of a common language, a vehicle that was used to push for a common corporate interest – education.[432]

Mobilities that create diaspora groups threaten mother tongue languages, as they are spoken less often in new localities and are less likely to be passed on to the next generation.[433] This threat to language was real for migrant Luo labourers in Mombasa where Kiswahili was the de facto language of communication. A mastery of Kiswahili was particularly essential for *wabara* migrants migrating to work at the rail and port, for two main reasons. Firstly, it was necessary to learn the common language of communication amongst the different ethnicities living in Mombasa town; and secondly, knowledge of Kiswahili was considered prestigious. *Wapwani*

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[428] Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Culture Difference* (Illinois: Waveland Press Inc, 1998), p.11.

[429] Andrew Simpson, *Language and Ethnic Identity in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[430] Ibid., p. 2.

[431] Minimal variations exist to date. Maize, for example, is *oduma* amongst Alego Luo and *baando* amongst the Suna Luo.

[432] Education was one way for Luo rail and port workers to rise through the employment ranks at the KURH. This was only possible if resources meant to advance education, i.e. books, were available in Luoland. The Luo Union, whose primary objective was to "promote mutual understanding and unity among the Luo as a tribe for practical purposes," spearheaded efforts to consolidate Luo language, which enabled the production of educational related texts. These efforts included establishing a Luo language committee, whose members standardised the Luo language. The quotation above is from the introduction of the Unions prospectus, KNA/ PC/NZA/3/1/12 Administation, Riwruok Luo, 1945–51.

[433] Abid Chaudhry, Aftab Ahmed, and Shaheer Khan, "Migration and its Impacts on Demolishing Lingual Heritage: An In-Depth Case Study of Mohajir Kashmiri Families in Pakistan," paper presented at the International Conference on Migration, Education and Development in South Asia, Islamabad, Pakistan (2014).

regarded everything *bara* – mannerisms, forms of dressing, communal interactions, language, among other signifiers – to be inferior. Adopting Kiswahili, which, at the time, was an elite coastal language, was thus regarded as a step up on the perceived scale of "civilisation."

In the first decade of the 20th century, when the initial migrations to Mombasa began, the Luo language exhibited a wide range of variations between dialects. Because Luo language developed through local interactions, one might expect that a variant of the Luo language – perhaps one integrated with Kiswahili – would emerge in Mombasa's social sphere. This was not the case. As migration to Mombasa's port and rail service steadily increased, Luo labourers instead began rigorous efforts (which are generally considered successful) to develop a homogenous Luo language. As one missionary put it:

> *As many "Luo,"* especially the younger generation, go down the line for work, the demand for a grammar and vocabulary has greatly increased of late.* [434]

Such attempts to essentialise the language and bind it to identity were a common phenomenon amongst several African communities becoming aware of the concept of nationalism during the colonial period. The Kikuyu, for example, initially derived their identities from regional interactions and although variations of Kikuyu language were spoken by people from different regions, these regions were not unified by language.[435] Some Kikuyu groups in fact, identified more with the Nilotic Dorobo than with ethnicities that would later merge to form the Kikuyu nation.[436] In Uganda, the Langó communicated in the Acholi language and missionaries used Acholi books in education in schools in Langó. However, as nationalism gained ground in the 1950s, the Langó unexpectedly began demanding their own books, arguing that they did not understand Acholi phrases.[437] Recognising similar threats to their own language in Mombasa, Luo ethnic entrepreneurs then began efforts to organise and preserve it. Rail and port workers in Mombasa were particularly vulnerable to language loss, as they were unable to maintain regular spatial connections with relations in Luoland. Luo welfare organisations therefore began efforts to revive the language, and the first step was to request for its official structuring and organisation.[438]

Entrepreneurs' reasons aside, the move to structure and organise Luo language was primarily stimulated by the urban worker's desire to integrate into the modern world through Western education. Their demand for the standardisation of Luo orthography was aimed at enabling the

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[434] Fathers of St. Joseph Society, *A Handbook of the Kavirondo Language* (Nairobi: Caxton Printing and Publishing works, 1921).
*Quotation marks on the word "Luo" reflects the missionaries' recognition of the ambiguity of Luo language and identity.
[435] Ambler, *Kenyan Communities in the Age of Imperialism*.
[436] Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500–1900* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).
[437] Mildred Brown, "The Lwo Bible," in *The Bible Translator*, 11 No.1 (1960), p. 32, pp. 31–42.
[438] KNA/PC/NZA/3/6/129 Vernacular Literature, 1944–1949. The Luo Union formed the Luo Language committee to organise Luo language.

production of literature to expand education in Luoland.[439] To allow access to education, a range of organisations in the southern and central Nyanza areas even began inviting locals to regard themselves as Luo during the 1940s.[440] Education, a direct by product of the unification of the Luo language, became a defining boundary separating the Luo from other Africans and even the Arab population in Mombasa, as it bestowed on them the prestige associated with European "civilisation." By virtue of their educated status, a cadre of Luo labourers joining the rail and port service from the early 1930s through to the 1950s were skilled labourers, who worked as clerks, train drivers, and conductors.

Lucas Migosi vividly traces his lineage five generations back to the Abasekwe clan of the Bunyore Bantu. He divulges that his lineage shifted to Luo ethnicity when his great-grandfather, Awange Kogina, went to St. Mary's Mission school in Yala, where basic education was initially offered in the Luo language. Kogina went on to become a locomotive driver in Mombasa, a role that gradually facilitated his assimilation into Luo identity. He fully identified as a Luo during the 1939 strikes and was even part of the negotiating teams that were chosen to meet Chief Amoth of Central Nyanza, who had been called in to pacify striking rail and port workers in 1945. Educated Luo workers in Mombasa were part of an elite African minority whose presence contested Swahili stratification indexes. A member of the committee looking into labour unrest in Mombasa even commented that: "There are two types of African workers in Mombasa […] one has reached a standard of civilisation and is truly striving for civilised life […] This is the Luo."[441] By the beginning of the 1950s, Luo labourers in Mombasa certainly viewed themselves as the elite African in the colonial hierarchy. This perception was reinforced by the fact that, unlike a majority of *wapwani*, they were not only able to interact fluently with Europeans, but they also held positions that had previously been reserved for Europeans.[442]

A unified Luo language, moreover, helped Luo labourers better navigate Mombasa's saturated labour market. As Chapter Two revealed, work at the docks and on the railway was scarce from the 1920s, and mainly contracted through communal linkages. Employers often discriminatively gave specific work to certain ethnicities. Individuals identifying as Luo were more likely to get work at KURH than any other ethnicity, making Luo identity a critical factor

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[439] KNA/DC/Kisumu 1/10/60 Luo Language Committee, 1930–1954. Shadrack Malo, chair of the Luo Language Committee, reiterates the necessity of teaching in only one language in schools. Having a single language of instruction was cheaper for the missionary; KNA/ PC/NZA/3/6/129 Vernacular Literature, 1944–1949. Letters from the Luo language committee asking for the completion of books written in standardised Dholuo. Books include "*Sigendini ma gaso ji* [stories to keep you busy], and "*Dongo kwom riwruok*" [growth in unity].

[440] KNA/DC/KSM/1/10/60 Luo Language Committee, 1930–1954. Committee insists that there should be efforts towards consolidating the Southern Luo orthographies into a single language to avoid unnecessary divergences; Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival*.

[441] Comments by Committee member in, KNA/ K/331/892/2 *The Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Unrests in Mombasa* (Part Two) (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1945).

[442] Western education was largely rejected in Zanzibar territory (including Mombasa) as the Sultan's sovereignty called for the continuation of madrassa and Islamic schooling. Such training was insufficient for entry into the skilled worker categories at the KURH. Hence, when the decolonisation process began, the Luo took most of the positions offered to Africans in the KURH.

in surviving Mombasa's labour landscape. Additionally, fostering a common language creates a sense of community and migrants are likely to move and settle in areas where their community is established. This fact has been documented with migrant groups in various parts of the world. Wanting to immediately settle down, migrant Hadrajaye in Salamat, Chad, for example, move into areas where their language is established. For the Hadrajaye, language is important and integral to their identity, a link to their cultural and religious origin, and acts as a bond to their parents and other members of their society.[443] In Mombasa, language too played a central role in stabilising the otherwise unstable life of migrant Luo labourers. Beyond the severe working conditions in Mombasa, contacts with a culturally dominant group who considered *wabara* Luo beneath them produced feelings of inadequacy and, consequently, the Luo sought refuge and acceptance amongst fellow Luo. This was the main reason for Kogina's assimilation into Luo identity. Luo language was indeed reinforced as an identity marker in ethnicised living quarters in Mombasa, which were the first stops for migrant labourers arriving from Luoland.

5.7.3 Connecting the urban with the rural

The Luo naming structure includes a designation that fundamentally connects a person to their patrimonial *piny*. Thus, every Luo is either a *nyar* (f) or *ja* (m) of a particular *piny*. Atieno, for example, a woman whose father's clan hails from Alego will be referred to as *Atieno nyar-Alego*, while a man, Omondi, whose father's clan hails from Asembo becomes *Omondi ja-Asembo*. These communal connections to land were previously fluid and easily altered depending on circumstances. A *jadak* (migrant or settler), for example, gave up his patrimonial designation and adopted that of his benefactor. It was therefore not unusual for even blood brothers to have different patrimonial lineages. As migrations to urban areas increased and ethnic entrepreneurs worried about the creation of a detribalised group, this naming method shifted, becoming much more rigidly applied. Over time, it became a central tenet of Luo tradition. The new naming systems linked the urban Luo to their rural roots and making them natives of their *piny* of origin.

In the pre-colonial and early colonial years, migration into new lands and integration into new communities was so common that Luo identity was in a constant state of flux. Apart from subsistence reasons, there was little sense of nativity and connections to the soil, as shown by Kogina's shift from Bunyore to Luo identity. Feelings of nativity were also absent among the first batch of Luo migrants to newly developing urban spaces, as they viewed their migration as continuations of pre-colonial mobilities in search of new means of subsistence. Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo revealed that ethnic Luo who had left the rural locale before the 1920s, for whatever reason, were regarded as gone. If they died in their new locales, they were buried wherever they passed away.[444] As colonialism became much more entrenched, however, Western ideals of nativity became attractive. In an effort to emulate the European order, the

[443] Alio, "Conflict Mobility and Language."
[444] Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo, *Siaya*, p. 57.

Luo began not only to identify with their respective *piny*, but they also pegged this identity on unity with the soil. This unity was defined and reinforced by developing new agnatic relations, i.e. relations that bound individuals and families religiously and spiritually to land.[445] This mystical bond to the land found its most perceptible expression in a naming system that incorporated one's *piny* within one's identity.

Connections with the soil were reinforced by the British creation of ethnic reserves. Reserves worked to limit expansion to new lands, which was common practice whenever occupied land was exhausted. The South and Central Kavirondo Luo reserves thus confined the Luo within these restricted locations. Reserves were a remarkable strategy in social control, in that they not only allowed the segregation of ethnic groups, but they also made it possible to extend indigenous structures of authority beyond the local. This was a particularly important framework for enabling social control of populations in the diaspora and, in this case, in Mombasa.

Reserves presented new opportunities for reconstruction and recreation of identities centred around "native" homelands. As has been pointed out, Luo identities were previously in a constant state of flux and people moved in and out of *piny* ingroup identities for various reasons. An excommunicated man, for example, sought refuge in another piny as a *jadak* far away from his original homeland.[446] *Jodak* were almost always given lands to begin subsisting, which was essentially a clean slate from which to restart life as a member of a new community. *Jodak* children would be fully integrated into the new community, becoming known by the designation of their father's adoptive *piny*. Through this system, old identities disappeared and new identities and accompanying lineages emerged. Often, *jodak* moved to neighbouring Bantu groups, internalising and adopting Bantu identities while their Luo identities dissipated. The creation of reserves, however, completely shifted this system of identity reconstruction and gave way to rigid formations of identities connected to the soil of one's *piny*. Consequently, those who had left their ancestral homes because of non-reconcilable differences and were looking forward to a fresh start in a new location, were still forced to maintain communal connections. It became a case of permanent connection with community and one's past, and no chance of new beginnings.

One guarantee of maintaining this connection was to ensure that all Luo bodies were ritually linked to the soil. Every Luo gained association to their homeland at birth through a ceremony where the umbilical cord was buried at one's paternal homestead.[447] This linkage to the soil became a powerful means of social control, as one's behaviour, fate, and even fortune were forever tied to their origins. The body's connection to the community was attributed to

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[445] Glickman, "Patriliny among the Gusii and Luo of Kenya."

[446] Wilson, *Luo Customary Laws*. For example, a person could be excommunicated by the *buch piny* if they were the cause of constant quarrels between family or clan members. If a person was responsible for another's death, they were also a candidate for either cleansing or excommunication.

[447] Osodo Dami, O.I., 10 January 2018; Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo, *Burying SM;* Mboya, Luo *Kitgi gi Timbegi*.

communal spirits called *juogi* who resided in communal lands, and linkages created through acts such as burying the umbilical cord. It was believed that if a deceased person was unable to finally rest in the soil of their ancestors, then their spirit would forever wander, lost in strange lands and never finding peace. Migrant Luo labourers in Mombasa were generally unable to make frequent visits back to their reserve homeland, unlike migrants in Nairobi or other nearer urban towns, but *juogi* ensured that they were still an integral part of the Luo community.[448] Reconnection was mandatory and if the colonial situation obstructed this in life, then it had to be realised in death.

One famous example of this unwavering linkage with the soil played out in the battle to bury prominent criminal lawyer Silvanus Melea (SM) Otieno.[449] Though this saga occurred in 1986–1987, which is later than the official timeline of this study, SM's case is a remarkable illustration of the resolute linkages existing between an urban Luo and his rural homeland, whose origins can be traced back to the colonial period. SM's case drew attention to the burdens that urban-rural connections place on individual identities and highlighted the tensions and contradictions these connections produced. Contests over SM's body were revealed in Kenya's highest court, the Court of Appeal, when SM's brother, Joash Otieno, and the Luo Umira Kager clan, on one hand, contested his wife's right to bury him at their home in Matasia. SM's wife, Wambui Otieno, was an ethnic Kikuyu. SM's case drew wide public attention and reconfirmed the spatial recognition of home and its place in the identity of urban Luo, including those who had willingly severed ties with the rural. In interviews given after the saga, Wambui maintained that SM considered Matasia his new home and actually detested Nyalgunga, his place of origin.[450] SM thus, had essentially adopted the status of a *jadak*. Upon his death, in 1986, Wambui insisted on burying SM in his home in Matasia, a decision vehemently contested by Joash and the Umira Kager clan. They insisted that SM's body must reconnect with the soil of his people by being interred in his homeland. Joash's/ Umira Kager's won the case and the final burial of SM in Nyalgunga drew attention to the hierarchy of patrimonial relations (*anyuola)*, which are reinforced by connections to the soil, and how these connections rank higher than those created through marriage (*wat*).[451] Cases such as SM's also occurred in Mombasa in the colonial period in the rare instances of inter-ethnic unions. They were, however, much more common when a Luo labourer adopted the Islamic faith.[452]

Habiba Waswa is a shop owner in Bangladesh. Her husband Ali died in 2014, and she complains that, since then, her daughters have not been living according to the tenets prescribed by the Islamic faith. One daughter, Khadija, has even begun patronising an Evangelical church in

[448] Osodo Dami, O.I.

[449] J. B. Ojwang and J.N.Kanyua Mugambi, *The S.M Otieno Case: Death and Burial in Modern Kenya* (Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 1989).

[450] Blaine Harden, "Kenyan buried in village he hated," *The Washington Post*, 24 May 1987.

[451] Cohen and ES Atieno-Odhiambo, *Burying SM*.

[452] Habiba Waswa. O.I, 10 January 2018, in Bangladesh, Mombasa.

Magongo, a fact that clearly irks Habiba. Habiba tells the story of how her father's adopted identity conflicted with their "native" identity:

> *My father came to Mombasa in the 1940s. He was a porter at the Kilindini harbour. He converted to Islam a few years after his arrival in Mombasa. He died in 1956. When he died, a feud ensued when my mother requested that my father's wishes of burying him according to Islamic burial rites be followed. Islamic burial rites largely contradict those of the Luo and my Luo kin were adamant that he was first a Luo before he became a Muslim. Even the requirement that the dead be buried within 24 hours could not be fulfilled as due to financial reasons, processes of transporting bodies back to Luoland took weeks, if not months. My mother lost the battle to bury my father, and he was transported back to Gem a month after his death.*

The tensions surrounding Habiba's father's "native" and adopted identities put severe strain on the family and estranged Habiba's mother (and, by extension, Habiba) from her father's family. She retaliated by cutting links with her husband's family and became an urban Mombasa Muslim resident. Habiba, however, still identifies as a Luo even if she continues to harbour resentment towards her paternal relations.

As in SM's and Habiba's father's case, heritage drawn from one's homeland became one of the most enduring symbols of identity for the urban-based Luo labourers. This was especially important for the Luo port and rail workers in Mombasa, who had been completely rejected by the Swahili social landscape. Even though they lived, and many died, in Mombasa, the Swahili and the colonial state ensured that Mombasa was never home for ethnic Luo. The emotions and longing for home certainly influenced the creation of linkages between the urban labourer and the rural regions, and labourers' rural homes embodied their origins and hence identity. Communal linkages between the rural and Mombasa labourers' commenced with organising Luo labourers around patrimonial welfare organisations, efforts that began from as early as the 1920s. As Southall argued, these organisations were part of the corporate, segmentary structure of the Luo in the rural and were reflected and represented in the new organisations of those abroad.[453] Clan and lineage organisations expanded to include more lineages and sub-tribes, eventually culminating in the all-inclusive Luo Union.

The Kavirondo Welfare Organisation (founded in 1922, later changed its name to Kavirondo Taxpayer's Welfare Association), Ramogi African Welfare Association (officially registered in 1945 even though activities began earlier), and the Luo Union assumed the role of the *buch piny* elders in the urban setting, and were instrumental as official mediums through which Luo

[453] Aidan Southall, "From Segmentary Lineage to Ethnic Association-Luo, Luhya, Ibo, and Other," M. Owusu (Ed.), *Colonialism and Change: Essays Presented to Lucy Mair* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter Mouton, 1979), p. 211, pp. 203–230.

rail and port workers were policed to conform to Luo group identity.[454] A key feature of this identity was the maintenance of urban and rural connections, which, if spatially and temporally impossible throughout ones life, were to be achieved in death by way of interment in Luoland. This requirement, however, created new contradictions as Mombasa's wage labour economy barely enabled labourers to make ends meet, let alone pay for repatriation if one died. Practices such as burying banana stumps together with the belongings of the dead (for example, a piece of their clothing) in mock funerals back in Luoland emerged and were widely adopted from the 1930s. The practice continues to date. From the late 1940s, and throughout the 1950s, at a time when rail and port workers earned better salaries, the Luo Union's and other welfare organisations' core responsibilities included ensuring that, in death, the expenses for transporting bodies back to Luoland were taken care of by a member's contributions.[455]

Connections between the urban Luo and the rural homeland were further strengthened through public engagement facilitated by the popular press. The press became the interface that virtually eliminated the temporal distance between the urban Luo in Mombasa and their rural counterparts, as news and ideas regularly flowed between the two groups despite their irregular meetings. The tradition of press propaganda was initiated by the colonial state, in conjunction with missionaries, through the medium of district news sheets. These began circulating somewhere in the mid-1910s. District news sheets carried information on developments in particular districts, and were disseminated to schools, but also to LNC's, whose membership included individuals who had acquired formal education. The sheets' main aim was to propagate the European modernisation agenda and, thus, subtly encourage their consumers to adopt European tastes, which, in turn, would arouse interest in integration into the wage labour economy. The press propaganda tradition was reproduced by urban Luo living in Mombasa, however their interests lay in wanting to be informed of going-ons in their homeland districts and, more importantly, in wanting to influence rural articulations of lifestyles adopted by the urban Luo labourer. The Central Kavirondo District commissioner's comments that, "[…]Luo LNCs would be interested in subsidising publicity material because they are very interested in the political and social development of the masses […]."[456] demonstrated that the urban Luo fully recognised the crucial role the press could play in encouraging the rural landscape's acceptance of and assimilation into urban lifestyles. From the 1920s, newspapers such as *Habari ya Leo*, *Baraza*, *Pamoja*, *Coast African Express*, *Hodi*, and *Kenya ni Yetu* (all written in Kiswahili) emerged, and were soon followed by those written in vernacular Luo.

Coast African Express, *Hodi*, and *Kenya ni Yetu* were produced in Mombasa and their content included images of the life of migrant Luo labourers living in the town. Rail and port labourers

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[454] KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/376 Administration (Ramogi African welfare). While addressing members of Ramogi welfare, Paul Mboya, a member of the Luo Union, was categorical that, through the union, Luo elders should strive to direct the multitude of Luo people to behave in a "particular manner."

[455] KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/316 Luo Union, 1951–1955.

[456] KNA/PC/NZA/3/6/129 Vernacular Literature, 1944–1949. Reply to request made by the Luo Union to recommence printing of *Pamoja* newspaper in 1946.

endeavours were thus a prominent feature in the newspaper, and the Luo often received special commendations for their contributions to the expansions at the rail and harbours.[457] Though produced in Nairobi, *Habari ya Leo* was also distributed in Mombasa, and included in its features were personal stories of ethnic Luo who had done exceptionally well in urban areas, including Mombasa. The newspaper began circulating in the 1920s and ran through to 1931, when the depression rendered its continuance impossible.

The press tradition went into a lull in the 1930s, but a revival was witnessed at the beginning of the 1940s and continued through to the 1950s. Aside from the re-emergence of Kiswahili language propaganda newspapers of old, this new era witnessed the introduction of the vernacular press. Newspapers including *Ramogi*, *Fwenyo Adieri*, and *Dongo Jo Central Nyanza* emerged when the Luo language was at the zenith of its consolidation, and tensions over ethnic nationalism and positionality in the Swahili social sphere were aggressively playing out in colonial Mombasa. The vernacular press became a powerful medium for articulating Luo ethnic citizenship in the diaspora,[458] and it was a great tool in expressing ideals of elitism and modernity, features they believed the Luo labourer certainly possessed.

[457] Ibid.

[458] James Ogude, "The vernacular press and the articulation of Luo ethnic citizenship: The case of Achieng' Oneko's Ramogi," *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 13, No.2 (2001), pp. 42–55.

5.8. Enter the Luo woman

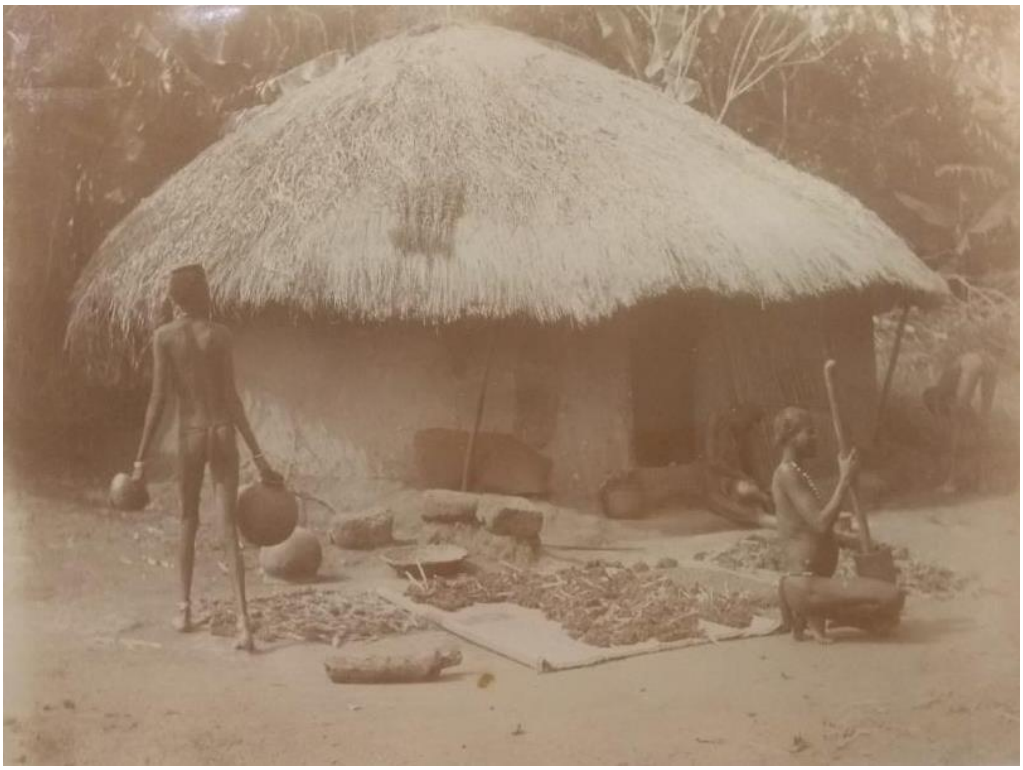

Figure 5.2. A photograph of Luo women performing domestic duties, circa 1910. The cieno *tail worn around the waist denotes their marital status. The place and roles of the Luo woman dramatically shifted with the introduction of the colonial economy and a number chose to migrate to Mombasa as wives and partners to Luo rail and port workers.* Source, Mill Hill missionaries Archives in Oosterbeek, the Netherlands

African women's entry into mainstream feminist scholarship is a fairly recent phenomenon.[459] While compiling her seminal work *Queens, Prostitutes and Peasants,*[460] Hay lamented that they only came across four books that properly analysed African women in their discourses. Hay's work is crucial in summarising the main historiographical themes in discourses on African

[459] Barbara Smith, Akasha Gloria Hull, and Patrice Bell Scott, *All the Women are White, all the Blacks are Men but some of us are Brave* (Old Westbury: Feminist Press, 1982). This classic text on black feminism was among the first critiques of the feminist movement's presentation of white women's worldviews as the collective experience of the female world.

[460] Margaret Jean Hay, "Queens, Prostitutes and Peasants: Historical Perspectives on African Women, 1971–1986," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol 22, No.3 (location: Taylor and Francis, 1988), pp. 431–447.

women up to 1985. The work additionally demonstrates the linkages between these themes and the dominant narratives of particular historical periods. Hay argued that initial discourses on African women depicted them as queens, and historiography focused on the positions and roles played by elite African women. Scholarship focused on women in leadership, on traders, and on market women. The "prostitutes" narratives followed the "queens" era, and these discourses heavily borrowed perspectives from the feminist movement. Analyses thus centred on women re-evaluating their positionality in society, and challenging the values ascribed to their personhood as women, mothers, and daughters. The re-appraisal of female gendered roles in family production introduced a new era of property accumulation by women and, in turn, disrupted and radically transformed structures of communal power relations. Discourses in the "peasants" era, Hay posits, began as critiques of liberalism. Accounts therefore painted women as the unfortunate victims of capitalist economies, severely devaluing their labour at the behest of profits. Since Hays analysis, an abundance of historical scholarship focusing on gender in general and African women in particular have been produced and the themes discussed by Hays continue to occupy space in these new discourses.[461] New theoretical approaches have also been introduced with Africology,[462] Black feminism, and intersectionality[463] becoming popular trends in analysing African women in Africa and the diaspora. Strides are also being made in connecting issues of gender with imperialism and race.[464] Moreover, sexualities and femininities, in their varied social performances, are also becoming popular perspectives in African women and gender studies.

Kenneth Little was among the first Africanists to pay attention to African women migrating into towns. He demonstrated that women migrated to colonial urban centres for reasons centred around escaping the constraints of family, kinship, and lineages. Women, he argued, migrated to cities to enjoy the material and non-material elements of culture, behaviour patterns and ideas that originate or are distinctive to the city.[465] Analogous to Little's study is Jean Baptiste's *Conjugal Rights*,[466]a study that chronicled the journey of Gabonese women in their quest to acquire space in the growing colonial urban centres of Libreville. Baptiste's work presented the

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[461] Scholars who have engaged with Hay's work include Kathleen Sheldon, *African Women: Early History to the 21st Century*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014) and Iyelli Ichile Hanks, *Black Magic Woman: Towards a Theory of Africana Women's Resistance* (Doctoral dissertation, Howard University, 2011). Available at: https://search.proquest.com/docview/878545824?accountid=12045.

[462] Yaba Amgborale Blay, "All the 'Africans' are Men, all the "Sistas" are "American," but some of us Resist: Realizing African Feminism(S) as an Africological Research Methodology," *The Journal of Pan African studies* 2, No.2 (2008).

[463] Saidiya Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors," *Souls*, 18, No.1 (2016), pp 166–173; Sabine Broeck, *Gender and the Abjection of Blackness* (New York: SUNY Press, 2018).

[464] Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyike Musisi (ed), *Women in African Colonial Histories* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002).

[465] Kenneth Little, *African Women in Towns: An Aspect of Africa's Social Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 18.

[466] Rachel Jean-Baptiste, *Conjugal Rights: Marriage, Sexuality, and Urban Life in Colonial Libreville, Gabon* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014).

operations and challenges of migrant women navigating structures of colonial feminisation, and the roles they played overall in changing established racial, colonial ,and social power structures in Gabon. Luise White's *The Comforts of Home*[467] is another seminal work analysing women's migration. This study chronicles the development of female sex work in colonial Nairobi. This section will engage Hay's, Little's, Baptiste's, and White's work, to examine Luo women's movement and subsequent interaction with Luo rail and port workers in Mombasa. It aims to reveal the central role they played in effecting the economic and social transformations that were witnessed in colonial Mombasa's urban space. Migrant Luo women, indeed, co-opted Mombasa's urban landscape, and particularly the spatial distance between Mombasa and Luoland, to escape new representations of Luo femininities that were developing in the rural areas. Their engagement with urban Mombasa produced a social revolution and enabled the radical transformations that were witnessed in the population dynamics of the town. At the same time, they contributed to the social and economic mobility of Luo port and rail workers. The movement of Luo women to Mombasa constituted some of the first registers of feminist resistance to colonial and African patriarchal structures, and ushered in what Aderinto described as new ideals of female socialisation.[468]

5.9.1 British colonialism and the deterioration of the rural landscape for Luo women.

The migration of Luo women to Mombasa, initially facilitated by the direct agency of KURH men but later as individual migrants, was a response to the colonial experience that had fundamentally altered their traditional gender roles, particularly in family production. Colonialism had indeed influenced the cultural revolution that was occurring in the rural areas and ushered in an era where Luo cultural femininities were redefined, communal property relations were reorganised, and gendered labour values were redistributed and re-evaluated. These changes severely limited women's ability to survive the rural landscape and to navigate family/communal social relations. It was under these circumstances that a number of Luo women made the conscious choice to migrate and seek better opportunities elsewhere, and Mombasa became a popular destination. Mombasa had a particular pull for individual migrant Luo women who, in line with this study, later partnered with Luo port and rail workers. Firstly, its unique urban characteristics, and especially its status as an international port city, provided opportunities for them to engage with the cash economy within colonial spaces where femininities demanded women operate within boundaries of the private. In addition, Mombasa presented options for conversion to Islam and women converts were – in contrast to recently revaluated Luo customary laws – granted full rights of property accumulation. Most importantly, though, the distance between Luoland and Mombasa provided safety as it significantly reduced possibilities of repatriation, a commonly applied punitive measure for Luo women considered "difficult" or disloyal to men and their community. Figure 5.3 shows Luo women participating in hunting, and reveals that gender essentialism was not a defining feature

[467] White, *The Comforts of Home.*

[468] Saheed Aderinto, "Journey to Work: Transnational Prostitution in Colonial British West Africa," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 24, No.1 (location: University of Texas press, 2015), p. 101, pp. 99–124.

of Luo femininities in the precolonial era, while the letter extract in Figure 5.4. reveals the extent to which Luo men worked to control and curtail the movement and independence of Luo women in nearby Kisumu town through community associations, which made moving to Mombasa a much more attractive option.

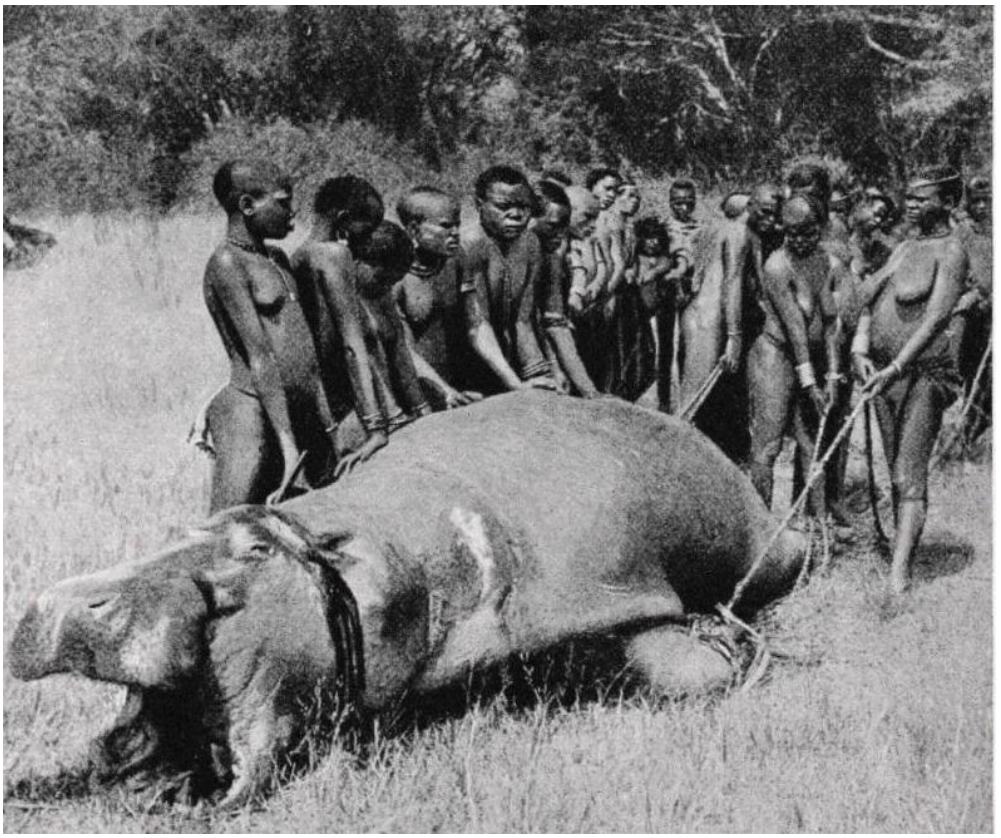
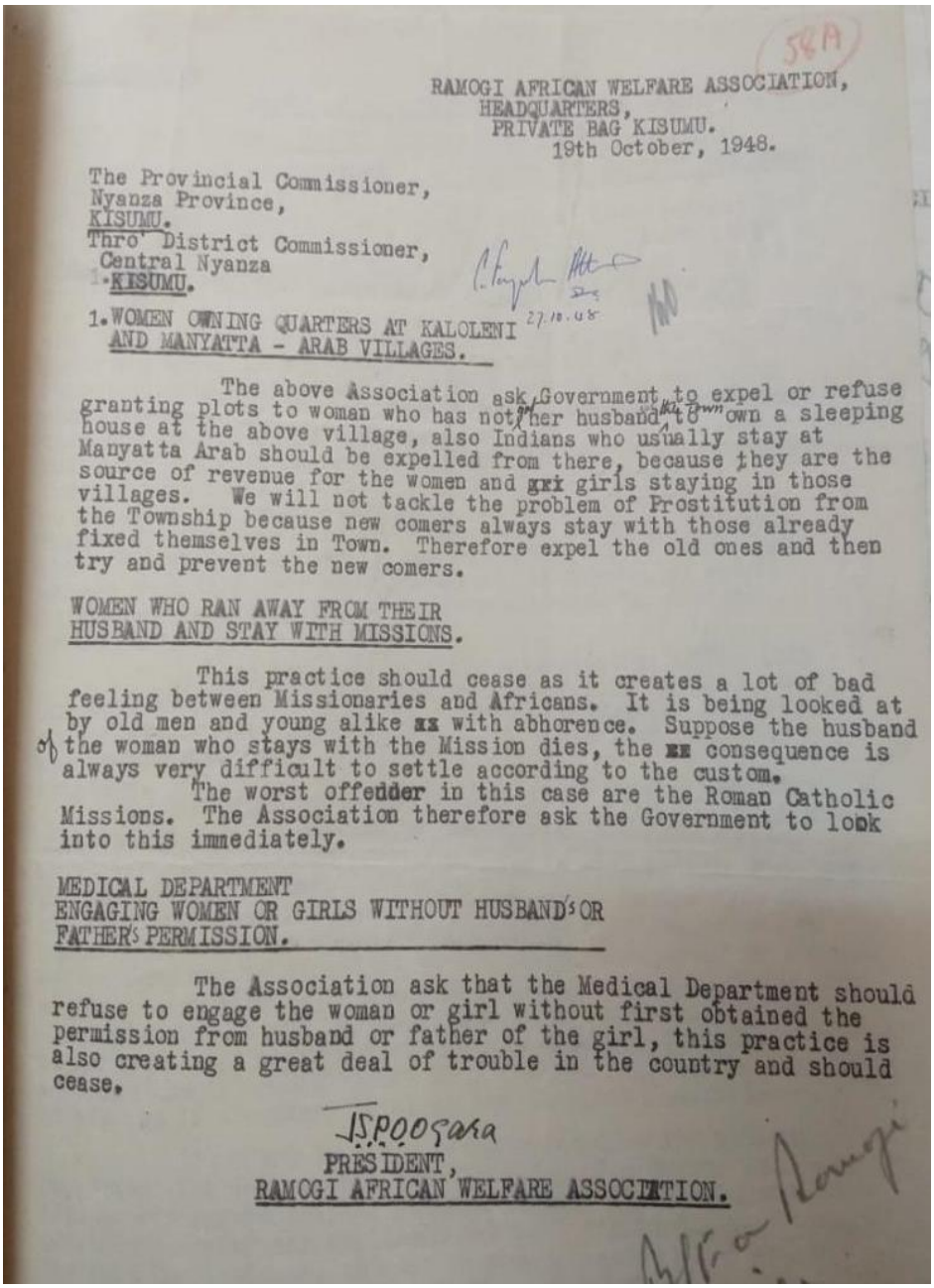


Figure 5.3. Luo women participating in a hippo hunt. The caption in the photo reads: Women of the Kavirondo tribe […] are most enterprising. They pursue agriculture, herding, hunting, and fishing with their menfolk, and are their tribe's only "medicine-men." […]plucky and dextrous hunters, the fiercest hippopotamus and largest elephant invariably succumb to their traps and spears. Photograph accessed on 15 February 2024 at: https://ian.macky.net/secretmuseum/kavirondo_women_hauling_hippo.jpg.



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RAMOGI AFRICAN WELFARE ASSOCIATION,
HEADQUARTERS,
PRIVATE BAG KISUMU.
19th October, 1948.

The Provincial Commissioner,
Nyanza Province,
KISUMU.
Thro' District Commissioner,
Central Nyanza
KISUMU.

27.10.48

1. WOMEN OWNING QUARTERS AT KALOLENI AND MANYATTA - ARAB VILLAGES.

The above Association ask Government to expel or refuse granting plots to woman who has not her husband, to own a sleeping house at the above village, also Indians who usually stay at Manyatta Arab should be expelled from there, because they are the source of revenue for the women and girls staying in those villages. We will not tackle the problem of Prostitution from the Township because new comers always stay with those already fixed themselves in Town. Therefore expel the old ones and then try and prevent the new comers.

WOMEN WHO RAN AWAY FROM THEIR HUSBAND AND STAY WITH MISSIONS.

This practice should cease as it creates a lot of bad feeling between Missionaries and Africans. It is being looked at by old men and young alike with abhorence. Suppose the husband of the woman who stays with the Mission dies, the consequence is always very difficult to settle according to the custom.
The worst offedder in this case are the Roman Catholic Missions. The Association therefore ask the Government to look into this immediately.

MEDICAL DEPARTMENT
ENGAGING WOMEN OR GIRLS WITHOUT HUSBAND'S OR FATHER'S PERMISSION.

The Association ask that the Medical Department should refuse to engage the woman or girl without first obtained the permission from husband or father of the girl, this practice is also creating a great deal of trouble in the country and should cease.

J.S.Ooyaka
PRESIDENT,
RAMOGI AFRICAN WELFARE ASSOCIATION.

Figure 5.4. A copy of a letter by Ramogi welfare association members requesting the colonial state's help to curtail the activities of independent Luo women in Kisumu. Photograph source: The Kenya National Archives, PC/NZA/ Association and Institutions, Riwruok Luo.

5.9.2 The reorganisation of communal property relations

The changes induced by colonialism in the matter of communal property ownership were a major factor catalysing Luo women's choice of Mombasa as a migration destination. The reserve policy in particular limited options for expansion and occupation of new lands and, consequently, put considerable strain on the prevailing cultural practices of tenureship among the Luo. Because of land scarcities, Luo agnatic relations swiftly transformed to displace some persons from accessing land ownership and inheritance rights.[469] Women and *jodak* tenants were amongst the first groups to lose land rights in this regard.

Wilson's[470] study comprehensively captured Luo tenure practices at the time of colonial occupation. He was categorical, however, that respondents whose material was used to finalise this work were explicit about recent changes in tenure practices, and that these changes were in response to the colonial experience. Wilson's work revealed that precolonial tenure amongst the Luo recognised that land was the property of the community. The land was acquired through conquest, and lineage warriors moved to conquer new areas whenever currently occupied lands became exhausted. Every member of an *Oganda* (lineage), had inalienable rights to cultivate a garden within the territory *(piny)* of their *oganda*. Within the *oganda*, women acquired usufruct rights to lands belonging to either their fathers (through their mothers) or through their husbands. These cultivation rights were inalienable and could only be removed if a woman changed their lineage by way of marriage, divorce, or remarriage. A man gave land to his wife upon marriage and each wife cultivated the land together with her children. Wives' portions thus belonged to them and all unmarried children, irrespective of gender. When a woman married, they lost ownership rights over their mother's portion but. at the same time, gained rights to portions given by the husband. These lands would then belong to her and her children. In the event of divorce, a woman returned to her father's home and was given a portion of her mother's land to cultivate. Her brothers or other male kin (in cases where the mother did not produce male children) could not take away these lands in inheritance when their father died. If a husband died without a male issue, their land reverted back to their father or nearest agnatic relations, except the portions that were allocated to the wife/wives. These lands could only be taken away if the woman refused to be taken in levirate and, instead, opted to be remarried in a different lineage. If the woman was taken in levirate, the levirate man did not gain rights to such lands, which remained property of the woman and her children. Occupation and usufruct rights extended to protect all children produced by a woman. For instance, if a woman came to her marriage with a *kimirwa/nyathi simba* (child born before cattle were paid to her father as bride price, and hence considered illegitimate), the *kimirwa* had rights to inherit portions given to the mother.

The social practices of tenure rights given to women began changing when reserves were created. As Ogot observed, the freezing of boundaries created a major economic problem for the Luo who, accustomed to moving to find new homes whenever there were contests over land,

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[469] Glickman, "Patriliny among the Gusii and Luo of Kenya."

[470] Wilson, *Luo Customary Laws.*

were now confined within specific land units.[471]As the value of land increased, clan and lineage territories were sealed and land inheritance rights were strictly tied to patrilineal lines.[472] Widows then lost land rights as agnatic kin of husbands now had the rights to land in levirate arrangements. Divorced women, too, were disinherited as patrimonial ties began conferring more rights on agnatic male relations. *Kimirwa* children became strangers and were accorded similar status to *jodak*, whose rights of inheritance were directly linked to their immediate benefactors. As the story of Halima Achieng below reveals, migration then provided opportunities where women could opt out of the growing tensions over lands in rural Luoland. Mombasa became the perfect destination, where these women could participate in the cash economy and eke out a living, far from communal restrictions.

> *I got married to Joshua in the year 1950. I did not particularly like him, but had no choice in the marriage as I had begot a kimirwa and the man responsible had run away to Nairobi. Soon after marriage negotiations had been completed, Joshua left me at his parent's home and went back to Thika where he worked in a sisal plantation. He had not yet made me my own hut and I was living in his old simba*.[473] He went for a very long time and did not communicate with us. We lived badly. Often, we would go without food and his family did not accept my child. They insisted that they would not accept a stranger taking away part of their land in inheritance. I began selling groundnuts at the market in Akala to make some money. It was in this market that I was told that Kisumu provided better conditions for working as ayah (child minder) especially if one had received some formal education. Since I had gone to the mission school for two years, I thought I would try my luck and find work at the European or Arab houses in Kisumu. I left Akala in the pretext of visiting my uncle in Kisumu, and there, I secured employment as a cleaner for Ali who worked as a cloth trader. I began having relations with Ali, and soon moved to his house where I began performing wifely duties even though our relationship was not legally recognised. Ali stopped paying for my services as soon as I began living with him. He was also violent. I then decided to move farther, to Mombasa where I had heard that men paid more money for women. On reaching Mombasa, I was shocked at the size of the town! I was given accommodation by a man who worked as a goods carrier at the rail godowns, and we began living as husband and wife. He earned very little and life was difficult. I looked for work in the beer bars, where I learned how to brew the popular "changáa" gin. It was here that my profession as a sex worker became established. When my family heard of my endeavours in Mombasa, I became a pariah. I know I cannot go back to Luoland and have made my peace with it. I however often think of my child, whom I left with my uncle in Kisumu.*

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[471] Ogot, *History of the Southern Luo*.

[472] Glickman, "Patriliny among the Gusii and Luo of Kenya."

[473] Simba is the housing built for unmarried bachelors in their father's compounds.

Joseph Ouma shares a similar story of contested patrimonial land rights. The 71-year-old is a second-generation migrant whose "ancestral" home is in Migori. Ouma lives in Bangladesh with his two wives; Amondi an ethnic Luo and Rose an ethnic Manyala. His first wife, Achieng, was a local beer brewer who unfortunately died; she is buried in Makaburini public cemetery. Joseph's father, Saulo, came to Mombasa in search of his mother, who migrated into the town in the 1930s.

> *My father was a kimirwa. Because of his status, my grandmother's choice in marriage partners became limited and she ended up being the third wife of a much older man. The man accepted him as his legal father but died when my father was still a young boy.*

Kimirwas' status as legal sons of the household is recognised with finality when the adoptive father pays a bride price for the son, which, in this case, had not happened.

> *When my adoptive grandparent died, his extended family began constant quarrels with my grandmother. She could not bear it anymore and hence left her marital home, and sought refuge at her maternal home. Efforts to reconcile the family did not bear fruit, which greatly annoyed my grandmother's maternal household and particularly the uncles. The contests were mainly related to land and inheritance rights. One day, my grandmother disappeared with a labourer from Mombasa, leaving my father behind. When my father grew up, he decided to go with one of his neighbours to Mombasa in the hopes of finding my grandmother. He was also tired of everyday quarrels at home, and he hoped to start a new life in Mombasa. Mombasa however turned out to be a sisal plantation in Voi. He worked several contracts in Voi and later moved on to work at the port in Mombasa. Here, he met and married my mother. She was a beer brewer.*

Joseph confirms that his father's stigmatising *kimirwa* status influenced his decision to marry Achieng, another social outcast. It was also the reason for her interment at the public cemetery in Mombasa, just like his father; both had "no rights" to land in Migori. Asked whether he feels incomplete because of the broken relationship with his "motherland," Joseph replies that he is actually happy because he finally found a home amongst the diaspora Luo population living in Bangladesh. Here, his status as "a child of no one" is diminished as Bangladesh provides a home and community for ethnic Luo rejected in Luoland.

The translocation of the site of family and communal production from the home to the wage labour economy considerably changed the values of Luo women's productive labour. The monetary compensation for labour provided *outside* the home, and mainly performed by men, and non-compensation of those provided *inside* the home, and performed mainly by women, shifted the values of traditional forms of gendered labour and invalidated the contribution of women in family and communal property acquisition. Before European occupation, labour was uniformly valued as a resource for keeping family and society running, and hence gendered division of labour was no more than a product of adapting to existing environments and lived

realities, rather than having any form of essentialism attached.[474] European capitalist reinterpretations of gendered labour served to devalue African women's labour, especially since household duties, though accepted as nurturing, were considered invisible and unproductive and hence not given any monetary value.[475]

In a majority of pre-colonial African societies, labour for personal accumulation was organised within the family and through the agency of women. Women did the bulk of subsistence work and were the chief producers of life and labour, making them, alongside land, one of the most valuable resource in communities.[476] When a woman left her maternal homestead for marriage, cattle were sent to her father to compensate for the loss of her labour, and those of her future children. The father usually used these cattle to acquire more wives (and children) or he would exchange them for political and social standing. Women and cattle therefore generated each other in a cycle of male accumulation and family formation.[477] The wealthiest men were those who owned many cattle and many wives. In this way, women's manifest and latent labours metamorphosised into male economic and political power. It is for this reason that whenever divorce occurred amongst the Luo, deductions were made from the bride price to be returned (a number of cows for every child borne, and some more for every year spent with the husband) to the extent that, in most cases, no returns were actually made.[478] If the woman produced many children or had stayed for a considerable period of time with a man, the husband was, in fact, the one with a debt of cattle to pay.[479]

Because land and property ownership were closely tied to a family's subsistence capabilities, a man was only able to accumulate large parcels of land if he had a large family of many wives and children who could work the land. In the case of the Luo, overall family wealth was measured by how many and how full one's granaries were, together with how much cattle and other domestic animals one possessed.[480] Men were obliged to build granaries for wives as soon as a home was established for them, and the granaries became property semi-owned by both man and wife. This was because each wife and her children were responsible for filling their particular granary. Upon getting married, a woman was sent to her new homestead with gifts of animals, which, in time, reproduced and increased the family's herd. Because women produced and co-owned family property, men were therefore required to seek permission from their wives to redistribute them. For example, a man could not use cattle belonging to his wife to pay bride price and he could not redistribute grain from their granary without her consent.

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[474] Xavier Vigna and Michelle Zancharini-Fournel, "Gender History and Labour History: Intersections," *Clio* 38. (2013). Online since 15 September 2014 at: http://journals.openedition.org/cliowgh/306.

[475] Ibid, p.177.

[476] White, *The Comforts of Home*.

[477]Anne McClintock, "The Scandal of the Whorearchy: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi," *Transition*, No.52 (Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 95.

[478] Paul Onyango, O.I., 20 April 2018, Bangladesh, Mombasa.

[479] Wilson, *Luo Customary Laws and Marriage Laws Customs*.

[480] Peter Odongo, O.I., 26 April 2018, Nyali Mombasa.

Property co-ownership would, however, be contested with the official embracing of a monetary economy and the adoption of cash as the main contributor to family property. Thus, as cash became much more important in the family economy, women whose labour values contributed less cash became marginalised. Having lost land rights and their position in property accumulation, women became much more dependent on men, and this situation increased their vulnerability. A number of Luo women therefore opted to break away from this growing cycle of male dominance and rural poverty, and moving far away from the community was the first step towards attaining personal freedom.

5.9.3 Conjugality and migration to Mombasa

Jean Baptiste[481] tells a compelling story of a community of former slaves who had been rescued and settled in Libreville. After settling into their new homes, the community, made up of mainly men, mutinied against their missionary benefactors and began kidnapping women from surrounding communities with the intent of making them their wives. The rescued slaves were the cause of much terror as they threatened to inflict further harm upon neighbouring residents unless they were given access to more women. Baptiste's story is an observed example of conflict that often arises in situations where the gender ratio is imbalanced. Studies have proven that living in environments that provide little companionship and opportunities for social and biological reproduction produces feelings of isolation, which can lead to the breakdown of not only the individual, but the society as a whole.[482] Colonial Mombasa's gender ratio was heavily skewed. Of the 18,000 Africans enumerated in the 1921 census, for example, over 12,000 were men. The Mombasa Housing and Population Survey, moreover, showed that, in 1948, the African proper male population stood at 29,244 against 13,609 women.[483] The majority of the women captured in Mombasa censuses[484] up to the 1950s were, indeed, classified under the racial categories of Arab, Indian, and European, i.e. women who migrant Luo labourers could not access.

From the outset of European occupation, the population of African women on Mombasa Island was very low, and this image was the official demographic face of the town through to the 1950s. This was in glaring contrast to the numbers recorded on the mainland among the

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[481] Jean-Baptiste, *Conjugal Rights.*

[482] Lea-Maria Löbel, Hannes Kröger, Ana Nanette Tibubos, "Social Isolation and Loneliness in the Context of Migration: A Cross-Sectional Study of Refugees, Migrants, and the Native Population in Germany," *SOEP Papers on Multidisciplinary Panel Data Research*, (Berlin, 2021); F. A. S. Jensen, "Psychological Aspects of the Social Isolation of Refugees," *The International Migration Digest*, 3 No.1 (Sage Publications, 1966), pp. 40–60.

[483] KNA/CQ/1/1/20 Housing and Population Survey, Mombasa District, 1948–1961.

[484] Ibid. The survey admitted that the government put little consideration into the matter of Mombasa's population. Censuses were rarely conducted, and population estimates were made by merely scrutinising employment records at KURH. These records did not even capture non-contracted workers. After the census of 1921, it would be 1948 before the next one was conducted, and the subsequent one in 1962. Official population numbers in colonial Mombasa thus remain contentious.

Mijikenda. Moving to work at the rail and port thus presented opportunities for irregular attachments to women, and made it difficult for migrant Luo men to exercise influence over Luo women. This predicament was exacerbated by the fact that, in the initial years of male migration, women who had been left behind in Luoland changed their loyalties, and many abandoned matrimonial homes to remarry elsewhere. From the 1910s up to the 1950s, several cases of the cuckolding of migrant men were presented to the Central Kavirondo LNC's.[485] This changing of loyalties was certainly made possible by customs that viewed marriages as lifelong processes rather than events, hence the last bull cementing marriages "*riso chege*" exchanged when both parties were old.[486]

The loneliness of Luo labourers in Mombasa was compounded by the colonial practice of segregating living arrangements. The various ethnicities working for the KURH were housed in separated quarters, which made it impossible for the Luo to have meaningful interactions with anyone other than male Luo labourers. Furthermore, the low status of *wabara* Luo at the Swahili coast limited labourers' access to women of coastal ethnicities. Luo labourers in Mombasa were therefore walking a tightrope, balancing trying to survive in Mombasa with trying to keep marriages and relationships going in their rural homes. These tensions were worsened by growing contests between the older generation of Luo men in Western Kenya and the relatively younger migrants in Mombasa over control and access to women. The constant oscillating between the urban and the rural,[487] in efforts to keep relationships going, caused considerable work disruptions, and by the end of the 1920s, colonial authorities overlooked as the nascent features of Luo women's migration to Mombasa began manifesting.

The contest between older men in rural areas and younger men in Mombasa influenced the earliest cases of Luo women migrants to Mombasa in the period 1920–1940. Older men wanted to maintain control over their daughters who, at this time, were their primary means of accumulation. Younger migrant men, by contrast, were unable to gather enough money from their wages to pay a bride priceand yet still, were seeking wives who would move with them to Mombasa.[488] Fathers in Luoland had began to arbitrarily demand for extra favours and monies to allow access to their daughters, even as LNCs, which, in this period, acted as the *buch piny*, failed to stabilise an official mechanism for bride price payment. Young men asked for a reduction of the number of ceremonies that followed marriage, but elders were adamant on them following the established, tedious processes. As the battle over access to women raged on, young men changed tack, and resorted to *por* elopement. Indeed, the majority of the first

[485] KNA/PC/NZA/2/7/16 Native Tribunal Courts, Central Kavirondo, 1932–38.

[486] Wilson, *Luo Customary Laws and Marriage Laws Customs.*

[487] Labourers were often forced to leave their workstations to tend to domestic issues in Luoland. These labourers' rarely made it back to Mombasa because of the costs involved. Mombasa's KURH thus lost a number of skilled labourers, many of whom opted to move to Nairobi or Kisumu towns that were closer to Luoland.

[488] KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/376 Administration (Ramogi African Welfare). Joel Omino's comments at a Central Kavirondo LNC meeting in Kisumu, on 26 May 1946. He reiterated that migrant labourers were in the habit of misleading girls and even people's wives in order to get them to go and live with them in the towns.

batch of Luo women arriving in Mombasa came following a *por* marriage.[489] As Wilson aptly put it:

> *[T]his form of marriage that can only be directly translated as elopement is becoming increasingly popular among young, educated Luo […] the preliminary ceremonies are omitted. When escape to the towns is easily accomplished then brideswealth is not paid at all and these unions end in separation, and these women frequently turn to other forms of marriages or concubinage which are outside the customary laws of the Luo.*[490]

Por marriage was allowed in pre-colonial Luo society as it was believed that a young bridegroom in constrained circumstances would eventually pay the bride price. In particular, though, it was hoped that *por* unions would produce girls who would get married in the future, and the family of the mother would then take the cattle of the daughter's bride price as compensation for their daughter. *Por* thus ensured that even the poorest had a chance at marriage and subsequent extension of their lineage.

To legitimise *por*, a young man brought the woman he wanted to marry to his *simba* and had intercourse with her. She would then remain in his home and *cook in his mother's hut*. Cooking was the definitive action signalling that she was now a married woman. The Luo word for marriage, *tedo*, is in fact, the same word for cooking. *Por* was also deemed legitimate if a man ran off with a woman and went to live with her in "distant lands" and amongst a different ethnic group. In the pre-colonial era, when distant lands actually meant neighbouring *pinje* or Bantu lands, her family generally went in search of the pair to try and convince the woman to come back. If she refused, they would accept some cattle as compensation for her bride price. The number of cattle was usually less than in a normal marriage negotiation. For young Luo KURH labourers in Mombasa, distant lands presented opportunities to acquire partners in an economy that had limited avenues for wealth accumulation. Contrary to the rules of *por*, however, young Luo men were not willing to defer payment of the bride price; rather, they planned to ignore it altogether.

Finding themselves in strange lands and with an illegitimate status, the first batch of Luo women in Mombasa began their migrant experience from a disadvantaged and vulnerable position. Many found themselves in deplorable living conditions, sharing rooms in lodges and as tenants in dilapidated accommodation, as colonial authorities continued to neglect housing for its African labourer population. Even as the housing situation deteriorated through to the 1930s, the Carter Commission in 1934 recommended no changes to the reserve policy, which could have allowed changes in land ownership for non-coastal indigenes. The commission claimed that migrant ethnicities were not forced to bring their families along to live with them in the

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[489] Ibid. The Ramogi Association's memo to the governor of the Kenya colony contesting the Native Christian Marriage and Divorce Ordinance 1931, which gave autonomy to girls to choose their marital partners. It was particularly difficult to follow up on bride price if a daughter had run off to Mombasa. Memo dated 31 July 1946.
[490] Wilson, *Luo Customary Laws and Marriage Laws Customs*. p.118.

urban areas and, if they did, they could always find accommodation further inland in the more rural areas.[491] This was untrue. All land falling under the colonial side of greater Mombasa were either community owned or crown land, and, because the reserve policy had created land shortages, strangers were not welcome in *wapwani* communal lands. Moreover, Luo women's vulnerability increased in their new abodes as, in this period, communal mechanisms for dispute resolution were evolving and becoming much more patriarchal.[492] Quinney's supposition that personal and social values shape people's concept of victims, and that victimhood is a social construct used as a means of social control by those in power,[493] was clearly evident in Mombasa, where women facing marital challenges were viewed as delinquents who were fomenting female disobedience. Having eloped from Luoland, which blocked their father's access to their bride wealth, these women's status as victims of deception changed, and they acquired pariah status as deviant women.[494] Mechanisms to provide recourse for redress whenever they had marital problems were therefore blocked, as their situation in Mombasa was regarded as having neither customary status nor communal favour.

5.9.4 Luo women and the transformation of the positionality of Luo ethnicity in colonial Mombasa

Other Luo women followed the railway line to Mombasa shortly after the group who had left partnered with men. This second set of women was in search of ways to improve their material conditions, as the effects of the cash economy and male migration had negatively impacted their general welfare. For some, Mombasa presented opportunities for income generation, while others hoped that far-off lands could finally provide enough distance to escape familial and community bonds. Mombasa was a favourite destination for "misfit" Luo women: those running away from their husbands or marriage arrangements; those who had produced *kimirwa and nyithi simba*; those who had been accused of witchcraft, sex workers, "wild" and worldly women, and swathes of other women whom Luo men regarded as eccentric. These women hoped to eke out a living and begin new lives as part of the new African urban population in Mombasa.

The colonial economy in Mombasa, however, presented limited options for Luo women looking to eke out a living in the town. This was the case in many colonial towns, where women were not only heavily policed, but also offered chances of gainful employment only if the work fell within the boundaries of Western representations of gendered female roles. Aderinto argued that these restrictions were reflections of perceived threats women had to transverse racial lines,

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[491] R. Carter, *Kenya Land Commission Report* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1934), Paragraph 1351–1365 discusses native tenants in the coastal mainland and native tenants in Mombasa.

[492] Samwel Okuro, "Our Women Must Return Home: Institutionalized Patriarchy in Colonial Central Nyanza District, 1945–1963," *Journal of Asian and African Studies,* 45 (2010), pp. 522–33.

[493] Richard Quinney, "Who is the Victim?," *Criminology,* 10 No. 3 (Sage Publications, 1972), pp. 314-323.

[494] Okuro, "Misfit Mothers, Wayward Wives and Disobedient Daughters."

which, if followed through, could jeopardise the potency of empire and, by extension, imperial, male, national self-esteem.[495] This fear of women was evident in colonial Mombasa where prostitution was a recurring topic of discussion in government circulars and legislative agendas.[496] The colonial state turned to Luo welfare organisations, and co-opted their influence to police the movement and behaviour of Luo women. Insisting on Luo womanhood mirroring Victorian femininity, Luo men, through welfare organisations, pushed for women's employment to be restricted to caregiving positions. This meant that a majority of working Luo women – because they worked in defiance of men – were pushed into the margins of the colonial economy. Hawking and petty trading, sex work, cleaning, and beer/liquor brewing thus became the most common economic activities for Luo women from the 1920s up to the 1950s.

How, then, did Luo women's mobilities transform Luo positionality in Mombasa town? How did their movement contribute to, especially, the economic changes witnessed by the Luo population working for the KURH? Because women operated in the periphery of the official economy in Mombasa, official figures regarding their contribution to the developments witnessed in the town do not exist. Their influence on improvements seen in Mombasa is, however, indisputable. Firstly, Luo women's presence in the town was a key factor contributing to the changes witnessed in Mombasa's housing policies starting in the 1920s and running through to the decolonisation years of the 1950s. Whereas the colonial government overlooked the issue of migrant labourers' housing, from the mid-1920s, KURH management began investigating this question and, in particular, looked into how they could settle married migrant workers with families in better living quarters.[497] From the 1930s, workers were given housing allowances. A key reason for this development was to enable labourers with families to find better housing. Though negligible, the allowances progressively increased from the late 1930s to the 1950s, and this allowed a cadre of Luo labourers to live a more agreeable urban life in Mombasa.

In addition, Luo families influenced the commencement of housing schemes in Mombasa. Several housing schemes aimed at settling rail and port workers were started after World War II. These provided proper modern housing, with plumbing and running water, similar to those occupied by Europeans. The housing schemes continued well into the 1960s and were the reason why some Swahili groups wanting to access them, began requesting the colonial state to recognise them as African. The photographs in Figures 5.5 and 5.6. show the Mombasa Railways housing scheme in 1940, and today.

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[495] Aderinto, "Journey to Work." The European colonist was particularly wary of white men mingling with African women.

[496] KNA/PC/COAST/1/10/166 Township Matters, 1913; KNA/CQ/I/19/25 Annual report Mombasa district, 1932–1939.

[497] KNA/K/331/11/87-842 *Straight Talk on Labour,* (Nairobi: Government printer, 1928).

Figure 5.5

Figure 5.6.

Fig 5.5 and 5.6. Mombasa Railways housing scheme in the 1940s and a photo taken by the researcher in 2019. The housing scheme catered to migrant labourers with family. 1940s photograph is courtesy of G.C.W Ogilvie, *The Housing Of Africans in the Urban Areas of Kenya* (Nairobi: The Kenya information office, 1946).

Luo women, moreover, made significant contributions to the appraisal and stabilisation of Luo household incomes in Mombasa. By engaging in work in the periphery of the mainstream economy – i.e. the black economy, which drove Mombasa's booming informal sector – they were able to supplement household incomes and contribute to the matter of property acquisition.[498] Jacinta[499] owns several plots of land in Magongo, which were inherited from her mother, who, in turn, inherited them from her grandmother. She suspects that her grandmother, who was the original owner of these plots, was a sex worker. Her grandmother was already a wealthy woman in the 1950s, at the time she met her grandfather, who was a train engine fireman. She pegs her suspicion on the fact that there is no clear line tracing the origins of their wealth as both grandparents were neither educated nor from elite families. Luo sex workers were, indeed, able to accumulate a tidy sum as they negotiated for higher pay from European, Arab, and Asian clients, and this money was used to accumulate property, which later became family property. Mercy[500] is another example. She owns and runs an illegal distillery in Bangladesh, where she makes the popular liquor *chang'aa*, which is distributed throughout several informal settlements in Mombasa. Mercy says that her family business spans four generations of women, and that knowledge of brewing, and distribution through underground networks, was passed down from mother to daughter. *Chang'aa* brewing has afforded Mercy a comfortable life in Mombasa. Though educated (she holds a university degree), Mercy says she continues operating this illegal business because it is more lucrative than formal employment. She owns several houses in Bangladesh and Magongo, where she collects monthly rent, but she insists that her core business is *chang'aa* brewing. Mercy and Jacinta's maternal predecessors were key players, laying foundations for their current material status, and their stories of women pioneers were replicated in a number of Luo households that I interviewed.

Luo women did not, however, freely operate in colonial Mombasa. They were constantly intimidated, harassed, and some were even repatriated for seeking wage employment in the town. The Ramogi African Welfare Association and the Luo Union were the greatest challengers to their freedom, as they literally went on the prowl, looking for Luo women living in the town and wanting to know why they were there. Women merely existing in Mombasa were regularly accused of engaging in sex work, and then indicted for being disloyal to the ethos of Luo womanhood and identity. Ramogi was procedurally pedantic in policing Luo women, so much so that a stipulation in the organisation's rulebook spelled out that "[…] any Luo girl or woman found smoking cigarettes with the lit end inside the mouth and drawing money from the underwear pocket will be liable to prosecution."[501] The association made it difficult for even married women to visit their spouses in Mombasa and women spotted there were interviewed on the nature of their business. When the land consolidation processes began in the late 1950s, Luo Union and Ramogi Welfare found new impetus for deporting women

[498] The Mombasa social survey of 1939, for example, revealed that migrant labourers' wives contributed to household incomes by engaging in trade.

[499] O.I, 12 February 2018. Named changed for privacy purposes.

[500] O.I, 6 February 2018. Named changed for privacy purposes.

[501] KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/376 Administration, (Ramogi Welfare) 1944–1947.

back to Western Kenya, arguing that their presence there was needed to protect land rights of men in urban areas.[502]

Conclusion

The formation of a diaspora Luo constituency in Mombasa was related to the establishment of mediums for negotiating with the colonial state, which would enable the appraisal of Luo positionality in Mombasa's colonial hierarchy. The outcomes of these endeavours were, however, much more profound, and they produced what can only be described as a social revolution in Mombasa's urban landscape. Firstly, the Luo definitively changed the demographic map of Mombasa, shifting its positionality from an Arab settlement to a solidly African town. The consolidation of the various Luo identities into a single ethnic constituency gave them numerical strength, to the point that, by the beginning of the 1940s, even *wapwani* recognised that Mombasa had shifted from being a Swahili town to become a Kavirondo town. Luo KURH labourers additionally influenced the town's spatial development, in that they prompted the construction of modern housing and infrastructure specifically catering to its key demographic, the African labourer class. KURH labourers' experiences, moreover, featured prominently in anti-colonial narratives, and these were appropriated to gain political space in Mombasa in the years leading up to Kenya's independence.

The Luo Union's role in these revolutionary endeavours is worth special mention. The organisation was indeed, the substructure that forged a pan-Luo identity in Mombasa. In addition to providing the platform from where the current Luo identity emerged, the Union was also responsible for shaping and launching the careers of prominent Luo politicians, including Tom Mboya and Oginga Odinga. These politicians were instrumental in effecting the transformations witnessed in Mombasa's political status as Kenya's independence drew near. The merging of Luo and Kikuyu ethnic constituencies in the Kenya African National Union (KANU) in the 1950s, enabled a successful negotiation for power with colonialists as the independence agenda was visualised through the lens of the colonial experience of these two ethnic groups. Though current narratives of the Union evoke memories of little more than the establishment the of *Gor Mahia* Football club, whose fanatical following is associated with ethnic Luo, the Union's consolidation of Luo ethnicity in the exact period when Luo rail and port workers needed a community, was truly an accomplishment in surviving Mombasa.

[502] KNA/PC/NZA/3/1/316 Administration: Associations and Institutions, Luo Union, 1951–1955.

CONCLUSION

In 1961, a petitioner for Kenya's coastal autonomy presented a memorandum to the chairman of the Robertson Commission, vocalising his support for the politics of the *Mwambao*[503] movement, whose main agenda was to demand the reclamation and restoration of Zanzibari indigenous rights. The petitioners statement said, among other things:

> *We would like to explode the fallacy that is very prevalent in this part of Africa, that as long as one has a black pigmentation and fuzzy hair, one has citizenship rights in Africa. Might was right in 1885 and in 1961 Black is right. These people swarming from upcountry in busloads and bogey loads come to earn a living or to shelter from the famine that ravages their country from time to time. They never regard this as their home and they have got their roots firmly entrenched in their own homes. . . . To grant political rights to such a people, who have no patriotic sentiments to the Coastal Strip or who have dual loyalties is a mockery of democracy and a direct threat to the wellbeing of the true nationals of this country. This threat looms very large on our heads, the true sons of Mwambao*[504]

The position of Mombasa and the 16-mile coastal strip came into sharp focus from the beginning of the 1950s, when African mobilisation for political independence gained momentum throughout the colony. While the Mau Mau movement in Central Kenya aimed at reclaiming land rights limited by the introduction of settler farming and the declaration of the White highlands,[505] Mombasa's was dealing with two specific struggles. One group, led by majority upcountry labourer populations, sought to improve worker conditions and was pushing for more African representation in the labour governing structures of the colonial state. This faction was spearheaded by the rail and port workers' trade union networks. A second struggle for independence emerging in Mombasa was commanded by Swahili and Arab indigenes. The concerns of this group were rooted in fears of losing sovereignty when the inevitable independence was gained. This second struggle was testament to, and a response to, the obvious transformations in Mombasa's topographical features, and which were mainly driven by migrant labourers, the majority of whom were Luo KURH workers.

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[503] The *Mwambao* movement was a political campaign led by Arab and Swahili residents of the Kenyan coast. The movement's activities ran between 1953–1963, and its aim was the pursuit of a sovereign region on the coast, which was previously the property of the Sultan. *Mwambao* adherents' claims hinged on fears of political domination by Africans living along the coast and migrants from upcountry, as Kenya moved towards self rule. A more in-depth understanding of the movement's activities can be read in James Brennan, "Lowering the Sultan's Flag: Sovereignty and Decolonisation in Coastal Kenya," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 50 No.4 (2008), pp 831–861.

[504] CO/ 894/13/2, Memorandum written by Coastal People's Party (CPP) to the Richardson commission looking into coastal autonomy.

[505] Frank Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective* (Nairobi and Athens: James Currey and East African Educational Publishers, 1989); Robert Bates, "The Agrarian Origins of Mau Mau: A Structural Account," *Agricultural History*, 61 No.1 (1987), pp 1–28.

The migrant Luo rail and port workers arrived in Mombasa's cultural space as the official labourer class, whose main role was to assist the expansion and maintenance of East Africa's grandest colonial project. In no less than half a century, the labourer had revolutionised and transformed the topography of Mombasa's economic and social space, to the extent that their presence contested the town's positionality, particularly with regard to questions of sovereignty and conceptions of nationhood and citizenship rights. The contradictions of Mombasa's evident outlook vis-à-vis agreements made with the Sultan placed considerable pressure on the colonial governing structure, as they attempted to mediate the construction of a post-colonial order for the protectorate, and for the colony. As various interest groups within Mombasa and the larger coastal strip appealed for recognition, ethnic tensions heightened and Mombasa became a volatile zone.

Even though Britain was pursuing decolonisation, Mombasa and hinterland Kenya were still regarded as highly strategic. The importance of these two regions was largely informed by the rail line and Mombasa's harbour, which, by the end of the 1950s, connected the economies of the entire East African region. Britain thus aimed to facilitate the structuring of a post-colonial order that maintained links with the region where KURH infrastructure lay. The decision to secure Mombasa, and Kenya in general, was additionally informed by concerns about the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic's (USSR) growing influence in Africa. The possibility of communism spreading to strategic lands in Africa was becoming evident as Tanganyika, next door to Mombasa, adopted an Africanised system of socialism known as *Ujamaa*.[506] Britain, furthermore, was apprehensive about losing control of East Africa to the growing Arab influence in Africa. The open support given by Arabic countries to the *Mwambao* movement, and their active participation in pushing *Mwambao* rhetoric in their own country, was seen as a threat to European hegemony, and they feared that Mombasa could be used as a gateway to effect Islamic influence in other African countries.[507]

By 1961, the estimated population of the coastal strip stood at almost 400,000. This included about 300,000 Africans, 37,000 Arabs, Swahili, and Bajuni, 48,000 Asians, and 7000 Europeans.[508] Of these, 117,000 Africans, 27,000 Arabs, 34,000 Asians, and 6,000 Europeans lived in Mombasa. Migrant Luo rail and port workers comprised a sizable portion of the African population in Mombasa. Luo numbers swelled from the beginning of the 1950s, as the political climate became even more accommodating to Luo labourers.[509] In addition to searching for employment, they came to enjoy the trappings of urban life, which included schools, hospitals, roads, and shopping centres, which were scarce in Luoland in Western Kenya. In this period,

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[506] Arrigo Pallotti, "Post-Colonial Nation-Building and Southern African Liberation: Tanzania and the Break of Diplomatic Relations with the United Kingdom, 1965–1968," *African Historical Review*, 41 No.2 (2009), pp. 60–84.

[507] Ibid.

[508] James Robertson, *The Kenya Coastal Strip: Report of the Commissioner* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1961).

[509] In the 1950s, the colonial state was embroiled in a struggle with the Mau Mau, and the Kikuyu were hence viewed with suspicion. The state moved away from recruiting ethnic Kikuyu and turned to the Luo, who were largely incorporated into the colonial Africanisation policy.

KURH offered a better working environment for migrant labourers as the decolonisation era struggles had resulted in the granting of several worker concessions, including better wages and housing. The Luo were then presented with the space to feel at home in Mombasa. Consequently, the town's demography shifted, as it became more African and more inland dominated – a Kavirondo town in the literal sense. As questions of coastal autochthony and citizenship rights became amplified in the late 1950s, colonial authorities were prompted to re-evaluate the treaty that had established, in law, separate political identities for the colony and the protectorate. The Colonial Office in London created a commission of inquiry led by James Robertson, whose main aim was to look into and report on changes considered advisable in the 1895 agreement relating to the coastal strip of Kenya.

Migrant Luo KURH labourers, with roots in both Mombasa and inland Kenya, had now become key stakeholders in the political and economic affairs of Mombasa. These labourers wanted a unitary state encompassing the Kenya colony and the independent coastal strip.[510] Arabs and Swahili populations, and some Europeans, on the other hand, supported an autonomous state along the coast, which was to include Mombasa. Robertson's first suggestion was a referendum, but it was rejected as there was no agreement on exactly who should be included in the vote. *Wapwani* argued that migrant groups should not be allowed to vote and it was therefore felt that the results of any such referendum would not reflect the true will of the people involved with the affairs of the coast and particularly its most strategic town, Mombasa. Robertson conducted a series of meetings with various interest groups, noting their views for and against coastal autonomy. His final report recommended the unification of the protectorate region with the colony.

Robertson gave various reason for his recommendation of a unitary state. His key point, however, was that the coastal strip would not be a viable entity if allowed to exist separated from the colony. Firstly, he argued that it would be extremely expensive to establish independent administrative structures for the new area, as the region had always been administered from Nairobi.[511] A new administrative region would, indeed, require a civil service, police, treasury, amongst other governing structures, and their establishment in that period would have been an expensive venture. Mombasa's civil service, of which a key part included the management of the rail and port, was certainly run by upcountry migrant labourers of whom the Luo were a sizable number. Robertson was categorical that marking out the boundaries of an independent coastal strip would pose challenges and, perhaps, create new contests with Mijikenda groups. The boundaries of the strip belonging to the Sultan had never been officially defined, and attempting to establish new ones in that period would have possibly cut off ethnic groups caught in the middle. The strip, and Mombasa in particular, also relied on the inland for many of its vital resources. KURH, for example, could not survive at that time without the migrant labourer population. The source of Mombasa's freshwaters, Mzima

[510] Donald Rothchild, *Racial Bargaining in Independent Kenya: A Study of Minorities and Decolonization* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).
[511] Robertson, *The Kenya Coastal Strip.*

Springs, was, moreover, located in the inland area of Taita Taveta. With plans to build a new refinery already underway, and projections of further expansion of the port, it was expected that Mombasa would require even more labourers, and more water from inland for the anticipated population growth. If separation occurred, then it was expected that hinterland Kenya would retaliate by, for example, disconnecting the freshwater line, placing the coast and Mombasa in particular in jeopardy.[512]

Robertson's decision, however, was primarily informed by the question of migrant upcountry folks and their place in an independent state if autonomy was granted; and by the KURH, which, in this period, connected the economies of the entire East Africa region. The creation of separate and distinct independent states would have required the renegotiation of the positionality of the upcountry migrant, and mediation of a truce between them and the coastal elites whose relations had, by then, badly deteriorated. If coastal elites decided to expel upcountry populations from the territory on gaining autonomy, would the KURH survive such a massive shock? How, too, would a much stronger inland Kenya react? Pushback from inland would certainly mean war and the coast would not be able to defend itself.[513] A conflict between Kenya and an autonomous coast would, moreover, put the rail line, and, by extension Uganda, a region not party to the conflict but heavily dependent on Mombasa's port, in peril. Therefore, Robertson believed that abrogating the 1895 agreement was only appropriate if the two regions were to co-exist side by side.

Robertson intimated the importance of addressing anxieties expressed by minority groups requesting coastal and Mombasa's autonomy, and asked that safeguards be put in place to secure some vital rights for *wapwani* and especially for Arabs and Swahili populations when the coast became incorporated within boundaries of the Republic of Kenya. He recommended that the Sultan's sovereignty be nominally acknowledged, and he argued that showing such statesmanship would assure Muslims at the coast that their historical rights in the region were recognised. Recognition would, furthermore, reassure them that the Kenyan government was sympathetic to their customs and way of life. He also called for the continuation of Islamic jurisprudence customs by way of instituting *kadhi* courts in Kenya's judicial system, and absorbing the traditional offices of *liwali* and *mudir*, (regarded in the colonial period as appendages of provincial administration in the same vein as chiefs) into the provincial administrative body. Robertson additionally advised that only Muslim administrators should be deployed in Muslim majority settlements in Mombasa and the larger coastal region. The commission, moreover, recommended that a coast province be created as one administrative unit of a unitary Kenya. To address the unique coastal land question – did it belong to Arabs, the African *m'pwani*, or the inland administrative unit that the *wabara* were set to take over – the commission advised the creation of a Coast Lands Board, whose main duty was to advise government on land policy particular to the coast. He suggested that the board devise policies

[512] Ibid.
[513] Ibid.

encompassing the disposal and use of public lands, the transfer of lands owned privately by local coastal people, and on methods of settling disputes between landlords and tenants.

On 8 October 1963, the protectorate section, including Mombasa, was transferred to Kenya in an agreement between the colonial secretary Duncan Sandys, the Zanzibar sovereign Sultan Jamshid, the Kenya Prime minister Jomo Kenyatta, and the Zanzibar prime minister Mohammed Shamte. Kenyatta pledged to guarantee safeguards outlined by the Robertson Commission, but this position was quickly abandoned when Mombasa came under Nairobi in 1964 and upcountry folks, who were largely Christian, began dominating the coastal administrative machinery and political scene. The land question was pushed to the periphery and, in fact, was exacerbated by the resettlement of more upcountry folks on government land while Afro coastal indigene land rights remained in limbo. Political patronage increasingly determined land access and various connected individuals from the coast, but mostly from upcountry, were awarded prime and large tracts of land in this region. This deepened tensions between *wabara* and *wapwani*.

The current political struggles at the coast and Mombasa, in particular, are reproductions of feelings of dissatisfaction with the Robertson Commission solutions, and particularly with regards to the question of the place of the migrant population in Mombasa's political and social space. Though it might be argued that migrant Luo labourers have earned their place and residential status in Mombasa, their presence remains a cause of the disharmonious co-existence between *wabara* and *wapwani* in Mombasa. Sentiments of a sovereign coast separate from mainland Kenya have survived and offer *wapwani* an emotionally attractive, even if impractical alternative to the patronage contests of Kenyan national politics. Though the constitutional changes of 2010, which created counties as semi-autonomous administrative units, provided some reprieve, as the coast felt it was now involved in the running of its own affairs, Kenya's government has nevertheless largely disregarded coastal indigenes' appeals for recognition. Instead, it is making efforts to supress dissent, for example among MRC adherents who echo *Mwambao's* sentiments. A more agreeable co-existence framework may be achieved if inquiries are made into why and how recommendations of the Robertson Commission were largely disregarded, and if there are ways in which *wapwani* can feel their place in Mombasa's political and social landscape is respected. If this does not happen, then the migrant Luo who arrived in Mombasa and made immense contributions to what the town looks like today, will forever live in peril, and the underlying conflict is simply postponed.

SUMMARY

Mombasa town has long been a forum for contact, and the portal for the transfer of goods, technology, and ideas between various groups of geographically distant actors. Notably, the town became a central player in the imperial expansionist project when Britain set out to export European institution models to Africa as part of the global expansion of a European international order. Mombasa's positionality in the grand colonial project was informed by the existence of two key infrastructures: the Kenya–Uganda rail line and the Mombasa port. The rail and port were, indeed, key factors influencing the production of colonial Mombasa's urban outlook when the colonial state merged the productive forces of the colony and the protectorate and attempted to structure the modes of interactions of the actors at play. These features include a volatile wage labour economy, a town deeply divided along ethnic lines, and a town that was evidently dominated by the African labourer class. Using migrant Luo labourers as the unit of my analysis, this study aims to analyse how the Kenya Uganda Railway and Harbour labourer contributed to the manifestation of the defining features of colonial Mombasa in the years 1902–1950s. Essentially, the study examines how the introduction of the Luo labourer into Mombasa's distinct cultural space, revolutionised the town's economic and social landscape to produce the features mapping out colonial Mombasa's urbanity.

The study is qualitative and based on the use of both primary and secondary data. The primary data used were mainly archival records sourced from the Kenya National Archives, the British National Archives in Kew, the Mill Hill Mission Archives in Oosterbeek Netherlands, and the digital archives of United Kingdom's parliamentary proceedings. To place the individual experience in the grand narrative of the development of Mombasa's colonial space, oral interviews were also conducted with principals and descendants of colonial era rail and port workers. The primary data was analysed and edited contrasted against an array of secondary data, which aided in juxtaposing my study against the theme of colonial expansionism and how it affected spatial mobility and the development of present outlooks of African urban spaces.

The study findings are presented in five empirical chapters. The introduction chapter gives an overview of the research, including background information, objectives, research methods, and outlines the structure of the thesis. Chapters Two to Five provide the key arguments about the interactions of the Luo migrant labourer with the colonial state and the Swahili social landscape, and explores how these interactions produced the defining features of Mombasa's colonial urban space. The conclusion chapter discusses how Mombasa's colonial map influenced the unification of the protectorate and colony sections of imperial Kenya to produce the Republic

of Kenya, with a focus on how the migrant Luo rail and port worker was the central figure in the development of this outcome.

Mombasa was a key commercial centre in the complex Indian Ocean trade network. Luxury goods sourced from the interior regions of East and Central Africa-like ivory, hides, gold and precious stones-were traded in this coastal town, and exchanged for cloth, glass, and jewellery among other goods, from the Middle East, China and South East Asia. The expanding of the trade network with Muslim players during the Middle Ages gradually transformed Mombasa's and generally, East Africa's coastline, particularly because Arab merchant families began settling on the coast and established familial bonds with local Bantu populations. The meeting and merging of the two cultures produced Swahili culture, which was deeply embedded in Mombasa's political and social networks in the later years of the 19th Century, when Britain began showing interest in the region. Chapter Two of this thesis deliberates on the conjunction of Mombasa's pre-colonial urban space, British imperial capitalist ideology, and the Luo labourer, in the nascent years of the 20th Century. The chapter analyses how at the onset of British occupation, Mombasa's political and social structure offered a labour market that was contradictory to British imperial needs, and explores how Britain was able to navigate and resolve this contradiction by introducing the Luo labourer into the town's urban space. The chapter then narrates the processes of migration of Luo rail and port workers into Mombasa, amidst a backdrop of worsening living conditions in Western Kenya's Luoland.

Mombasa's labour landscape was turbulent and disorderly. This spectacle is examined in Chapter Three of this thesis. The chapter elaborates on how the governing policies put in place to develop the rail and port network, influenced the influx of huge numbers of Luo migrant labourers into the town, and contributed to the development of an urban proletariat class in Mombasa. The chapter also discusses the proletariat struggles of Luo rail and port workers, and evaluates how their positionality stimulated the development of worker's organisation. Additionally, the chapter explores how colonial capital developed mechanisms to control the articulation of rail and port workers grievances, in the backdrop of growing tensions between capital and the working class.

The *wabara/wapwani* (visitor/local) ethnic divide was one of the hallmark features of colonial Mombasa's urban landscape. This feature is discussed in Chapter Four. Essentially, the chapter examines how the racial structure of the imperial economy nurtured the emergent politics of class and identity in colonial Mombasa. Using the personal experiences of colonial era rail and

port workers, the chapter illustrates how Mombasa society delineated ethnic and racial lines by framing the outlines of *u'bara* and *u'pwani* identities. Moreover, the chapter demonstrates how contests over identity impacted Mombasa's cost of living and made it one of the most expensive towns for migrant Luo labourers to live in. Lastly, the chapter explores the Swahili coast's reinterpretation of *kafaáh* marriages, and adoption of *ngoma*, which were aimed at invigorating Swahili cultural purity, for reasons of upholding imperial social and racial demarcations.

By the beginning of the 1920s, Luo rail and port workers numbers had swelled in Mombasa, to the extent that the town acquired the pejorative tag of being a "Kavirondo Town". This phenomenon-the development of a diaspora Luo community in colonial Mombasa-is elaborated in Chapter Five. The chapter examines how Luo labourers navigated Mombasa's turbulent urban landscape by way of embracing a pan-Luo identity, which worked to create numbers, a valuable asset when it came to negotiating for better terms of service with the rail and harbour management. The chapter also analyses how Luo labourers attempts to integrate into Mombasa's elite circles, influenced the foundation of a neo-Luo identity. This new identity aligned with Western interpretations of modernity, and the Luo were gradually recognised as one of the few "civilised Africans" in the colony. The "Kavirondo Town" tag was however firmly registered when permanent Luo households emerged in Mombasa. This feature was the outcome of the migration of Luo women, which is also discussed in this chapter. The diaspora Luo community in Mombasa, indeed, contributed to the dramatic demographic shift witnessed in the town, and Mombasa struggled to embrace its new identity as an African town.

This thesis ultimately works at the intersection of history and anthropology in its interrogation of how migrant groups interacted with, and shaped the outlines of colonial urban areas. The work contextualises the Luo labourer's position in the formation of Mombasa's urban features at a significant historical moment, and offers a narrative of the mapping of a town that became the most important trading post on the coast of East Africa in the 20th century

SAMENVATTING

Mombasa is van oudsher een belangrijk centrum geweest voor ontmoetingen en de uitwisseling van goederen, technologie en ideeën tussen diverse, geografisch verspreide groepen. De stad speelde een cruciale rol in het imperialistische uitbreidingsplan van het Britse Rijk, dat gericht was op de export van het Europese instellingsmodel naar Afrika als onderdeel van de wereldwijde uitbreiding van de gevestigde Europese orde. De positie van Mombasa binnen dit grootschalige koloniale uitbreidingsplan werd bepaald door de aanwezigheid van twee essentiële infrastructuren: de spoorlijn tussen Kenia en Oeganda en de haven van Mombasa. De spoorlijn en de haven waren cruciale factoren die de vorming van het stedelijk aanzien van koloniaal Mombasa beïnvloedden, toen de koloniale staat de productiekrachten van de kolonie en het protectoraat integreerde en de interacties tussen de betrokken actoren probeerde te structureren. Deze kenmerken omvatten een instabiele loonarbeidseconomie, een sterke etnische segregatie en een duidelijke dominantie van de Afrikaanse arbeidersklasse. Dit onderzoek richt zich op de invloed die migrerende Luo-arbeiders van de Kenya Uganda Railway en de haven uitoefenden op koloniaal Mombasa in de jaren 1902 tot 1950. De kern van deze studie is de analyse van de wijze waarop de komst van de Luo-arbeiders een significante verandering teweegbracht in het economische en sociale landschap van Mombasa.

Het onderzoek is kwalitatief en gebaseerd op het gebruik van zowel primaire en secundaire bronnen. De primaire bronnen bestonden voornamelijk uit archiefmateriaal van het Kenya National Archives, de British National Archives in Kew, de Mill Hill Missions Archives in Oosterbeek, Nederland, en de parlementaire archieven van het Verenigd Koninkrijk. Daarnaast zijn er mondelinge interviews afgenomen met ooggetuigen en nazaten van spoorweg- en havenarbeiders uit het koloniale tijdperk. De primaire gegevens werden geanalyseerd en afgezet tegen een reeks secundaire gegevens. Deze analyse heeft bijgedragen aan de positionering van mijn studie binnen het thema van koloniale expansie en de impact daarvan op regionale mobiliteit en de ontwikkeling van hedendaagse perspectieven op Afrikaanse steden.

De bevindingen van het onderzoek worden gepresenteerd in vijf empirische hoofdstukken. Het inleidende hoofdstuk geeft een overzicht van het onderzoek, inclusief achtergrondinformatie, doelstellingen, onderzoekmethoden en de opbouw van het proefschrift. De hoofdstukken twee tot en met vijf belichten de belangrijkste interacties van de Luo arbeidsmigrant met de koloniale staat en hun sociale verhouding tot de Swahili-cultuur. Het laatste hoofdstuk bespreekt de mate waarin koloniaal Mombasa de eenwording van de Kolonie en het Protectoraat Kenia tot de

Republiek Kenia heeft beïnvloed, met een focus op de rol van de migrerende Luo-spoor- en havenarbeiders hierin.

Mombasa was een belangrijk handelscentrum in het complexe handelsnetwerk in de Indische Oceaan. In deze kuststad werden luxegoederen uit het binnenland van Oost- en Centraal-Afrika, zoals ivoor, huiden, goud en edelstenen, verhandeld en geruild tegen onder andere stoffen, glas en juwelen uit het Midden-Oosten, China en Zuidoost-Azië. De uitbreiding van het handelsnetwerk met islamitische actoren tijdens de Middeleeuwen leidde tot een geleidelijke transformatie van de kustlijn van Mombasa en Oost-Afrika in het algemeen, voornamelijk door de vestiging van Arabische koopmansfamilies aan de kust en de aangegane familiebanden met de lokale Bantoevolkeren. De samensmelting van deze twee culturen leidde tot de Swahili-cultuur, die in de latere 19e eeuw, toen Groot-Brittannië interesse in de regio begon te tonen, diep verankerd was in de politieke en sociale netwerken van Mombasa. Hoofdstuk twee van dit proefschrift behandelt de relatie tussen de prekoloniale stedelijke samenleving van Mombasa, de Britse imperiale kapitalistische ideologie en de positie van de Luo-arbeider in de vroege 20e eeuw. Dit hoofdstuk analyseert hoe de politieke en sociale structuur van Mombasa aan het begin van de Britse bezetting een arbeidsmarkt bood die niet aansloot bij de Britse imperiale behoeften. Het verkent hoe Groot-Brittannië in staat was om deze tegenstrijdigheid op te lossen door de Luo-arbeider in de stad te introduceren. Vervolgens beschrijft het hoofdstuk het migratieproces van Luo-spoorweg- en havenarbeiders naar Mombasa, wat leidde tot een verslechtering van de levensomstandigheden in Luoland, West-Kenia.

Het arbeidslandschap van Mombasa kenmerkte zich door turbulentie en chaos. Dit wordt onderzocht in hoofdstuk drie. Het hoofdstuk belicht hoe het regeringsbeleid voor de ontwikkeling van het spoor- en havennetwerk de instroom van grote aantallen Luo-arbeidsmigranten naar de stad beïnvloedde en bijdroeg aan de ontwikkeling van een stedelijke proletariaatsklasse in Mombasa. Daarnaast bespreekt het de proletarische strijd van de Luo-spoorweg- en havenarbeiders en hoe hun collectieve ervaringen en strijd de ontwikkeling van arbeidersorganisaties stimuleerden. Verder onderzoekt het hoe de koloniale overheid mechanismen ontwikkelde om de grieven van spoorweg- en havenarbeiders te controleren in de context van oplopende spanningen tussen kapitaal en arbeid.

De etnische scheiding tussen *wabara* (bezoekers) en *wapwani* (inwoners) was een prominent kenmerk van het koloniale stadslandschap van Mombasa. Dit kenmerk wordt besproken in hoofdstuk vier. Hoofdstuk vier behandelt dit kenmerk en onderzoekt in essentie hoe het raciale karakter van de koloniale economie de opkomende politiek van koloniaal Mombasa

beïnvloedde. Aan de hand van persoonlijke ervaringen van spoorweg- en havenarbeiders uit de koloniale periode illustreert het hoofdstuk hoe de samenleving in Mombasa zich langs etnische en raciale lijnen aftekende. Hierbij worden de contouren van de *u'bara* en *u'pwani*- identiteiten geschetst. Bovendien toont het hoofdstuk aan hoe de strijd om de identiteit de kosten van levensonderhoud in Mombasa beïnvloedde en Mombasa tot een van de duurste steden maakte om te wonen voor migrerende Luo-arbeiders. Tot slot verkent het hoofdstuk de herinterpretatie door de Swahili van *kafa'ah*-huwelijken en de adoptie van *ngoma*, die bedoeld waren om de culturele zuiverheid van het Swahili te versterken om de imperiale sociale en raciale afbakeningen in stand te houden.

Tegen het begin van de jaren twintig van de 20e eeuw was het aantal Luo-spoorweg- en havenarbeiders in Mombasa zo sterk toegenomen dat de stad de pejoratieve benaming "Kavirondo Town" kreeg. Dit fenomeen - de ontwikkeling van een Luo diasporagemeenschap in koloniaal Mombasa - wordt in hoofdstuk vijf nader uitgewerkt. Het hoofdstuk onderzoekt hoe Luo-arbeiders zich in het turbulente stadslandschap van Mombasa positioneerden door een pan-Luo-identiteit te omarmen. Dit leidde tot een grotere groep Luo's en vormde een waardevolle troef bij de onderhandelingen met het spoorweg- en havenbeheer over verbeterde arbeidsvoorwaarden. Het hoofdstuk analyseert tevens hoe de pogingen van de Luo-arbeiders om te integreren in de elitekringen van Mombasa de vorming van een neo-Luo-identiteit beïnvloedden. Deze nieuwe identiteit resoneerde met westerse interpretaties van moderniteit, waardoor de Luo geleidelijk werden erkend als een van de weinige "beschaafde Afrikanen" in de kolonie. Het label "Kavirondo Town" werd echter pas echt duidelijk toen er permanente Luo-huishoudens in Mombasa ontstonden. Dit was het gevolg van de migratie van Luo-vrouwen, wat eveneens in dit hoofdstuk aan de orde komt. De Luo-diasporagemeenschap in Mombasa droeg significant bij aan de ingrijpende demografische verschuiving in de stad, en Mombasa worstelde met het omarmen van haar nieuwe identiteit als Afrikaanse stad.

Dit proefschrift positioneert zich op het snijvlak van geschiedenis en antropologie door te onderzoeken hoe migrantengroepen interageerden met en vorm gaven aan de contouren van koloniale stedelijke gebieden. Het werk contextualiseert de positie van de Luo-arbeider in de vorming van de stedelijke kenmerken van Mombasa tijdens een cruciaal historisch moment en schetst de ontwikkeling van een stad die in de 20e eeuw uitgroeide tot de belangrijkste handelspost aan de Oost-Afrikaanse kust.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Belinda Okelo (1984, Samburu Maralal, Kenya) attended high school at Moi Girls School in Nairobi. She holds a Bachelor's degree (Upper Second Class Honours) and a Master degree (Upper Second Class Honours) from Egerton University in Kenya. Her work stands at the intersection of history and anthropology in the interrogation of African ethnic groups, and how they interact with, shape, and navigate urban spaces within colonial and modern frameworks. Specifically, her PhD research which commenced in 2018, is dedicated to understating how the meeting of ethnic Luo, Mombasa's Swahili society, and European colonisation, produced the revolutionary changes manifest in Mombasa's urban space in the colonial period. Her PhD project was carried out at the African Studies Centre, Leiden University. Belinda was part of the Graduate Program in African Studies

During her PhD, Belinda was mainly involved with teaching at Egerton University. Additionally, she managed various community programmes with Non-Government Organisations in Kenya. She worked with ActionAid International to support programmes aimed at providing knowledge about funding models available for local communities. She also worked with *Sauti ya Wanawake* CBO in aid of programmes aimed at marshalling women's vote to negotiate for political space in Mombasa. Currently, she is involved in industry where she works to supports resource managers understand labour dynamics and particularly, in relation to navigating diverse work spaces.