

# Migrant Luo rail and port workers and the cartographies of colonial Mombasa, 1902-1950s Okelo. B.A.

#### Citation

Okelo, B. A. (2025, September 9). *Migrant Luo rail and port workers and the cartographies of colonial Mombasa*, 1902-1950s. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4260331

Version: Publisher's Version

License: License agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis

in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden

Downloaded from: <a href="https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4260331">https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4260331</a>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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

Belinda Aluoch Okelo



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

#### **Proefschrift**

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden, op gezag van rector magnificus prof.dr.ir. H. Bijl, volgens besluit van het college voor promoties te verdedigen op dinsdag 9 september 2025 klokke 14.30 uur

door

Belinda Aluoch Okelo

geboren te Samburu, Kenya in 1984 Promotores:

Prof.dr. M. Dekker Dr. W. Nkwi Gam Dr K. van Walraven

#### Promotiecommissie:

Prof.dr. B.A. Barendregt (voorzitter)

Prof.dr. M.E. de Bruijn Prof.dr. M.M.A. Kaag Prof.dr. M.L.J.C. Schrover

Dr. S. Bellucci

Dr. I. Peša (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgement	ii
List of foreign words	iii
List of Abbreviations	iv
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: The Setting	21
Chapter Three: A Town in Turmoil	51
Chapter Four: A Town Divided	92
Chapter Five: A Kavirondo Town	122
Conclusion	166
Summary	171
Samenvatting	174
References	177
Curriculum Vitae	196

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This thesis would not have been completed without the assistance of a number of institutions and individuals. I foremost wish to thank the African Studies Centre Leiden, for giving me the opportunity and space to develop and expand my research idea, and the resources that enabled the finalising of the thesis. Special thanks is given to the Collaborative Research Group (CRG) Rethinking African History for partly funding this project.

The project would not have been possible without the immense help of my promoter, Prof. Dr. M. Dekker, and my immediate supervisors Dr. Klaas van Walraven and Dr. Walter Nkwi. Even though they are busy scholars, the team patiently read through every chapter of this thesis, and offered valuable advice on improvements. Moreover, they supported and encouraged me through the myriad of challenges encountered during this journey. I also owe gratitude to Dr. Felix Mutunga Ndaka at the University of Johannesburg, and Dr Isaac Tarus at Egerton University, who despite their demanding schedules, found time to discuss and critique my work. I am greatly indebted to them.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to individuals who were instrumental in ensuring that my data collection journey in Mombasa, Nairobi, Kisumu and Siaya were a success. Many thanks to my research respondents for welcoming me into their homes and sharing their memories, some of which were painful. Furthermore, I am thankful to the Legio Maria Church in Magongo, *Sauti ya Wanawake* and SHOFCO CBO's in Mombasa. Many thanks for your hospitality, and for helping me find ground and relevant research respondents. I also wish to extend my gratitude to the team at the Kenya National Archives. Your expertise on documentation and help in finding relevant documents to support the completion of this study is acknowledged

Last but not least, I would like to offer my gratitude to my family. To my husband Harm de Vreng who supported me with confidence and encouraged me to follow my path. To Otis, for your inspiration and reminding me of the value of perseverance. To my brothers Steve, and Martin who offered accommodation and followed up on information whenever I was out of town, and to my sister Achieng who assisted me in navigating Kisumu's and Siaya's rural landscape while collecting data for this study. I am immensely grateful.

#### **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