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

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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

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[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

[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.

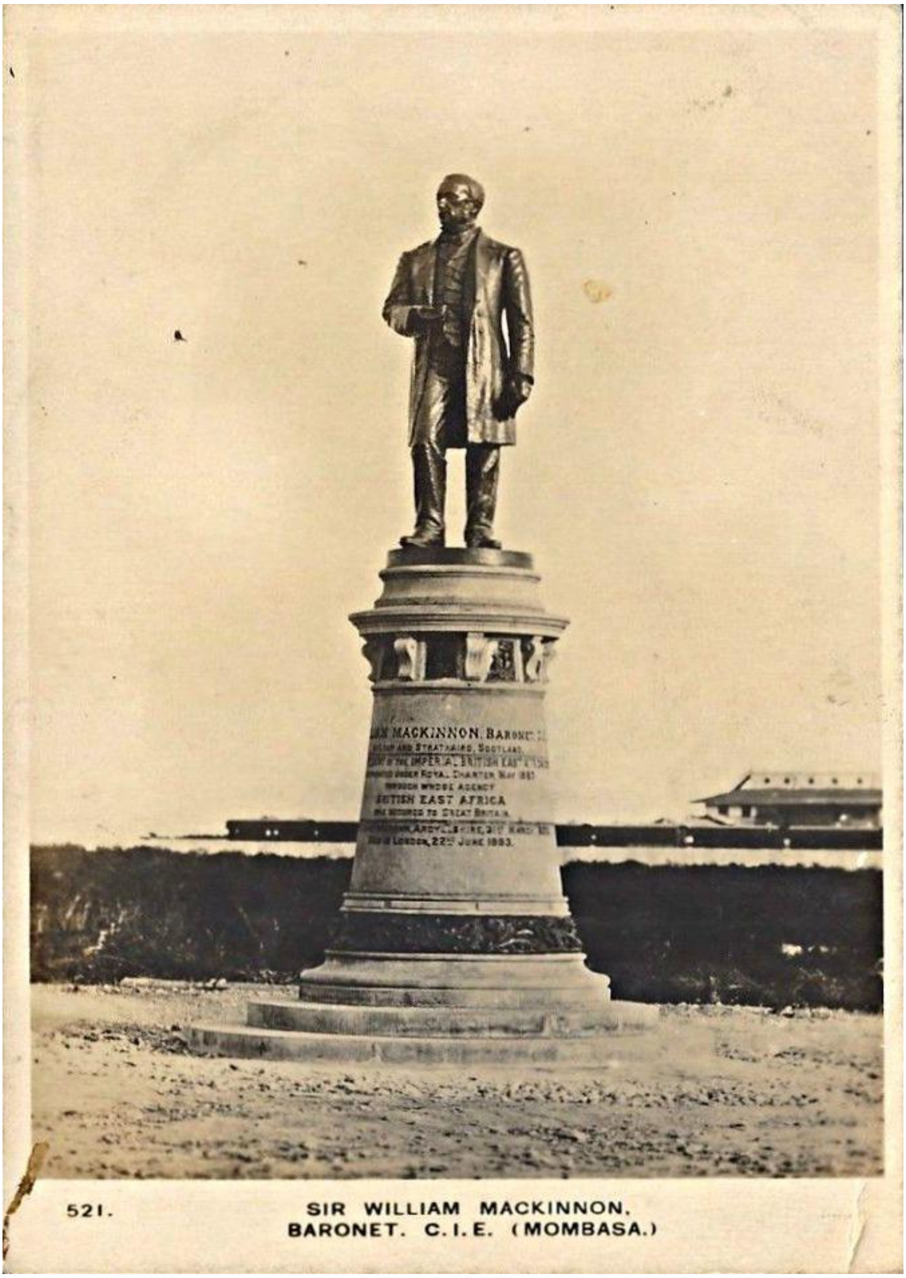

Figure 2.1. A photograph of the statue of Scottish trader and IBEAC founder William Mackinnon. The statue was erected in Mombasa in 1900, but moved to Keil School in Dumbarton, Scotland, in 1964. Photo source: Vintage East Africa on Pinterest. https://pin.it/4Ku69yb

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.

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[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

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[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

[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

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 mokadho. Kinde nogo ne gitiyo gi Mig. Ojendo kaka boi mar ariyo. Chieng' moro Ojendo jaka Oremo nonwang'o wach ni nyathinde 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 achiel 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 onyis e chandruokge duto mag tuo nyathi kendo kaka pesa to oongego kata hela achiel e lwete. Ogot Kogot ne en ng'ama nigi chuny maber kendo mohero ji ndi. Bende ne en ng'ama lwete ber ma jarit pesa ahinya.

Ogot Kogot ne owacho ni Ojendo ni en kod oonglochege moko to ni kech koro kaka osewinjo chandruok maka meni 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 chutho. 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 oriembe 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 makuno. 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 mane opo nono ka ng'adone ger Ojendo ni ni Mombasa to otiyo kuom joka Kenya Landing, Kilindini.

E kindego 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 Yal 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 onindo

(Odhi e Kalatas 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.