Original Article

Railways as Sites of Identity Formation and Creation: Gender, Race, and Labour Hierarchies in Jinja

Alex Ssebaana[1]*

[1] Makerere University, P. O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda.
[*] Author's Email: alessebaana@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the experiences of former railway workers in Jinja-Busoga, Uganda, and explores how they were treated and the memories of their life experiences. This paper examines identity formation and negotiation in colonial railways in East Africa, specifically the Kenya Uganda Railways (KUR) and East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H), a branch in the Jinja-Busoga region. This study used in-depth interviews with former railway workers and their family members in Jinja district, Busoga region, to collect personal narratives and first-hand accounts of their experiences. It also involved archival research at the Uganda National Archival Centre situated in Nakasero, Kampala. Findings indicate that while colonial discourse advertised railways as catalysts for socio-economic development and modernisation, this narrative obscured the complex power dynamics and social hierarchies that underpinned railway labour. The paper reveals that colonial authorities institutionalised racial and gendered divisions within the railway workforce, with Europeans occupying positions of privilege, Asians serving as intermediaries, and Africans relegated to subordinate roles and strenuous labour tasks. These power dynamics shaped the lived experiences of former railway workers, influenced collective identities, and informed labour resistance. Gendered dimensions of railway labour were unearthed, demonstrating how employment in this sector discriminated against women and disrupted family life. The study concludes that the KUR and EAR&H were complex institutions where issues of race, identity, and gender were contested and shaped. While these railways facilitated the extraction of resources and movement of European goods, they also institutionalised inequality through racially biased recruitment, wage systems, and gendered labour practices. The study recommends: Acknowledging historical injustices in labour policy, integrating colonial history into education, informing wider discussions based on the East African context, and supporting community-led historical projects related to this phenomenon.

INTRODUCTION

Railways have been extensively discussed by earlier scholars as infrastructures that facilitated the transportation of people, bulk raw materials, and goods; they contributed significantly to economic development, social control, and political domination in the communities that adopted them (Schivelbusch, 1986). This phenomenon was evident from the inception of railway infrastructure during the early stages of European industrialisation, first with Britain, then later Belgium, France, and Germany between the 1750s and the first half of the nineteenth century (Dobruszkes and Moyano, 2021). A similar pattern was observed in Latin American countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Cuba (Gonzalez, 1997; Alfonso, 2014). Recent scholarship has highlighted the role of railways in negotiating identity and race. In colonial Uganda, the construction and operations of the Kenya Uganda Railways (KUR) and East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H) in interior regions such as Jinja in Busoga served not only as a means of British administrative control and resource transportation but also as a site where racial and gender dynamics were constructed, contested, and redefined (Mwaura, 2015; Ndlovu, 2018). This paper details how colonial railways in Jinja-Busoga functioned as sites of identity, race, and hierarchy formation during the colonial era, approximately 1912-1950s, thereby unearthing the lived experiences of former railway workers.

Drawing on existing literature on modernity, colonial power, and the role of infrastructure development in shaping social hierarchies (Cooper, 1996; Bayly, 2004), this paper emphasises the multifaceted nature of railways. A global analysis of colonial railways reveals their dual role: on one hand, they facilitated growth and development, representing modernity in societies that furthered colonial objectives. On the other hand, railways served as sites where racial, national, and identity dynamics were endorsed through various employment practices, including unequal wages, welfare benefits, ethnic labour recruitment preferences, and differentiated labour contracts. By examining these themes, this paper contributes to ongoing debates on the lasting impact of colonial infrastructure projects in the postcolonial era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Context and Theoretical Framework

The global establishment of railways was primarily aimed at facilitating the transportation of bulk commodities, manufactured goods, and raw materials, as well as deploying administrative personnel (Porter, 1996; Whitehouse, 1948). However, in the context of Jinja, Uganda, the construction of railways was driven by distinct objectives. Specifically, these infrastructures connected the coastal regions of Mombasa to the interior of East Africa, transported soldiers during times of war and rebellions, and served strategic administrative purposes. This aligns with Cecil Rhodes' vision of a contiguous British territory stretching from Cape Town, South Africa, to Cairo, Egypt (Pakenham, 1991; Fieldhouse, 1981; Hill, 1949; Lugard, 1922). Initially, the Imperial British East African Company (IBEAC), under William Mackinnon's leadership, commenced the construction of a railway line starting from Mombasa, a coastal point stretching deep into the interior of the British sphere, with the primary objective of facilitating trade and commerce like any other business-oriented being. However, following Mackinnon's bankruptcy and the

proposed line unfinished, the British government took over the completion of this line to consolidate British rule, combat the ongoing slave trade, and fulfil philanthropic obligations, as evident in the Brussels Conference (Fieldhouse, 1981; Amin, 1972). While railways were often publicised as symbols of modernity, easing the burden of manual labour and promoting economic development, their construction and operation were deeply entrenched in racialised labour policies. This hierarchical structure positioned British expatriates at the apex, occupying management and supervisory roles, while Asian workers served as intermediaries, and Africans were relegated to tedious, energy-intensive positions, reflecting the colonial era's entrenched social hierarchies (Mamdani, 1996).

This paper draws on modernisation, dependency, and racial foundation theories, which offer insights into development and labour management during the colonial era. Proponents of modernisation, such as Rostow and Lerner, speculate that technological advancements lead to increased wealth and economic progress (Rostow, 1959; Lerner, 1966). This perspective assumes that exposure to modern technologies spurs cultural and economic development, as was purportedly the case for Third World nations, including Uganda. For dependency theorists, they argue that the wealth accumulated by core nations came at the expense of peripheral nations, which were colonised and exploited (Gunder, 1967; Rodney, 1981; and Ake, 1981). However, racial foundation theory highlights that racial sentiments were used, practiced and transformed in labour organisations of coloured people to reinforce European dominance and as a justification of racial discrimination (Omi & Winant, 2014). These three theories provide a nuanced understanding of the complex power dynamics at play when European colonisers introduced modernity to Africa, and how this modernity impacted the colonised states. This paper examines how the Busoga railways organisation served as a platform for negotiating race, identity, gender relations, and labour hierarchies. Specifically, it investigates the recruitment processes, payment structures, welfare packages, and racialised travel practices of both workers and passengers, highlighting how these policies contributed to the development of shared identities that combined elements of labour resistance with the internalisation of racial and gender norms.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

The transformative role of railways in shaping economic, social, and cultural norms in the Global South has been extensively explored by earlier scholars. Lugard, Whitehouse, and Hailey posited that colonial infrastructures, such as railways, were essential for introducing modernity, economic growth, and development, particularly in "backward" countries. However, this narrative was later contested by scholars like Rodney (1972), Ake (1981), Nkrumah (1973), and Brett (1973), who argued that these same infrastructures served as tools for exploiting raw materials, both mineral and agricultural, and local populations. Recent research by Cooper (1996) and Bayly (2004) has examined the role of colonial railways as sites of social and cultural transformation, highlighting how these infrastructures reconfigured economic and political relationships across Africa. This analysis reveals that colonial railways, through the imposition of racialised labour regimes, reinforced colonial hierarchies while also fostering growing forms of resistance and identity among African workers, ultimately shaping the contours of postcolonial socio-political life. This paper further elucidates the effects of colonial railway organisations on the social, economic, and cultural fabric of colonised societies.

In Senegal, Mali, and South Africa, colonial railways played a dual role that perpetuated harm in these communities. Empirical evidence reveals that workers were recruited from neighbouring countries, such as Botswana, Mozambique, and Angola, to work on South African railways (Phiri, 2020). This labour was deemed cheap and resilient compared to local South African workers. Research indicates that, despite preferential recruitment practices and the

willingness of many individuals to offer their voluntary labour, migrants were driven to seek employment outside their homelands due to the challenging conditions imposed by their colonial governments, particularly the Portuguese. The unrealistic labour policies and oppressive conditions forced migrants to choose between remaining in their native lands or seeking employment under another oppressive regime outside their countries. Consequently, a significant number of able-bodied men migrated to South Africa for work. However, for these workers, the experience was marked by limited joy, justifying the phrase "double wrong." Studies show that these workers were subjected to inhumane treatment, including overcrowded accommodations, meagre wages, and excessively long working hours in demanding departments (Hansen, 1989, p. 46). These conditions were disproportionately imposed on African migrant labourers, reinforcing the ideology that they were exploited and degraded, rendering them inferior in colonial projects.

The literature suggests that colonial projects had a profound impact on African family systems and gender roles. The preference for male labour in these projects, often recruited through coercive means, including forced labour practices, disrupted traditional family structures. Initially, able-bodied men were required to provide free labour on colonial projects annually, under the guise of contributing to the development of their communities (Miller, 2017, p. 102). Later, voluntary labour practices were introduced, but these were often accompanied by new forms of taxation, such as poll taxes, which compelled African men above 18 years old to work to pay their annual taxes (Okoro, 2019). As a result, men from labour-rich communities were recruited for extended periods, sometimes exceeding a year, without returning to their ancestral homes. While this approach may be seen as supporting modernisation theory's emphasis on efficient labour management, it neglects the social aspect of labour, treating workers as mere factors of production rather than human beings with complex needs and relationships.

The colonial labour recruitment practices had far-reaching consequences for African communities. One significant outcome was the acute labour deficiency in agricultural production, as men responsible for preparing agricultural land were absent, leading to food shortages for households in communities where labour was sourced (Adeyemi, 2022). As a result, women took on unconventional roles to support their families. The literature highlights that the absence of a fatherly figure in homes led to women engaging in casual jobs, disrupting traditional African gender roles (Sembene, 2018). This shift in domestic and economic domains is evident in West Africa, where women assumed responsibilities previously held by men, including providing for their families during times of strikes and absenteeism.

The postcolonial TAZARA project in Tanzania and Zambia in the mid-1960s offers another example of discriminatory labour recruitment and maintenance practices (Manson, 1999). Despite being touted as a unifying project, the recruitment process was partisan, favouring young, energetic men who supported the ruling Chama Cha Mapenduzi (CCM) party. These men were promised retirement benefits and recognition for their sacrifices, but ultimately, they were denied basic needs and left regretting their involvement. The development of railway projects in Africa exemplifies the "double wrong" of colonialism and its legacy. These projects exploited African workers, disrupted social identities, and jeopardised family cohesion and African gender roles, leaving lasting scars on affected communities. This paper seeks to examine these issues in the context of the Jinja-Busoga region in Uganda, using archival documents and oral narratives to explore the experiences of workers, their families and local communities.

In apartheid South Africa, colonial railways were perceived as outlier infrastructures, fostering transportation and connectivity between localities while simultaneously serving as tools for state control. These railways facilitated the transportation of armies and administrators, reinforcing racial segregation and economic

suppression (Harrington, 2019). In Mozambique and Zimbabwe, the apartheid regime colluded with local governments to recruit men at a cheaper cost, while the governments received handsome payments for these recruitments (Phiri, 2020). This practice created significant gaps in African families, leading to economic hardships and disrupted community unity (Manuel, 2021). Furthermore, workers in apartheid South Africa were racially selected and assigned roles based on their racial classification. Black workers were deliberately exploited, given physically demanding and harsh roles that affected their mental and physical well-being, leaving a lasting impact on their life experiences (Ndlovu, 2022).

Studies on race and gender in colonial labour epochs highlight how European colonialists used employment as a means of social control. Researchers like Hansen (1989) and Bujra (2000) have shown that racialised labour practices in colonial organisations not only undermined African labourers but also excluded women from physically demanding roles in the formal economy. Colonial railways, such as those in East Africa, played a dual role, serving as tools for state control and spaces where workers resisted and fought for improved working conditions (Nyong'o, 2021). This phenomenon was also observed in West Africa (Adeyemi, 2022). In South Africa, railways exacerbated discrimination and economic decline (Mthembu, 2020), while in Latin America, railways were characterised by income disparities among workers and provided platforms for labour organisations, as examined by Garcia (2020). These complex relationships highlight the dual nature of colonial railways, serving as both sites of exploitation and potential avenues for resistance.

This paper aims to examine the complex lived experiences of former railway workers in the Jinja-Busoga region of Uganda. By focusing on a lesser-investigated geographical locality, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge. So far, most scholarly works have concentrated on major railway stations in larger urban centres, such as Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Lagos, Dakar, Cape Town, and Kumasi, which served as key hubs for colonial governments. In contrast, Jinja, an interior but equally significant context, has received relatively little scholarly attention. This study addresses this gap by combining archival records with oral narratives, providing a voice to those individuals who directly witnessed and lived through this historical era, and offering a nuanced understanding of the complex experiences of former railway workers in the region.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach with a historical-ethnographic design, with a combination of archival sources and oral narratives as data collection methods to enrich its findings. A total of 37 participants were interviewed. These participants worked in different roles with the KUR and EAR&H and were found in their retirement place, such as Jinja, Mbulamuti, Mutai, Namasagali, Luzinga, Bugembe, Namaganda, and Namuwendwa. Archival sources included official colonial Kenya Uganda Railway (KUR) and East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H) documents showing recruitment records and practices, terms of employment, administrative correspondences of top officials in the KUR and EAR&H, salaries paid, and welfare attachments to workers during the investigation epoch. To corroborate the archives, oral narratives gathered through in-depth interviews from surviving former railway workers and their family members supplemented and enriched the study. While colonial archives provided a top-down viewpoint on colonial railway practices, oral narratives with thirty-seven participants provided the first-hand perspective of former workers and their families on how these labour practices were experienced, contested, and adopted by railway workers. The study employed a historical interpretivist approach to examine the relationship between the colonial infrastructures built and identity formation. By positioning workers' experiences and realities within the wider social, economic, and political contexts, the study shows how material conditions on the Jinja-Busoga railways of EAR&H contributed to the negotiation of identities alongside sentiments of

race, gender, and class. Data triangulation and collaboration between archival documents and oral narratives helped in improving the strength of these study findings. This paper is based on a PhD study, and hence, the researcher followed all the necessary ethical procedures and clearance from Makerere Social Science Research Ethical Committee (MAKSSREC) and Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). Equally, pseudonyms have been used in this study for confidentiality.

RESULTS

Labour Recruitment: Forming Racial and Gendered Biases

The construction of the Uganda Railway was guided by the lead engineer, George Whitehouse, who devised a plan to recruit the necessary workforce. Initially, he brought in a number of British expatriates experienced in railway construction, including architects, engineers, drivers, surveyors, and plate layers. To supplement this workforce, Whitehouse recruited over 36,000 Asians of Indian origin to serve as intermediaries. This decision was based on their prior experience with British-Indian railways. The British government in the 1830s had constructed a similar infrastructure to serve their interests in the Indian colony, such as raw material extraction and a market for their finished goods. This earlier contact made Indians ideal for bridging the gap between British top officials and the local black workers. The latter were coerced and recruited in large numbers to labour in the most demanding positions on the project.

From the onset of this project, the recruitment policies within the Kenya Uganda Railway (KUR) and the East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H) reflected the deep-rooted colonial hierarchies of the time. Each race was assigned specific tasks at different supervisory levels, with colonial archival documents revealing that African labourers were consistently recruited for physically demanding roles that did not require higher skills or managerial capabilities, like the archival record from the Chief Secretary reads,

"The Jinja-Mbulamuti-Bugungu-Kampala railway should be worked on by Nilotics labour. The railway construction authorities invariably prefer Nilotic labour, which generally does a better day's work and is easier to handle" (Uganda Archives, 1928). This document correlates positively with earlier scholars' works (Cooper, 1996), who contend that the railways always had discriminative policies in recruitment. As Cooper notes, these conditions both challenged and confirmed racial boundaries. Furthermore, another archival record also cemented these biases, where a British section head, Mr. McClymont, reported in a letter to the Undersecretary of State for the Colonial Office that:

"In a place full of sleeping sickness, black water fever, dysentery, and malaria, the living conditions were extremely poor and the quarters were described as damp, dirty hovels. No self-respecting headman would have inhabited such a place. The ration issued to my men (300-400) was inadequate and unfit for consumption" (Uganda Archives, 1928).

Such testimonies are indicators that the recruitment processes were not merely administrative; they were constructive encounters that shaped workers' self-views and consequent identities. African workers narrated how they were reduced to their physical capabilities, with their value solely relying on their ability to execute demanding work. This perception helped define their sense of self in the workplace. The realities of these workers demonstrate how the recruitment process acted as an early caption of identity, having lasting impacts on workers' understanding of their social status.

Based on archival records on recruitment strategies, provide deeper insight into the practices employed by the British railway authorities in Jinja-Busoga during the early 20th century. Notably, not all local African populations were deemed suitable for labour; instead, the authorities preferred ethnic groups from Northern and Eastern Uganda, including the Lugbara and Madi from West Nile, Acholi, Lango, Iteso, and

Samya. These groups were presumably chosen due to their physical characteristics, being perceived as tall, energetic, and capable of performing better day's work compared to other ethnic groups. This evidence suggests that local racial biases originated from these recruitment preferences, which ultimately contributed to prolonged discrimination within railway labour.

Furthermore, archival records reveal that the railway authorities were reluctant to utilise local labour from Busoga and its vicinity, citing concerns that these workers would be expensive and lack the required work ethic for such an undertaking. Specifically, the East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H) avoided using Bantu labour, as they were perceived to frequently excuse themselves to visit their homes, prefer culturally familiar meals, and resist taking orders from supervisors. Upon closer analysis, these views reflect a complex interplay between modernity, class, and culture. The workers' desire to visit their homes was not inherently problematic, but rather a manifestation of family continuity and cultural values. However, this practice conflicted with modern labour management practices, which emphasised labour camping as a means to reduce absenteeism and increase productivity. The authorities' preference for distant labour, which was less likely to request frequent visits, underscores the primary concern for labour productivity and efficiency. However, as nature can always dictate unforeseen circumstances, archival records provide a fallback and a compromise of colonial labour policies towards some specific local groups. In the same year, 1928, sleeping sickness struck the labour-rich areas of West Nile, where the colonial authorities had heavily relied on for labour and this caused a shift in all the earlier arrangements of not using Bantu labour. In a letter from the Chief Secretary, Entebbe, to the Labour Commissioners of Jinja and Kampala read that:

With reference to the question of labour requirements for the Jinja-Kampala railway extension, I am directed to inform you that you will be in charge of supplying and supervision of labour to be employed on this work. It is of first importance that it should be carried out by local labour, and made clear to the engineers in charge. The recent spread of sleeping sickness in West Nile district is likely to render it impracticable to fall back on that district as a source of labour supply (Uganda Archives, 1929).

Under the modern labour management system, the Kenya Uganda Railway (KUR) and East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H) were expected to provide a uniform meal to all workers, consisting mainly of maize flour and beans. However, in an oral narrative recorded from Wambi, a former headman at Luzinga station stressed that, "Bantu laborers preferred to maintain their traditional dietary practices, desiring meals similar to those they enjoyed in their homes, such as Matooke, yams, sweet potatoes, groundnuts, beans, and roasted meat." The railway authorities found it challenging to accommodate these dietary preferences, which further contributed to the bias in labour recruitment. This preference for uniformity in meal provision is reminiscent of modern management principles, where institutions, such as boarding schools in Uganda, provide standardised meals to students regardless of their cultural and family background. Allowing individualised meal preferences would have created divisions among workers, which the railway authorities sought to avoid.

Payment and Work: Institutionalising Labour Hierarchies

The recruitment system, wages, and work practices on the Kenya Uganda Railway (KUR) and East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H) reflected the prevailing racialised labour practices and hierarchies. Archival documents and correspondence between labour commissioners, district commissioners, and labour agents reveal that African local workers were recruited at significantly lower wages compared to their Asian and European counterparts. For example, archival records portray that railway authorities contracted agents such as Ravishankar & co, Smith Mackenzie & co, and Rahematali, who sourced labour from

distant regions at a cheap monthly wage, for example:

The provincial commissioner Northern province authorised Mr. Ravishankar to recruit porters in West Nile provided labourers are medically examined at Arua or Butiaba health centres. The labour commissioner approved the terms of shs 12/= monthly salary but with attached benefits such as a blanket, 1.5lbs mealie, 4ozs beans, 0.5ozs salt, 2 ozs ground nuts. (Uganda Archives, 1931).

This was an agreed rate and documented in the Uganda Protectorate, Master and Servants ordinance memorandum. However, for those workers who came from Buganda and Busoga regions, archives show that these were paid slightly higher, with a difference of SHS 3-6/= because they had to be enticed to join the labour force. Therefore, even within the local labour, there was wage discrimination depending on where one was coming from. These wage differentials were justified by biases assuming Africans were less skilled than Asians and Britons. Such inequalities not only weakened Africans' economic positions but also reinforced the colonial ideology that ranked European workers as naturally superior.

A closer examination of the work practices implemented by the KUR and EAR&H reveals that they were designed to maximise control and productivity. A strict daily routine was enforced through modern managerial practices, for example, Wako, a former plate layer between Jinja and Mbulamuti line, discussed that, "railway authorities made it a routine at times without warning to come and take roll calls to see workers present and those absenting themselves. He further stated that there was no room for excusing yourself from work unless one was medically proven sick or unfit." Such policies contributed to the harsh working conditions that workers were always complaining about.

Despite all these, workers found ways to resist these policies through forming work groups based on ethnicity and departmental affiliation. For example, Luo workers formed a kind of cash round where every member contributed a small agreeable amount for collective help in case of a member getting a problem like loss of a dear one, complicated sickness that required extra funding, saving for festive season, but also interesting contribution for evening gatherings where they sat at designated days and enjoyed local brew (malwa and kwete). Okello admits that it is through these gatherings that they shared common grievances and came up with options like eventually organising strikes. He vividly remembered the 1950s workers' uprisings where they were demanding better pay, improved accommodation, delayed overtime incentives, and improved working hours. These innovative strategies demonstrate early expressions of collective working-class awareness, that although railway authorities never wanted these workers to have a spirit of togetherness, it was within the African norms that they needed one another, because that's how Africans behave. The conflicts between colonial intentions and workers' demands for self-esteem and fair payment are highlighted through these practices.

Welfare and Control during Colonial Governance

An analysis of the welfare benefits provided by the Kenya Uganda Railway (KUR) and the East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H) to workers reveals a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. On one hand, these benefits, including accommodation shelters, health services, and financial support, may be seen as a demonstration of care and concern for workers' well-being. However, a closer examination reveals that these welfare programs were also filled with a sense of control, serving as tools for the surveillance and regulation of workers' lives. The provision of welfare benefits was intended to ensure a stable and productive workforce, one that could be readily mobilised and controlled at any given time. However, these benefits came with stringent conditions that curtailed workers' freedoms, fostering a deep sense of dependency on colonial authorities. Ultimately, the welfare programs implemented by the KUR and EAR&H

were authoritarian in nature, perpetuating the power dynamics of colonialism and reinforcing the subjugation of African workers.

A closer examination of the archival records reveals that the welfare policies and support programs implemented by the colonial authorities were not applied equally across different racial groups. British workers received the most comprehensive support, including housing, higher salaries, medical treatment, and annual leave. These were made clear to them upon arrival. In contrast, their Asian and African counterparts faced marginalisation and insufficient provisions, perpetuating racial superiority. For example, based on archival records regarding the housing of Africans:

In 1935, it was advised to erect mud grass roofed or papyrus each in a space of 16 feet to accommodate 6 workers, an erected shared kitchen for 60 workers, and utensils were to be provided by the employers, each 10 men were supposed to share one pit latrine room" (Uganda Archives, 1935).

However, in a different record of 1957 concerning housing of non-Africans, it was a policy for interested candidates to show interest by writing a letter to the district commissioner's office of Busoga for one to be accorded a house.

This is a testimony that as the Europeans and Asians were planned for in terms of where to be accommodated, Africans were not and it is of no surprise when my respondent, Mzee Busi of Nsuube Jinja, lamented that since Africans were not catered for, that why places like Walukuba were never organised like the Nile avenues where non-Africans resided. Walukuba started as an outskirt accommodation for black railway and industrial workers and indeed it looked more like a slum as Busi compared it to Soweto of Apartheid South Africa, although he had never reached there, that's how it was always referred to.

In a similar case, archives show that a one Walusimbi, an African man who had worked for the railways for over seventeen years and due to sickness of his wife asked to be transferred near his home which the authorities declined and upon frustration, he resigned his roles but the EAR&H never granted him gratuity which he contested since some of his mates like Manga and Reuben for them they were granted. He sought an explanation from the high commissioner for transport. The general manager replied to him and stated that Walusimbi never communicated within the appropriate time of six months prior to his retirement and that it was not mandatory for everyone serving the railway beyond 15 years to receive a gratuity. This is what causes the puzzle in how the EAR&H authorities decided who to be granted this benefit, thus an affirmation of the discriminatory welfare program.

More disparities in welfare provisions between Asian and African workers is also evident in the archival documents. Asians received somewhat better packages, including gratuity and retirement benefits, after quitting their work after serving fifteen years. In the cases of retirement, medical grounds, or death, Asian workers' widows and children were entitled to support until the last-born child turned eighteen. In stark contrast, African workers were denied similar benefits, with many complaining about not receiving gratuities despite years of service. Requests for transfers to care for ailing family members were often denied, and African workers were forced to live in cramped, unsanitary conditions, sharing small rooms with six or more people. These conditions exposed them to diseases like cholera, dysentery, and typhoid, as well as parasites such as ticks, lice, and bed bugs, as McClymont earlier testified to the undersecretary for colonies. Furthermore, African workers received lower wages for their labour, ranging from shs 8 to shs 16 shillings, which could not serve all their personal and family obligations, depending on the recruitment location, contracting company, and region of origin. On top of that renumeration, each worker received a monthly ration consisting of dry beans, flour, and salt, which differed significantly from their traditional diets. These injustices and differentiations exacerbated existing inequalities, ultimately contributing to labour unrest and conflicts during that period.

According to oral narratives, each East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H) worker was entitled to a 30-day annual leave, which was mandatory. Workers were required to submit their proposed leave dates in advance, allowing the railway authorities to plan for their absence and arrange replacements. Former workers fondly recalled these leaves, describing them as a welcome respite from the accumulated fatigue of their labour. These periods allowed workers to rejuvenate, visit loved ones, and attend to household responsibilities, such as manual labour in the fields and undertaking family projects. However, some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the limited duration of the leave. One former worker lamented, "30 days for a casual worker are not enough. You can't compare us to managers who sit in offices and do supervisory roles. For us, it's all about energy. We deserved at least two leaves in a year to recover what we had lost." These testimonies reveal that the Kenya Uganda Railway (KUR) and EAR&H welfare programs played a dual role. On one hand, they served as a control mechanism, while on the other hand, they stimulated the development of counter-narratives surrounding workers' humane dignity and rights.

Mobilities: Labour Promotions, Separated Travels and Struggles for Identity.

From its inception, the railway infrastructure was touted as a revolutionary tool that would facilitate mobility, enabling individuals to travel quickly from one place to another, and transporting merchandise, including agricultural products and natural mineral resources, from fields and deposits to industrial areas and markets. However, for Kenya Uganda Railway (KUR) and East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H) workers, these journeys were discriminative and explorative experiences that exposed them to new ideas and transformed traditional notions of community and belonging. To many African workers, the railway infrastructure was a double-edged sword, ushering in modernity and presenting both opportunities and challenges. This infrastructure was more of sorrow than happiness if you take a deeper dig and analyse the former

workers' voices. The concept of mobility within the railway workforce was multifaceted. There was vertical mobility, which referred to the expectation of career advancement, where workers would be promoted to higher positions after gaining experience and seniority. This type of mobility was often accompanied by benefits such as salary increments, improved welfare, including better housing and medical care, reduced working hours, and increased responsibilities, such as supervising junior workers. In contrast, horizontal mobility involved transferring workers from one station to another or assigning them to different roles without offering promotions or salary increases. Both types of mobility were experienced within the boundaries of the workplace, highlighting the complex and often limited nature of career advancement within the colonial railway system.

Archival records reveal that the potential for upward promotions was consistently thwarted by racialised sentiments in the workplace. African workers were not promoted based on merit, but rather were relegated to lower positions due to their racial classification. The archival documents explicitly state that railway work was segregated by race, with top positions and responsibilities that commanded higher wages, such as train drivers, senior inspectors, and administrative offices, reserved exclusively for Europeans. Asians, particularly Indians from southwestern India, occupied middle-management positions, serving as intermediaries between European supervisors and African labourers. Africans were consistently recruited for lower positions due to their perceived physical strength and endurance, which made them suitable for demanding and labour-intensive tasks. With all these policies in place, it became so hard for African workers to forge their way to the top since this was part of the design for colonial labour. Ojangole, a former porter who worked in the 1950s, corroborated this assertion, stating that Luos were preferred for their physical characteristics, including their height, strength, energy, and adaptability to the provided food. These attributes made them the ideal candidates for the job in the eyes of the

colonial authorities. I may not be mistaken if I state that they were the best experimental results in the British railway authorities who stood all the challenges. This racialised division of labour perpetuated a hierarchical system, with Africans relegated to the bottom of the labour pyramid.

However, archival records reveal the stark realities of working and travelling on these railways, further exposing the true nature of European infrastructure development. A notable example is found in an official exchange between the Commissioner of Transport in East Africa and an educated black traveller, who happened to be the son of a former Katikiro of Buganda. The traveller complained about being relegated to a wagon with inadequate ventilation, no washrooms, and being denied the opportunity to dine with European passengers. He urged that such discriminatory behaviour be investigated and addressed. In response, the Commissioner established a committee of inquiry, which acknowledged the existence of discriminatory practices against coloured passengers on the trains. However, in the committee's report, it agreed to the allegations of misconduct but also rationalised that the primary customers of these passenger trains were Europeans. It was true that discrimination and ill treatment was present on passenger trains, but for purposes of business, the railway authorities sounded like they could not lose their European clients in favour of a very small fraction of black clients, forgetting that still the numbers of blacks also helped in balancing their books to break even. However, at the end of its report, it recommended the provision of relatively improved coaches for affluent coloured passengers. The report reinforced the entrenched racial hierarchies. A provision of an improved coach for able-bodied coloured passengers still is a justification for discrimination. Why not recommend that those able-bodied coloured passengers be free to mix with European passengers travelling? These incidents reveal the true nature of these infrastructures, where native African men were exploited for their labour and colour in constructing and maintaining the railways, yet were excluded from fully participating in their benefits. These experiences prompted workers to negotiate identities that merged elements of modernity and resistance, as they sought to reclaim their dignity and challenge the oppressive systems that governed their lives.

A thorough examination of the archives reveals that the Kenya Uganda Railway (KUR) and East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H) railways served multiple purposes. They functioned not only as cargo stations and depots where raw materials were assembled and dispatched but also as spaces where workers and travellers from diverse identities and races converged, exchanging cultural heritages. However, these same spaces were also utilised as tools of discrimination against the people who sacrificed their families, youth, energy, and health to ensure the success of these colonial infrastructures. The archival documents confirm that the railways in Jinja-Busoga employed double standards, serving as both unifying organisations that brought workers from different geographical spaces together, such as the Luo, Luhya, Teso, Lugbara, Bantu, and others from across borders, unifying them and negotiating for their identity, but also enforcing racialised segregation within the same organisations. This paradox ultimately highlights the contradictions inherent in colonial modernisation projects, which purported to promote unity and progress while perpetuating discriminatory practices and reinforcing racial hierarchies which have contributed negatively to the development of societies presently.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the Kenya Uganda Railway (KUR) and East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H) former workers' recruitment practices, payment structures, welfare obligations, and travel practices provides a poignant example of how these railways represented and negotiated identity, race, and gender dynamics throughout the colonial era. The railways facilitated the British administration's control over their territories, enabling the extraction of minerals and industrial raw materials, such as cotton, coffee,

and tobacco, without impediment. These resources were in high demand in Britain, particularly Ugandan cotton, which was intended to fill the supply gap left by American suppliers who had shifted their focus to manufacturing cotton products, such as winter clothing. The railways also played a crucial role in transporting European finished commodities to African local markets, including goods such as cigarette lighters, ointments, clothing, and footwear, as well as facilitating the movement of colonial administrators. However, it is essential to acknowledge the railways' dual nature, as they not only facilitated colonial expansion but also perpetuated lasting injustices among their former workers (Cooper & Stoler, 1997). The railways reinforced colonial ideologies of discrimination, perpetuating racial and gender hierarchies that positioned Africans as inferior beings lacking civilisation and skills. Ironically, the railways, intended to bridge these perceived gaps, ultimately exacerbated them. The colonial administrators' oppressive policies sparked creativity among workers, who responded by creating spaces of resistance. Within these spaces, workers redefined their identities and collective influence, challenging the colonial narrative and asserting their agency.

The Kenya Uganda Railway (KUR) and East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H) examples in Jinja-Busoga reflect the broader dynamics of colonial infrastructures across the continent and globally. Studies from Asia, South America, and Africa have documented similar scenarios of identity formation in contexts of labour exploitation and resistance. In West Africa, railway workers' harsh working conditions played a crucial role in shaping their self-definition, family, and community dynamics. Workers in Senegal and Mali, for instance, organised boycotts and strikes to demand improved wages, equal to those of European labourers. Their slogan, "What a white man can do, we can do too, but we work more hours for less pay," testifies to their creativity and solidarity. Similarly, in the Americas, native, Asian, and Black workers navigated segregation and discrimination in

workplaces and commuter trains. They demanded equal access to travel coaches and routes, as well as improved salaries and accommodations (Erkkila, 2015).

The gendered biases of railway labour are also significant. Women's experiences, often neglected and discriminatory, reveal how they negotiated family and cultural roles. According to oral narratives and archival sources, women sold merchandise at railway stations to mitigate economic challenges. Despite frequent warnings and prohibitions by the EAR&H, women continued to sell goods, as it was their primary means of survival. In some cases, women took on men's roles as providers and supporters of their households by leasing land and engaging in seasonal agriculture. While these practices helped women earn income and support their families, they were often kept out of formal employment, and their family setups were disrupted. These experiences redefined women's community traditional roles, highlighting how infrastructures that brought modernity were frequently contested. By examining the challenges faced by workers and their families, this paper provides a nuanced understanding of identity formation, which has left a lasting impact on postcolonial social structures in Jinja-Busoga.

Ultimately, the railway, as a symbol of travel and mobility, epitomises the paradoxical nature of colonial modernity. On one hand, the railway represents development, progress, efficiency, and global connectivity, as touted by scholars of economic development. Empirically and practically, there is a positive correlation between railways and economic development, as well as community progress. For instance, railways have contributed to the emergence of major urban centres, such as Johannesburg, Durban, Manchester, Milan, Paris, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Dakar, and Bamako. These urban hubs boast high transportation services, populations, and development indexes. However, a deeper analysis of the railways' functionalities in these urban spaces reveals a more complex narrative. On the other hand, railways were organisations where racial identity and gender discrimination were

severely exercised. Workers were subjected to prolonged and irregular working hours and discriminatory labour practices. This forced workers to navigate the harsh conditions, negotiating between obligatory superiors and their desires for autonomy and dignity. This duality has been at the heart of the discussion surrounding the Jinja-Busoga railways between the 1920s and 1950s, highlighting the tensions between the promised benefits of colonial modernity and the harsh realities of exploitation and discrimination.

CONCLUSION

The railway works of the Kenya Uganda Railway (KUR) and East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H) between 1912 and the 1950s provide a nuanced understanding of colonial railways as complex organisations that not only facilitated the extraction of raw materials and the distribution of European finished goods but also served as sites where sentiments of identity, race, and gender were negotiated and practiced. The recruitment practices, infused with racial, identity, and gendered interests, exemplify this complexity. The wage structures and work practices perpetuated inequality, while welfare benefits represented a mix of control and care. Travel practices, meanwhile, embodied both modernity and limitations. Together, the KUR and EAR&H profoundly shaped the negative lived experiences of their former workers. This study concurs that despite the economic functionality of colonial railways, their presence has had a lasting impact on the collective aspects of identity, influencing how former workers, their families, and communities navigated race, gender, and class during colonialism and beyond. The lived experiences of African, Asian, and European workers on the railways demonstrate that endurance and adaptation were essential to colonial labour practices, which continue to shape the social and political landscapes of postcolonial Jinja-Busoga, East Africa.

By integrating archival documents with shared oral narratives, this study fills a gap in previous research on railway labour in lesser-studied regions, such as Jinja-Busoga, while contributing to ongoing debates about the relationship between labour, race, identity, and power in colonial contexts. The examples of the Kenya Uganda Railway (KUR) and East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H) prompt a re-evaluation of modernity itself, suggesting that the modern state and its infrastructures were built upon layers of resistance, negotiation, and persistent redefinition of identity among former workers.

Colonial legacies continue to shape our societies, sparking discussions about workers' rights, fair representation, and social justice. History has shown that colonial infrastructures were not solely built for development, civilisation, and modernity but also served as tools for local resource extraction, African exploitation, administrative control, and division among locals. Railways, often touted as symbols of progress, imposed laborious conditions on workers and reshaped women's gender roles, distorting African gender traditions. Acknowledging that colonial infrastructures were not neutral is essential, as they embodied the values and power relations of the nations that built them. By understanding how colonial railways functioned as both tools of progress and means of oppression, we can better comprehend current struggles and work towards improving the inconsistent working conditions of workers in contemporary social and political contexts.

RECOMMENDATION

Drawing lessons from the colonial railway legacies in the Kenya Uganda Railway (KUR) and East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H) between 1912 and the 1950s, the study recommends the following:

Addressing historical injustices in contemporary practices of East Africa by acknowledging and integrating historical context into labour policy development to address present-day disparities.

Integrate critical, nuanced colonial history into national curricula at all educational levels. This should highlight how colonial infrastructures served as both instruments of economic development and tools for exploitation,

administrative control, and social division, moving beyond simplistic narratives of "progress" and "civilisation."

Leverage research findings from the Ugandan context to enrich broader academic discussions on the nature of modernity, the complexities of colonial power dynamics, and the persistent struggles for social justice in postcolonial societies worldwide.

Foster and invest in community-led projects focused on documenting and preserving local histories. This includes establishing community archives, collecting oral testimonies, and digitising personal photographs and artefacts related to colonial labour and its impact.

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