

**TOPIC: IDENTITY, FAMILY LIFE AND SOCIAL MOBILITY AMONG RAILWAY  
WORKERS IN JINJA, 1912-1990**

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**Abstract**

This study investigated the impact of railway employment on the identity, family life, and social mobility of former railway workers in and around Jinja from 1912 to 1990. The study was guided by the following objectives namely: It examined how the development of railways in Jinja reinforced racial segregation and social hierarchies, how it shaped family structures and relationships within railway communities, and how it impacted labour mobility. This study used a historical case study design, utilising archival documents from the Kenya Uganda Railway and Harbours (KURH), Uganda Protectorate Government, and East African Railways and Harbours (EAR&H) authority housed at the Uganda National Archives and Records Centre to explore the lived experiences of former railway workers in relation to identity, family life, and mobility. These archival materials were supplemented by oral histories gathered from surviving former railway employees and their families who shared first-hand accounts. Drawing on Modernisation, Dependency, and Critical Race theories, the study highlights the complex relationship between railways and race in East Africa, and shows how the KURH and EAR&H served as drivers of colonial economic growth through exploitation and extraction, while perpetuating social division and power consolidation. The findings indicate that the Busoga railway facilitated the transportation of goods while entrenching racial divisions by assigning African labour to lower-status posts and reserving supervisory and decision-making positions for Europeans. This racial segregation limited career advancement opportunities for local workers, irrespective of seniority or skill. Furthermore, the railway disrupted family life, as male workers were frequently posted far from home, thus shattering traditional kinship networks and requiring women to assume greater economic and domestic responsibilities. This research concludes that the primary purpose of the Busoga railway was to serve British colonial interests at the expense of African communities, thereby highlighting the tension between progress and marginalisation that characterises colonial development initiatives.