

GEOPOLITICS OF CONNECTIVITY: ANALYZING CHINA'S CONSTRUCTION OF RAILWAYS IN KENYA

Pratyusha Basu, Ph.D. [1]
Associate Professor of Geography
Department of Sociology and
Anthropology
Director, Asian Studies Program
University of Texas - El Paso
500 W. University Ave.
El Paso, TX 79968
pbasu@utep.edu

Milena U. Janiec, Ph.D. [2]
Independent Researcher
milenajaniec@gmail.com

[1] Author for correspondence

Introduction

- Between 1896 and 1901, the British colonial government constructed a metre gauge railway line that connected the port city of Mombasa to Lake Victoria at Kenya-Uganda border.
- In 2011, a decision was made to start improvements to the infrastructure system.
- In 2013, China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) was awarded the contract to build a SGR line from Mombasa to Malaga.

Postcolonial and Neocolonial Perspectives

- Huggan (1997) posits that postcolonial perspective gained relevance because of the “continuing modes of imperialist thought and action (22)” which do “not imply that the colonial era is over (ibid.)”.
- Spivak (1991): neocolonialism is now “more economic and less territorial (2),”
- Lee and Muller (2012) the critiques of foreign acquisitions and investments have been predominantly centered on non-Western activities (25).

Colonial Infrastructure in China and Kenya

China

- In the aftermath of Russo – Japanese war, Manchurian railroad was utilized to remove resources to Japan.
- After WWII, the USSR confiscated infrastructure equipment against the United States' interests.
- Elleman (2010): once China gained control over its railways, the country was able to benefit from its internal networks.

Kenya

- Kenya's initial construction of railroad in 1901, was a manifest of a policy aiming to advance the British political, economic, and military might (Jedwab et al., 2015).
- Sir Eliot (1905) remarked that "[t]his line has literally created a country (208)."

China and Kenya: Past ties

- The success of the Communist revolution in China was met with support of Kenya's peasant resistance movement.
- When Kenya attained its independence in 1963, it received financial support from China.
- Geopolitical competition between Taiwan, China and Russia to offer help newly independent Kenya played a role.
- While all the help was needed, China's offer was viewed more favorably, because it did not require oversight of Kenya's development projects (Elleman 2010, 12).
- Similarly, now, China's aid is celebrated as a no strings attached policy.

Questions and Methods

How is China's construction of Kenya's railways represented in the major newspapers of Kenya (Daily Nation) and China (China Daily)? Specifically,

1. How is competition between various geo-economic actors as well as between various modes of transport reflected in news articles?
2. In what ways do criticisms of China's role focus on the financial aspects of railways, especially in terms of loans provided for railway construction and its connections to debt?
3. How does a focus on the value of Chinese investment depict China's technological prowess in rail construction vis-à-vis that of Western countries?

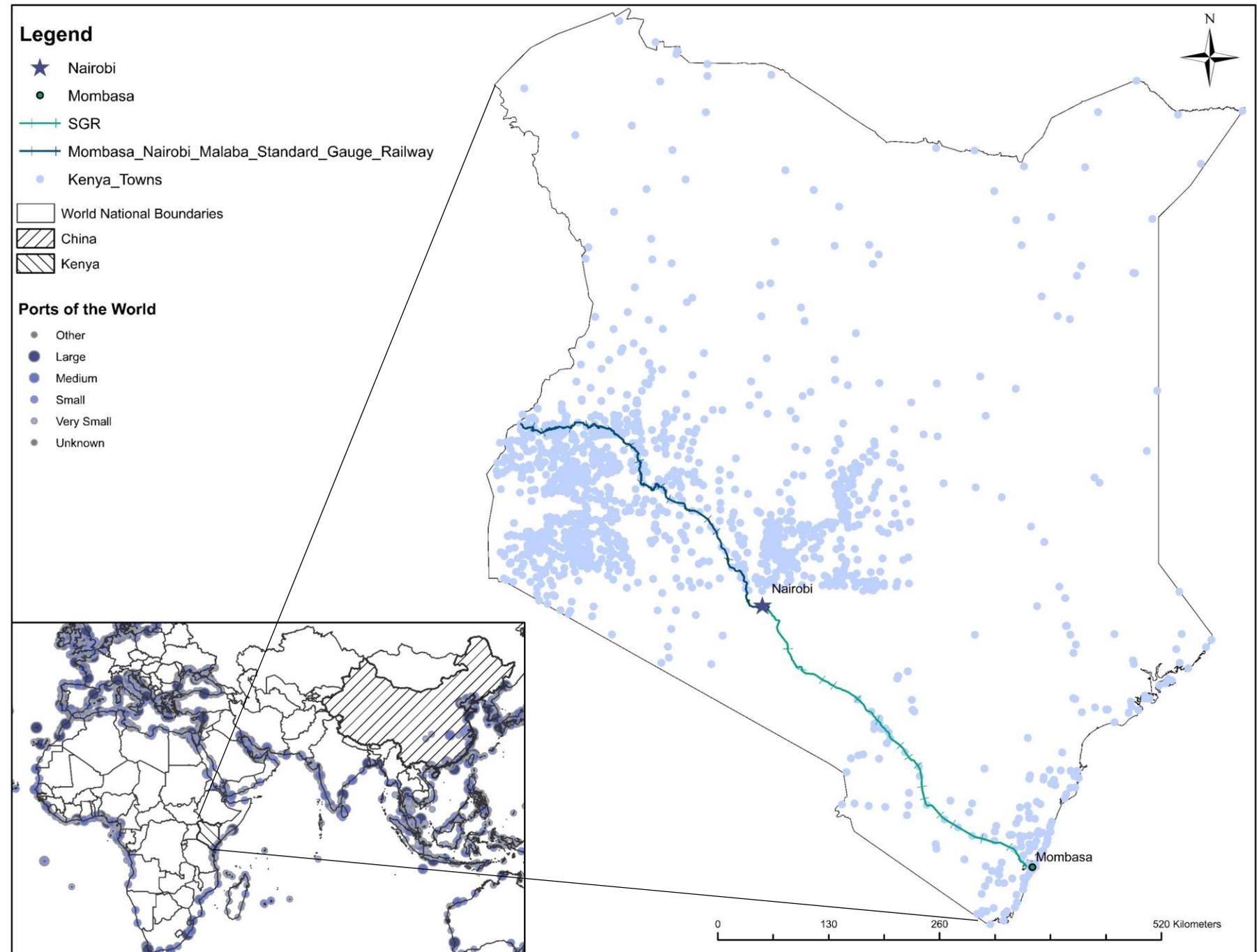
Questions and Methods

- China Daily:
 - 200,000 readers within China and abroad (China Daily, 2005).
- Daily Nation:
 - 170,000 readers (Wachira, 2014) in Kenya and abroad (Daily Nation, n.d.).
- Articles published between 2011, when Kenya's SGR project commenced and 2018 when the SGR become accessible for public use.
- Articles were selected through an online search engine LexisNexis.
 - China Daily and China Daily-Africa Weekly as well as Daily Nation and Sunday Nation
 - Included keywords "China", "Kenya", "Chinese", and "Kenyan". These words were paired with "railway", "railroad", "Standard Gauge Railway Network."
 - Repeated articles were removed
- The text was processed through Voyant Tools to guide the choice of categories.

Questions and Methods

Year	China Daily – number of articles	Daily Nation – number of articles
2011	0	1
2012	0	2
2013	17	64
2014	130	118
2015	158	100
2016	94	116
2017	197	113
2018	101	79
Total	697	593

Case Study



Framing International Competition within Discussion on Railroads

- On April 10, 2013, *Daily Nation* describes the changing characteristics of its international relations in the following way:
 - “Kenya's imports from China, India and Brazil have grown exponentially in the last few years to replace those from its traditional partners like the United States and Britain although foreign firms from the [...] Western powers remain in control of the key sectors of economy (n.p.)”
- *China Daily* advocates this continuous development drive and seeks to boost its argument by relating the current situation in Kenya to the investment in other African countries. For instance, July 27, 2018 article reveals that,
 - In South Africa, [...] a signatory to the Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese and South African companies have been cooperating on various infrastructure projects such as roads, railways, ports, power generation, airports and human settlements. [...] Statistics reveal that China's direct investment in South Africa has grown more than 80 times and exceeds \$10.2 billion in cumulative terms, creating tens of thousands of jobs for local communities and boosting the South African economy (n.p.).”

Framing International Competition within Discussion on Railroads

- The media seem to signal that the railway will possess superior technological characteristics.
- Portrays the introduction of railroads as a remedy for overcrowded roads, especially in terms of shipment of commercial goods.
- Frames the railway as a drive for more monies through increased movement of goods and people.

Loans and Debt Traps

- *China Daily*'s report of Foreign Minister Wang Yi visit to Kenya highlights his speech on the mutual aid relationship (January 12, 2015):
 - "The cooperation of China with Kenya and Africa is cooperation for mutual benefit between developing countries and is the mutual support of friends between each other. We should give priority to the needs of Kenyan's development and people's wishes [...] (n.p.)."
- Daily Nation considers the increased amount of debt for Kenya and other African countries. For example, an article published on March 30th, 2016, discusses implications of carrying the burden of debt:
 - "We borrowed a massive \$4 billion to build the Mombasa-Nairobi part from the Export-Import Bank of China [...], we hurriedly moved to sign off another \$1.5 billion for extending the line to Naivasha. We have signed a commercial contract with a Chinese railway contractor to allow us access to another \$5 billion [...]. In total, we are borrowing a massive \$10 billion from the Chinese for the railway. \$10 billion is 20 per cent of our gross domestic product. Do we have the right to saddle unborn generations with Chinese loans? (n.p.)."
- The June 19, 2016 article in *Sunday Nation* (Sunday edition of *Daily Nation*) reports Kenya's debt and decries the recent investment:
 - "The signing of the deal on Monday came just a month after the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned the country against its huge uptake of Chinese loans as they risk choking the economy with a huge repayment burden (n.p.)."

Loans and Debt Traps

- Kenya's newspapers framing of the loan contrast with China Daily's portrayals of Chinese financial investments.
- Daily Nation actively criticized SGR and framed the project as a 'mega-scandal.'
 - A single Chinese company was chosen to conduct a Feasibility Study for the project and was awarded the contract.
- A number of articles within the researched corpus included references to the World Bank's reports of Kenya's investments. The reports seemed to consider China's loans to be inferior, risky, and creating burden for future generations.

Expertise and Technology Transfers

- August 21, 2015: China Daily accounts the beginning of the training program for twenty people from Kenya which
 - “aimed to improve their knowledge of modern railway technology (n.p.)”.
- February 4th, 2015: Daily Nation reports on a different training program offered
 - “to bridge a skills gap as building of the new railway gathers steam (n.p)”.
- February 12, 2015: China Daily describes that
 - "China's Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiatives involve several cultures and 63 per-cent of the world's population. The differences in cultures, customs, policies and laws, labor markets and political environment may create stumbling blocks, but most people see it as a new chance for both China and African countries. Bethwel Kinuthia [...] told [...] that it is obvious the MSR unleashes a windfall for African countries in terms of new markets for products, transfer of technology and skills as well as easier mobility (n.p).”

Expertise and Technology Transfers

- China Daily and Daily Nation framed the issues associated with technology transfer in a similar way.
- The topics included training and international student exchanges, creating unified, standard infrastructure system, and providing cutting edge transportation solutions.
- African continent needs interconnection, but Western financial institutions want to update old colonial lines, whereas China will provide new lines.

Summary and Conclusion

- China Daily and Daily Nation frame the development of the SGR as a means to help boost Kenya's economy.
 - China Daily promotes a largely uniform type of discourse related to international cooperation,
 - Daily Nation more readily questions hiring of the Chinese personnel.
 - Kenya's newspaper points to the price of the SGR project in a form of the scandal surrounding the deal with China. In addition, economic development may be hindered by the large debt incurred to sponsor the project.
- Daily Nation seems to reveal Kenya's dreams of regional dominance achieved through access to international loans, new infrastructure, and ability to facilitate global trade.

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