

African Railwaymen

African Studies Series 10

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Solidarity and Opposition in an
East African Labour Force

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Cambridge University Press

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This was the first anthropological monograph to have dealt at length with the labour force of a major East African industry. It is a study of the African employees of the East African Railways and Harbours stationed at Kampala, Uganda, and living on the Railway-owned Nsambya housing estate. Set in the years 1964-5, shortly after Uganda's and Kenya's Independence, the book explores some of the consequences for African migrant workers of the changes affecting their society. Dr Grillo describes how falling prices for primary agricultural products, educational expansion and rising wages have created a high demand for employment. Those fortunate enough to find work enjoy a relatively high standard of living. Partly in consequence, the Railway labour force has become stabilised with a low turnover of employees, the majority of whom bring wives and children to live in town. They are, however, still migrants who maintain social and economic ties with their areas of origin. By fulfilling customary and personal obligations, individuals retain a position within an 'ethnic' system which provides one framework for relationships of solidarity and opposition. The industry itself with its work-units, occupational groups and grading system provides another.

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目录:

[African Railwaymen 下载链接1](#)

标签

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