Abstract

This thesis explores the historical, cultural, and memory-related aspects of the construction of the Congo-Ocean Railway (CFCO) in the Republic of Congo, with a focus on its colonial origins, its current technical and societal condition, and the ways in which it is preserved in collective memory, particularly through recollections of its construction period and its significance in contemporary Congolese identity. The work is divided into four main chapters. The first chapter provides the geographical, demographic, linguistic, and cultural context of the Republic of Congo, complemented by a historical-political overview from the precolonial period to the present day. The second chapter traces the development of the CFCO railway from its planning and motivations, through the construction phase, to its operation and function across different historical periods, including the postcolonial era and its current infrastructural condition. The third chapter examines how the CFCO is reflected in contemporary Congolese culture and society, addressing its presence in public space, media, literature, education, music, tourism, and memory sites linked to the railway. The fourth chapter is based on interviews with local residents and captures how Congolese people remember the railway, what it means to them, and how its story is transmitted (or not) across generations, while also revealing broader postcolonial dynamics, such as memory gaps, persistent silence on the part of the state, and tensions between official narratives and individual experiences.

Keywords: Congo, CFCO, collective memory, Congo-Brazzaville, railway, colonialism, French colonies