

Railways, Social Mobility, and Colonial Urbanization: Bogor in the Early Twentieth Century

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Abstract:

This article examines changes in social mobility in Bogor following the introduction of railways in the early twentieth century by positioning rail transport as a key infrastructure in the process of colonial urbanization. The study demonstrates that railway construction in Bogor cannot be understood merely as a technical innovation in transportation, but rather as an economic-political instrument that integrated the hinterland into the administrative and economic networks of the Dutch East Indies. Using a historical approach grounded in colonial archival sources and secondary references in the form of peer-reviewed academic articles and credible media reports, this research analyzes the relationship between railway development, social mobility, and the transformation of urban space during the period 1900–1930. The findings show that railways operated as a colonial mobility regime that simultaneously expanded horizontal mobility among indigenous populations—through intensified spatial movement and occupational diversification—while failing to open vertical mobility in an equitable manner. Access to education, official positions, and social status remained constrained by colonial structures based on race and class. In addition, railway lines and stations functioned as urban nodes that reconfigured the spatial organization of Bogor according

to the logic of timetables, economic extraction, and colonial administration. Consequently, mobility and urbanization in Bogor were produced in a differential manner through colonial infrastructure that both accelerated movement and normalized social inequality. This article argues that railways functioned as a politically charged agent of social change and contributes to the historiography of colonial transportation in Indonesia through an analytical lens centered on mobility, power, and social stratification.

Keywords: Social Mobility, Railways, Colonial Urbanization, Bogor, Dutch East Indies.

Abstrak:

Artikel ini menelaah perubahan mobilitas masyarakat Bogor pasca kehadiran kereta api pada awal abad ke-20 dengan menempatkan transportasi rel sebagai infrastruktur kunci dalam proses urbanisasi kolonial. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa pembangunan kereta api di Bogor tidak dapat dipahami semata sebagai inovasi teknis transportasi, melainkan sebagai instrumen ekonomi-politik yang mengintegrasikan wilayah pedalaman ke dalam jaringan administrasi dan ekonomi kolonial Hindia Belanda. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan sejarah berbasis arsip colonial dan referensi sekunder berupa artikel ilmiah dan laporan media kredibel, penelitian ini menganalisis relasi antara pembangunan perkeretaapian, mobilitas sosial, dan transformasi ruang kota pada periode 1900–1930. Temuan penelitian memperlihatkan bahwa kereta api beroperasi sebagai rezim mobilitas kolonial yang secara simultan memperluas mobilitas horizontal masyarakat pribumi—melalui intensifikasi perpindahan wilayah dan diversifikasi pekerjaan—namun tidak membuka mobilitas vertikal secara setara. Akses terhadap pendidikan, jabatan, dan status sosial tetap dibatasi oleh struktur kolonial berbasis ras dan kelas. Selain itu, rel dan stasiun membentuk simpul urban yang merekonfigurasi ruang kota Bogor mengikuti logika jadwal, ekstraksi ekonomi, dan administrasi kolonial. Dengan demikian, mobilitas dan urbanisasi di Bogor diproduksi secara diferensial melalui infrastruktur kolonial yang sekaligus mempercepat pergerakan dan menormalisasi ketimpangan sosial. Artikel ini menegaskan bahwa kereta api berfungsi sebagai agen perubahan sosial yang politis serta memperkaya historiografi transportasi kolonial Indonesia melalui lensa mobilitas, kuasa, dan stratifikasi sosial.

Kata Kunci: *Mobilitas Sosial, Kereta Api, Urbanisasi Kolonial, Bogor, Hindia Belanda.*

INTRODUCTION

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the implementation of a liberal economic system prompted the Government of the Dutch East Indies to undertake large-scale infrastructure expansion as part of a colonial project of modernization and territorial integration. In addition to irrigation and road networks, railway construction became one of the principal instruments for accelerating the circulation of commodities, labor, and colonial administration. By the early twentieth century, railway networks in Java and Sumatra had reached approximately 6,500 kilometers, marking a fundamental transformation in the colonial transportation landscape and economy (Dick, 2000; Fauzi & Alais Muhamadan, 2020). The early line connecting Batavia–Buitenzorg, completed in 1873, positioned Bogor as a key node within the colonial transportation network (“Kuda Besi Sepanjang Sejarah,” 1999).

Railway development in the Dutch East Indies primarily served colonial economic interests, particularly the transport of plantation products from the hinterland to ports for global trade (Brata, 2021; Rakhmawati et al., 2021). In West Java, increasing plantation output demanded faster and more reliable transportation modes than conventional land routes, which still consisted largely of dirt roads and footpaths with travel times that could extend to two days (Leirissa et al., 1983). Railways, as products of the Industrial Revolution, represented the introduction of Western technology into colonial space and simultaneously transformed rhythms of space, time, and social mobility (Lombard, 2000).

Bogor occupied a strategic position within this colonial logic. Its geographical proximity to Batavia and its role as a plantation and administrative center made the region a priority for railway lines and station development. The construction of the Batavia–Bogor network, later extended to Sukabumi, Cianjur, and Bandung, proceeded alongside the development of railway facilities such as stations, platforms, and waiting rooms, which gradually shaped the spatial structure of the colonial city (Lamiyati, 2017; Sulistyani, 2023). The alignment of railway tracks parallel to main roads and the use of open land reflected a technocratic colonial planning approach aimed at minimizing spatial conflicts with other infrastructures (Falah et al., 2018).

However, railways did not function solely as technical means for transporting goods. A growing body of studies emphasizes that colonial transportation infrastructure also shaped the social, economic, and spatial configurations of cities in the Dutch East Indies (Fakih, 2023; Silver, 2022). Railways expanded access to mobility, accelerated population movements, and widened access to education and employment opportunities. At the same time, the colonial railway system continued to operate within racial and class hierarchies, where discrimination against

indigenous populations persisted into the early twentieth century (Luttikhuis & Moses, 2012; Steenbrink et al., 2006).

In Bogor, tensions between the economic functions of railways and the realities of colonial society became increasingly complex. Although the railway network developed to support plantations and military interests—including troop mobilization and defense logistics—its presence indirectly facilitated social change at the local level (Hermawan et al., 2023). Intensified mobility encouraged shifts in social class status, transformations in work patterns, and renegotiations of traditional cultural values amid deepening colonial urbanization.

To date, studies of colonial railways in Indonesia have tended to situate rail infrastructure within frameworks of macroeconomic analysis, development history, station architecture, or colonial urban planning more broadly (Brata, 2021; Colombijn & Coté, 2015; Dick, 2000; Sulistyani, 2023). Within the wider literature on modernization and urban development, transportation infrastructure often appears as part of colonial and postcolonial projects aimed at territorial integration, urban ordering, and the facilitation of economic circulation at national or regional scales (Dimitriou, 2022; Permanasari & Sintusingha, 2021; Wirymartono, 2012). While valuable, these approaches frequently position railways as technical artifacts or symbols of state-led modernity rather than as social practices shaping everyday lived experience. Consequently, the dynamics of local social mobility—particularly how railways influenced patterns of movement, labor relations, and social opportunities at the urban scale in places such as Bogor—remain relatively underexplored. Yet, as critical transport and urban studies demonstrate, infrastructure does not merely reflect development policy; it actively produces power relations, social differentiation, and unequal mobility experiences (Dimitriou, 2022; Kusno, 2014). Understanding railways as agents of social change is therefore essential for a more comprehensive reading of the relationship between colonial infrastructure, urbanization, and everyday life, especially in colonial cities like Bogor located at the intersection of administrative centers, production zones, and regional transport networks.

Against this backdrop, this article analyzes the role of railways in shaping social mobility in Bogor during the period 1900–1930. Using a historical approach grounded in colonial archives—including documents from the Departement der Burgerlijke Openbare Werken, the Indisch Tijdschrift voor Spoor- en Tramwegwezen, Staatsblad, and the work of Reitsma (1925)—the study traces how railway development influenced population movements, access to education and employment, and changes in Bogor’s social structure. In doing so, the article contributes to the study of colonial transportation history and urbanization by placing social mobility at the center of analysis.

More broadly, this article argues that railways in Bogor cannot be understood merely as colonial transportation infrastructure but must be read as a structural mechanism that actively produced and reorganized social mobility within the context of colonial urbanization. Drawing on the new mobilities paradigm, mobility is understood not simply as physical movement but as a social relation structured by power, technology, and unequal access (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2016). The introduction of railways compressed space and time, enabling intensified population movement, transforming labor relations, and expanding—while simultaneously restricting—access to economic and educational resources. As Sheller (2014) emphasizes, mobility regimes are inherently political and differential: access to mobility never distributes evenly but remains framed by class and racial hierarchies embedded in colonial order. In Bogor, railways thus operated as mobility technologies that facilitated urbanization while reproducing colonial inequalities, shaping social mobility experiences through the interaction of transport technology, colonial economic interests, and local social structures undergoing transformation.

METHOD

This study focuses on social mobility in Bogor following the introduction of railways during the colonial period, particularly between 1900 and 1930, by positioning rail transport as a key infrastructure shaping population movement patterns, labor relations, and access to socio-economic resources. The units of analysis include everyday practices of social mobility among Bogor’s population, colonial policies and interests underlying railway development, and historical artifacts in the form of colonial documents and archives that record these dynamics.

The study adopts a qualitative research design with a historical approach, as it seeks to develop an in-depth understanding of social processes and structural transformations within the colonial context. The qualitative approach allows the analysis to examine meanings, power relations, and social implications of railway development that cannot be reduced to purely quantitative measurement. A social mobility analytical framework guides the interpretation of how changes in transport infrastructure affected horizontal mobility and constrained vertical mobility among indigenous populations within the colonial social structure (Soekanto, 2017).

The data sources consist of both primary and secondary materials. Primary sources include colonial archives such as correspondence from the *Departement der Burgerlijke Openbare Werken*, the *Indisch Tijdschrift voor Spoor- en Tramwegwezen, Staatsblad* (1878; 1879; 1885; 1919), and *Zitting* documents from 1897–1898 (*Zitting* 1897–1898, 1898). The study also draws on secondary sources in the form of contemporaneous works and historical literature, most notably Reitsma's (1925) *Gedenkboek der Staatsspoor- en Tramwegen in Nederlandsch-Indië 1875–1925*, as well as recent academic studies from credible online media relevant to the history of Indonesian railways, urbanization, and colonialism.

Data collection follows the heuristic method, involving the systematic identification and gathering of historical sources related to railway development and social mobility in Bogor. All collected sources then undergo a verification stage, particularly internal criticism, to assess credibility, authenticity, and consistency by cross-checking them against comparable sources. This heuristic stage requires a high level of rigor because it directly affects the validity of the historical data (Sulasman, 2014).

Data analysis proceeds through interpretation and historiography. During the interpretation stage, the study analyzes archival findings qualitatively by situating them within broader social, economic, and colonial contexts in order to clarify the relationship between railways, social mobility, and urbanization. The final stage involves historiography, in which the study presents its findings as an analytical and argumentative historical narrative rather than a purely chronological account (Sulasman, 2013). Through these stages, the research reconstructs the dynamics of social mobility in Bogor critically while remaining grounded in empirically verified evidence (Yatim, 1997).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Railways as a Colonial Mobility Regime in Bogor

The presence of railways in Bogor since the late nineteenth century cannot be reduced to a mere technical modernization of transportation; instead, it should be understood as the formation of a colonial mobility regime—an assemblage of infrastructure, policies, and governance mechanisms that determined who could move, how far, how fast, and for what purposes. This regime operated through two mutually reinforcing logics. First, a logic of colonial accumulation required faster and more massive transport of commodities from the interior to ports. Second, an administrative-political logic demanded stable connectivity between the colonial administrative center in Bogor (Buitenzorg) and Batavia as a hub of bureaucracy and trade (Brata, 2021; Dick, 2000). Accordingly, the Batavia-Buitenzorg line, completed in 1873, functioned not merely as an intercity connection but as a colonial corridor that reconfigured space-time relations in West Java. The technology of scheduled and measurable mobility shortened socio-economic distances between the Priangan hinterland, colonial centers, and ports, while hierarchies of access remained firmly embedded (Staatsblad, 1885; *Zitting* 1897–1898, 1898).

The economic-political dimension of this regime becomes evident when the railway network is read against the transition from the *cultuurstelsel* (forced cultivation system) to the *Agrarische Wet* of 1870, which expanded opportunities for private plantation investment. In this context, railways did not merely follow plantation growth; they constituted a prerequisite that enabled expansion on a larger and more stable scale. Historical reports on railway development indicate that difficulties in transporting commodities from the interior—previously dependent on slow and risky traditional modes—became a strategic justification for railway expansion in Java, including the Bogor-Priangan corridor, in order to accelerate commodity flows to ports (Dick, 2000; Lupitasari, 2022). In other words, railways produced a “mobility solution” to a structural colonial problem: how to transport products from the Sundanese highlands—coffee, tea, quinine, rubber, and other industrial commodities—efficiently to Batavia and Tanjung Priok while minimizing time costs and value loss due to distribution delays (Brata, 2021; Lupitasari, 2022).

However, the colonial mobility regime manifested not only in commodity flows but also in urban spatial design and symbols of power. The case of Bogor Station illustrates how railway infrastructure served colonial elites rather than the general public. Accounts of the Bogor–Cianjur line emphasize that the relocation and reconstruction of Bogor Station—positioned directly opposite the Bogor Palace—reflected an institutional-political rationality. The station functioned as an extension of the governor-general's center of power and as a representation of grandeur and symbolic competition with other colonial facilities in Asia (Wirawan, 2020). Within the history of urbanism and railway architecture, the station did not operate as a neutral space; it constituted a governed space that combined aesthetics, control, and exclusivity, as evidenced by VIP rooms, premium materials, and architectural layouts that marked user differentiation (Sulistyani, 2023; Wirawan, 2020).

Technical archives on the construction of the Bogor–Sukabumi line further reinforce the argument that this mobility regime emerged through a lengthy material process that included mapping, land acquisition, civil works

(excavation, embankment, concreting), and cross-regional material procurement. Such activities went beyond technical projects and instead produced colonial space through labor hierarchies and surveillance systems (Reitsma, 1925). Popular historical accounts of the Priangan line also note that the hilly terrain between Bogor and Sukabumi necessitated bridges and winding tracks, which eventually generated financial constraints that led to the takeover of construction by *Staatsspoorwegen* in 1879 (Wirawan, 2020). Here, mobility appears as the outcome of investment governance and institutional capacity within the colonial state: when private actors could not bear terrain-related risks, the state intervened to secure connectivity projects deemed vital for economic and administrative interests.

From the perspective of lived mobility, travel schedules on the Depok–Tjigombong route and the Bogor–Sukabumi line indicate an intensification of daily mobility that traditional modes could not previously achieve. Railways transformed travel from episodic practices dependent on weather, animal labor, and limited roads into regular, scheduled, and predictable mobility. This shift marked a defining feature of colonial modernity: time became disciplined, distance calculable, and travel a manageable routine (Lombard, 2000). Visual documentation of passenger crowds at Depok and Bogor stations in the early twentieth century portrays stations as new social spaces—sites for waiting, meeting, and interaction—so that mobility no longer signified mere physical movement but an arena for shaping everyday social rhythms (KITLV, 1935).

Figure 1. Crowds at Bogor Station around 1900



Source: Leiden University Libraries (KITLV 182791) in Wirawan (2020).

Figure 2. People waiting at Depok Station in 1900



Source: KITLV 141900.

From the perspective of the new mobilities paradigm, the key issue is not that railways “enabled mobility” but that they produced mobility differentially (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2016). This differentiation appeared in passenger classes, fares, and travel destinations that were embedded from the outset in colonial social structures. Railways accelerated movement, yet they did not distribute this acceleration equally. Instead, they operated through colonial racial and class stratification, so that experiences of mobility—comfort, access, and legitimacy—followed broader social hierarchies (Fakih, 2023; Steenbrink et al., 2006). Even as public mobility expanded, the colonial regime maintained boundaries regarding who qualified as a “legitimate” mobile subject and who remained most vulnerable to control, stigmatization, or restricted access.

Moreover, the colonial mobility regime in Bogor included an often-overlooked dimension: elite recreational mobility. The Bogor–Cianjur line transported not only plantation products but also facilitated access to leisure destinations favored by Europeans, such as the Lake Lido area. In this way, railways functioned dually as economic infrastructure and as a means of spatial consumption by colonial elites (Wirawan, 2020). Colonial mobility thus revealed a paradoxical character: the same infrastructure carried commodities produced through forced labor and plantation discipline while also conveying elites to recreational landscapes framed as the “green nature” of Priangan. Railways therefore integrated territories economically while simultaneously organizing colonial experiences of the landscape, transforming hills, plantations, and stations into circuits of production and leisure (Lombard, 2000; Wirawan, 2020).

Ultimately, these findings confirm that railways in Bogor operated as a colonial mobility regime because they: (1) constructed the Bogor–Batavia–port corridor as a strategic pathway for accumulation; (2) disciplined time and distance through schedules that increased mobility frequency; (3) produced differentiated access to mobility through passenger classes, fares, and station spatial arrangements; and (4) expanded railway functions from commodity transport to the management of symbols of power and colonial leisure. Consequently, railways must be understood as political rather than neutral infrastructure, as they bound mobility to relations of power and colonial interests, precisely as emphasized by the new mobilities paradigm: mobility is always produced, governed, and contested (Sheller, 2014; Sheller & Urry, 2006).

Horizontal Mobility and the Limits of Vertical Mobility among Indigenous Communities

The presence of railways in Bogor expanded horizontal mobility among indigenous communities—namely territorial movement, economic activities, and labor circulation—yet this expansion did not correspond to the opening of vertical mobility in the form of upward social status, access to formal education, or strategic positions of authority. In other words, railways accelerated movement and extended spatial reach, but the social benefits of this acceleration were distributed unevenly, following colonial structures based on race and class. This argument remains consistent when travel data, employment records, and colonial education policies are read in conjunction: mobility increased, but stratification continued to lock indigenous communities out of opportunities for upward mobility (Fakih, 2023; Steenbrink et al., 2006).

At the spatial level, railway schedules and routes connecting Bogor–Batavia and Bogor–Sukabumi enabled more intensive and regular village–city movement than in the pre-railway period. Daily and periodic mobility became possible, allowing laborers, small traders, and service workers to move according to the rhythms of plantation labor, markets, and urban services. Railway timetables document an intensification of travel frequency between villages and stations, while archival photographs depict stations as crowded social nodes, indicating that railways had integrated peripheral areas into colonial economic circuits (KITLV, 1935). However, this integration was instrumental in nature: it absorbed labor into sectors required by colonialism without altering workers’ structural positions.

Table 1. Railway Departure Schedule from Depok toward Tjigombong

| Station | Train 138 (Class 2–3– 3A) | Train 82 (Class 1–2–3–3A B) | Train E412 (Class 1–2–3– 3A) | Train 142 (Class 2–3– 3A) | Train 84 (Class 1–2–3–3A) |
|------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Depok | 11:31 / 11:36 | 12:10 / 12:11 | 1:03 / 1:04 | – | 1:40 / 1:41 |
| Tjitayam | 11:43 | – | 1:10 | – | – |
| Bodjong Gedeh | 11:51 | – | 1:16 | – | – |
| Tjilebut | 11:56 | – | 1:21 | – | – |
| Kebon Pedes | – | – | – | – | – |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|-------|-------|---------------|------|---|
| Buitenzorg | 12:00 | - | 12:31 / 12:37 | 1:31 | - |
| Tandjakan Empang | - | - | - | - | - |
| Batoe Toelis | - | 12:43 | - | 1:48 | - |
| Tjiomas | - | - | - | 2:06 | - |
| Maseng | - | 1:06 | - | 2:21 | - |
| Tjigombong | - | 1:16 | - | 2:35 | - |

Source: Colonial Architecture & Town Planning Repository, 2024.

In terms of occupational change, horizontal mobility appeared in shifts toward plantation labor, transport work, station services, and logistics-related employment. Railways facilitated labor flows to production and distribution sites, thereby accelerating the functional urbanization of Bogor as an administrative center and colonial economic hub. However, employment archives indicate that job segregation remained firmly in place. Indigenous workers occupied mainly operational and auxiliary positions—guards, security staff, telegraph operators—while supervisory and leadership roles were filled by European or selected non-indigenous employees. Salary tables of *Staatsspoorwegen* employees from 1885 confirm this inequality, both in terms of job hierarchy and wages, with direct implications for welfare and opportunities for socio-economic accumulation (Staatsblad, 1885; Susatya, 2008).

Table 2. Income of *Staatsspoorwegen* (SS) Employees

| No. | Position / Relation | Monthly Salary (Minimum) | Monthly Salary (Maximum) | Annual Salary (Minimum) | Annual Salary (Maximum) |
|-----|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| | Transport Section | | | f. 19,644 | f. 25,820 |
| | Station Services | | | | |
| 1. | Buitenzorg Station | | | | |
| 1 | Head of Station, Class 1 | f. 300 | f. 403 | f. 3,600 | f. 4,860 |
| 1 | Third Clerk | f. 130 | f. 130 | f. 1,800 | f. 1,800 |
| 1 | Sub-Commissioner, Class 2 | f. 100 | f. 100 | f. 1,200 | f. 1,200 |
| 1 | Sub-Commissioner, Class 3 | f. 80 | f. 80 | f. 960 | f. 960 |
| 1 | First Officer | f. 30 | f. 70 | f. 600 | f. 840 |
| 1 | Telegraph Operator (Indigenous) | f. 30 | f. 30 | f. 360 | f. 600 |
| 1 | Guard (Indigenous) | f. 30 | f. 30 | f. 360 | f. 600 |
| 2. | Batoe-Toelis Halt | | | | |
| 1 | Sub-Commissioner, Class 2 | f. 100 | f. 100 | f. 1,200 | f. 1,200 |
| 3. | Masseng Halt | | | | |
| 1 | Sub-Commissioner, Class 3 | f. 80 | f. 80 | f. 960 | f. 960 |
| 4. | Gombong Halt | | | | |
| 1 | Sub-Commissioner, Class 2 | f. 100 | f. 100 | f. 1,200 | f. 1,200 |
| 5. | Parungkoeda Halt | | | | |
| 1 | Sub-Commissioner, Class 2 | f. 100 | f. 100 | f. 1,200 | f. 1,200 |
| 6. | Tjibadak Halt | | | | |
| 1 | Sub-Commissioner, Class 1 | f. 125 | f. 125 | f. 1,300 | f. 1,300 |
| | Per Transport | | | f. 36,084 | f. 42,240 |

Source: Staatsblad (1885)

The limits of vertical mobility become even clearer when access to education and training is examined. Colonial policies did not aim to expand higher education for indigenous populations but rather to ensure the availability of cheap and narrowly skilled labor for operational functions. Research shows that advanced education and training—including overseas assignments and scholarships—primarily targeted prospective European officials who would serve in the Dutch East Indies, complete with allowances and financial support. In contrast, indigenous education followed a minimalist design, sufficient only to meet operational needs and not to open equivalent career pathways (PNKA, 1970; Staatsblad, 1919). As a result, although railways expanded geographical reach, the conversion of spatial mobility into status mobility remained constrained.

Colonial class structures—with Europeans at the top, *Timur Asing* (Foreign Orientals) in the middle, and indigenous peoples at the bottom—provide a fundamental context for understanding railway-facilitated mobility in Bogor. Mobility did not occur in a neutral social space but operated within a legally and institutionally segmented colonial landscape. Passenger class divisions, fare differentials, and travel comfort distinctions reflected and reproduced racial hierarchies institutionalized through colonial policy, particularly after the enactment of the *Indische Staatsregeling* of 1925. This regulation explicitly divided the population of the Dutch East Indies into three legal categories—European, Foreign Oriental, and Indigenous—which functioned not merely as administrative classifications but as legal foundations for social segregation that determined rights, legal protection, and legitimacy of movement in public space. Within this framework, experiences of mobility—who could travel comfortably, safely, and with dignity—became everyday expressions of legal and racial status. Public mobility was thus socially coded from the outset and served as a mechanism of structural reproduction rather than emancipation (Fakih, 2023; Van Reybrouck, 2020).

Furthermore, mobility inequality intersected with economic and labor discrimination legitimized by the colonial regime. A popular colonial principle summarized as “the more pigment, the less payment” illustrates that accelerated mobility never aimed to create social equality. Historical data show that although indigenous populations constituted the majority of the workforce, they received a far smaller share of income than the European minority, while also bearing relatively heavier tax burdens. This inequality also appeared within the railway system itself. Indigenous people moved physically—between villages and cities, working in plantations, station services, and logistics—yet remained confined to subordinate structural positions, with extremely limited access to education, supervisory roles, and vertical mobility. Railways thus functioned as differential infrastructure that expanded horizontal mobility while locking vertical mobility in place, ensuring that indigenous integration into colonial economic circuits did not threaten racial and class domination. From the perspective of differential mobility, accelerated movement became a tool for normalizing inequality, where moving faster did not mean rising higher but moving more efficiently within an unequal structure (Luttkhuis & Moses, 2012; Sheller, 2014).

These findings align with the concept of differential mobility within the new mobilities paradigm, which emphasizes that acceleration and intensification of mobility do not automatically produce social equality. Mobility always emerges within specific power relations, so some actors experience acceleration with opportunities for accumulation, while others move quickly yet remain in the same structural position (Sheller, 2014; Sheller & Urry, 2006). In Bogor, indigenous communities traveled farther and more frequently after the arrival of railways, but this speed did not convert into upward status because education, authority, and positions of power remained under colonial control.

Moreover, the limits of vertical mobility can be understood as a form of structural violence operating quietly. Rather than relying on overt repression, colonialism maintained inequality through administrative rules, labor divisions, and education policies that appeared technocratic but produced exclusionary outcomes (Luttkhuis & Moses, 2012). As a result, expanded horizontal mobility served to normalize inequality: indigenous communities moved within increasingly extensive colonial labor circuits yet remained locked into subordinate positions.

Ultimately, the arrival of railways in Bogor generated a paradox of colonial mobility: expanded movement without expanded opportunity. Horizontal mobility increased through territorial movement and occupational diversification, while vertical mobility remained constrained by colonial rationalities that positioned indigenous peoples as supporting labor rather than subjects of progress. Within this framework, railways did not liberate but selectively integrated, connecting indigenous bodies to colonial economic networks without granting equal access to education, authority, or social status.

Railways, Urbanization, and the Transformation of Bogor's Social Space

The construction of railways in Bogor—from the consolidation of the Batavia–Buitenzorg line (opened in 1873) to the push for expansion toward Sukabumi–Cianjur–Bandung—must be read as a mechanism of colonial urbanization rather than merely an improvement in transportation. Rail lines and stations functioned as “nodes” that concentrated flows of people, goods, and information, compelling the city to reorganize itself according to timetable rhythms, logistical demands, and administrative calculations. Within this framework, route maps and station layouts were not simply technical appendices but material evidence that Bogor was engineered as an interstitial space: a city bound to Batavia and the port through commodity flows, where socio-economic distance increasingly depended on travel time and schedule precision rather than on geographic distance alone (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Silver, 2022; Urry, 2016).

At a more concrete level, traces of colonial planning appear in the decision to relocate and rebuild Bogor Station during the continuation of the Priangan railway project. The station did not coincidentally face the Bogor Palace; this orientation demonstrates how mobility infrastructure was deliberately positioned alongside centers of power, making travel, visitation, and administrative circulation—including the needs of high-ranking officials—key parameters of urban spatial design (Wirawan, 2020). In this sense, the station operated as an extension of colonial authority: it linked Bogor to a wider colonial network while simultaneously locking urban growth into areas that served administrative and economic interests. Here, “urbanization” did not merely signify population increase but a reorganization of urban functions. New pockets of activity emerged within the station’s radius—transport services, petty trade, logistical labor, and daily markets—while surrounding kampungs adapted to a new gravitational center defined by the railway.

This nodal logic becomes even clearer when Bogor is positioned as the gateway to the Priangan railway project that connected the interior to commercial centers and ports. The difficult terrain of the Bogor–Sukabumi–Cianjur corridor, the takeover of construction by *Staatsspoorwegen*, and the creation of engineering landmarks such as the Lampegan Tunnel (1879–1882) demonstrate that spatial reconfiguration did not occur naturally but resulted from large-scale investment, technical discipline, and the mobilization of labor to ensure uninterrupted commodity flows from Priangan plantations (Breman, 2014, 2015; Wirawan, 2020). In other words, Bogor’s urbanization constituted a structured by-product of extraction needs: the city became denser because it had to service the circulation of goods, materials, machinery, and people that sustained the colonial economy.

Stations, however, reshaped not only geography but also social rhythms. Visual documentation from KITLV depicting platforms at Bogor Station (for example, around 1927) reveals the emergence of a new urban tempo: regular crowds, recurring peak hours, informal services attached to traffic flows, and more intensive cross-group interactions than in the pre-rail period. At the same time, station architecture—waiting rooms, access points, and platform layouts—functioned as mechanisms that regulated who could “wait” comfortably and who appeared merely as auxiliary labor within the dominant flow. Thus, the modernity introduced by railways operated through spatial discipline rather than through the neutrality of public facilities (Fakih, 2023; Sulistyani, 2023). Everyday values shifted accordingly: time became measurable, delays turned into social problems, and the city learned to live within a scheduled logic.

Figure 3. Bogor Station around 1927



Source: Leiden University Libraries (KITLV 157530), in Wirawan (2020).

Beyond their economic function, the Bogor–Cianjur line also illustrates how colonial mobility produced landscapes that combined economic extraction and recreation. Certain halts served as access points for Dutch leisure destinations—such as Lake Lido near Cigombong—while plantations and factories (including Cipetir) used the railway to transport machinery and outputs to stations and ports (Wirawan, 2020). This dual function matters because it shows that urbanization around station nodes did not simply reflect spontaneous market growth but rather a directed process aligned with commodity chains and a colonial mobility culture that fused extraction and leisure.

Figure 4. Lake Lido recreational area, circa 1947–1948



Source: National Museum Wereldculturen (7082-nf-683-15-2), in Wirawan (2020).

Figure 5. Cipetir Factory, circa 1928–1937



Source: National Museum van Wereldculturen (TM-60018854), in Wirawan (2020).

At this point, the article argues that Bogor was shaped by flows that were centralized and disciplined. Railways created new forms of temporal proximity while simultaneously binding the city to a colonial political-economic logic that organized space, labor, and everyday life (Sheller, 2014; Urry, 2016).

Moreover, because railway development by the Dutch colonial government directly influenced urbanization processes across many regions of Indonesia, the Bogor case must be situated within a broader pattern of colonial spatial transformation. Numerous studies show that railway networks functioned as the backbone of new urban centers by linking agrarian production zones—particularly plantations—to port cities and international markets. In Java, railways accelerated the circulation of high-value commodities while concentrating economic activity around stations and logistical hubs, thereby encouraging the growth of settlements, services, and labor markets in these areas (Brata, 2021; Mulyana, 2018). Colonial urbanization, therefore, was not a “natural” outcome of population growth alone but a structural consequence of infrastructure investment designed to support extractive economies and integrate colonial territories into the global economy.

Research on colonial urban morphology further demonstrates that station placement and railway alignments consistently shaped compact and linear urban forms, in which growth followed rail corridors and transport connectivity (Hartatik et al., 2024; Solikhah, 2019). Case studies from Semarang and Bandung, for instance, show how railways and colonial road networks provided the initial framework for urban expansion, the formation of administrative districts, and the concentration of trade and industrial activities (Hartatik & Trihatmoko, 2022; Izzati et al., 2025). Although road transport began to partially replace railways from the 1930s onward, the urban foundations laid by colonial infrastructure continued to shape city development well into the postcolonial period (Brata, 2021). In Bogor’s case, this confirms the central argument that railways were not merely mobility devices but primary agents that reconfigured space, accelerated urbanization, and bound the city to a long-term colonial political-economic logic.

DISCUSSION

This article finds that the presence of railways in Bogor in the early twentieth century cannot be understood merely as a technical innovation in transportation, but rather as a structural apparatus that shaped a colonial mobility regime. Simultaneously, the railway expanded horizontal mobility among the indigenous population, constrained their vertical mobility, and reconfigured urban space through directed urbanization. The findings demonstrate that mobility, urbanization, and social transformation in Bogor constituted interconnected processes that colonial infrastructure produced politically.

Read through the *new mobilities paradigm*, these findings reinforce the argument that mobility is not a neutral process, but a social relation produced through the interaction of technology, power, and unequal access (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2016). Railways in Bogor did not merely “enable” movement; they produced mobility differentially by accelerating some actors while maintaining structural delays for others. Differentiation in passenger classes, fares, comfort, and station spatial arrangements shows that colonial space–time compression adhered to

institutionalized racial and class hierarchies. As Sheller (2014) emphasizes, mobility regimes are inherently political and exclusive: access to mobility does not distribute evenly, but is framed by unequal social structures. In Bogor, indigenous communities traveled more frequently and over longer distances, yet remained subordinate within the colonial social order.

Analysis of horizontal mobility and constrained vertical mobility further illustrates how colonial infrastructure functioned as an instrument of selective integration. Railways connected villages to cities, plantations to markets, and peripheral areas to administrative centers, thereby expanding indigenous participation in colonial economic circuits. However, this integration remained instrumental: it absorbed labor without opening pathways to equitable social accumulation. Colonial education structures, labor policies, and wage systems demonstrate that spatial mobility did not convert into status mobility. From this perspective, horizontal mobility became a prerequisite for reproducing colonial domination—indigenous populations moved to meet colonial economic demands without ascending the social hierarchy (Fakih, 2023; Steenbrink et al., 2006).

When situated within earlier studies on colonial railways, this article complements and extends analytical emphases that have largely focused on macroeconomic dynamics, economic geography, or urban planning. Previous research has shown that railways accelerated commodity distribution and shaped urban centers in the Netherlands Indies (Brata, 2021; Dick, 2000; Silver, 2022). This study advances the discussion by placing social mobility at the center of analysis. By integrating operational archives, travel schedules, labor structures, and colonial policies, the article demonstrates that the same infrastructure generated divergent mobility experiences across social groups. This constitutes the article's principal contribution: mobility is treated not merely as an outcome of transport development, but as an analytical category that simultaneously links infrastructure, urbanization, and social stratification.

Within the broader history of colonialism in Indonesia, these findings show that Dutch colonial rule operated not only through direct exploitation and overt violence, but also through technocratic mechanisms that appeared rational and modern. Infrastructure development—including railways—formed part of a colonial strategy that combined economic efficiency, administrative discipline, and social control. As demonstrated in various studies, Dutch colonialism relied on a combination of military force, economic exploitation, and bureaucratic governance to produce compliance without always resorting to visible repression (Luttkhuis & Moses, 2012; Van Nederveen Meerkerk, 2016). In this context, railways functioned as a medium of power that disciplined space, time, and bodies through schedules, travel routines, and station spatial regulation, thereby creating new social orders that normalized inequality.

Accordingly, colonial mobility in Bogor can be understood as a form of silent structural violence. Rather than restricting movement, colonialism expanded physical mobility while limiting its conversion into social mobility. This pattern aligns with findings on dualistic and exclusionary colonial education policies, as well as legal and bureaucratic systems that differentiated rights based on race and legal status (Salim, 2010; Van Thang et al., 2024). Mobility thus became an ambivalent experience: it promised proximity and opportunity, while simultaneously reinforcing boundaries that colonial subjects could not cross.

Theoretically, this article contributes to strengthening the new mobilities paradigm within studies of Indonesian colonial history by demonstrating that mobility serves as an effective analytical lens for examining power relations, social stratification, and urbanization in an integrated manner. The study extends the application of mobility studies into historical inquiry, affirming that mobility is not only relevant to contemporary contexts but also crucial for understanding colonial dynamics. Practically, the article enriches the historiography of Indonesian railways by shifting attention from technical and economic narratives toward a critical socio-cultural reading. For urban and transport history, these findings offer an analytical framework for interpreting infrastructure as a political agent of social change—a perspective that remains relevant for understanding colonial legacies in spatial organization and mobility inequalities in Indonesia today.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the presence of railways in Bogor in the early twentieth century cannot be understood merely as a technical advance in transportation, but rather as colonial infrastructure that actively produced a mobility regime. Railways shaped patterns of movement for people, goods, and time in accordance with colonial economic-political interests, while simultaneously reconfiguring urban space through directed urbanization. Tracks and stations functioned as strategic nodes that bound Bogor to the Batavia–port–Priangan colonial network, making mobility, urbanization, and social transformation interrelated and non-neutral processes.

The findings also underscore a paradox of colonial mobility. On the one hand, railways expanded horizontal mobility among the indigenous population by enabling territorial movement, intensifying labor, and integrating communities into colonial economic circuits. On the other hand, this mobility did not translate into equivalent vertical mobility. Racial and class structures within the colonial order continued to restrict indigenous access to education, strategic positions, and social authority. As a result, space–time acceleration operated as a mechanism that normalized inequality: indigenous populations moved faster and farther, yet remained locked into structurally subordinate positions.

In terms of urbanization, this study shows that Bogor emerged as a nodal city whose growth followed the logics of extraction, administration, and colonial time discipline. Stations and rail lines altered not only the city's physical geography, but also its social rhythms, spatial organization, and everyday practices. The resulting urbanization was not an organic outcome of population growth alone, but a direct consequence of colonial infrastructure investment designed to sustain an extractive economy and regimes of power. In this sense, railways acted as political agents of spatial transformation—linking the city to global colonial networks while constraining possibilities for social emancipation among the indigenous population.

Theoretically, this article affirms the relevance of the new mobilities paradigm for interpreting Indonesian colonial history by demonstrating that mobility constitutes a key analytical category for understanding power relations, social stratification, and urbanization in an integrated manner. Practically, the study enriches the historiography of Indonesian railways by shifting attention from technical and economic narratives toward a critical socio-historical reading of mobility experiences and the inequalities they produced. In this context, railways represent not only a legacy of colonial modernity, but also a medium that reproduced spatial and social inequalities whose effects continue into the postcolonial period.

Future research may extend this analysis by comparing colonial mobility regimes in Bogor with those in other cities in Java or beyond, in order to identify variations in colonial patterns of mobility and urbanization. In addition, micro-level studies of subject experiences—such as those of laborers, small traders, or indigenous passengers—could deepen understanding of how colonial mobility was experienced, negotiated, and interpreted in everyday life. Such approaches are essential for advancing transport and urban history with greater sensitivity to social experience, while also opening dialogue between colonial history and contemporary issues of mobility inequality in Indonesia.

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