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An Imperial Refuge: Race and Colonialism in Polish Accounts from British East Africa*

Abstrakt: Niniejszy artykuł uzupełnia istniejące badania na temat polskich uchodźców i urzędników osiedlonych w brytyjskiej Afryce Wschodniej podczas II wojny światowej i po zakończeniu działań wojennych, analizując ich poglądy wobec koncepcji rasy i kolonializmu. Korzystając z mniej znanych materiałów, nakreślam ogólny obraz polskiego stosunku do kolonialnej rzeczywistości wspomnianego regionu. Podkreślam, że wielu Polaków, pomimo aspirowania do statusu w pełni „białej" rasy w koloniach, wykazywało postkolonialne zrozumienie pozycji Afrykanów w brytyjskim systemie kolonialnym.

Słowa kluczowe: studia postkolonialne, Afryka, Polska, uchodźcy, rasa.

Abstract: By analysing their positions towards race and colonialism, the present article complements existing studies on the Polish refugees and officials who settled in British East Africa during and after the Second World War. By using lesser-known materials, I draw a general image of Polish attitudes towards the colonial realities of the region. I underline that many Poles, despite aspiring to the entirely 'white' racial status in the colonies, displayed a postcolonial understanding of the position of Africans in the British colonial system.

Keywords: postcolonial studies, Africa, Poland, refugees, race.

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By the time Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union invaded Poland in September 1939, the Polish engagement with Africa was hardly something surprising to a careful observer of Warsaw's foreign policy. In the 1930s, the Polish elites had entertained highly ambitious commercial and settlement projects in Africa, from Liberia to Mozambique. Intending not so much to conquer what remained of the uncolonised world but to modernise the Polish state amid a morphing world order, the Polish elites pursued these 'colonial' projects in a somewhat clandestine fashion, in changing alliances with other European powers and international institutions.[1] In tandem with the Polish interwar ambitions a local production of knowledge about Africa was carried out, with social organisations such as the Maritime and Colonial League [Liga Morska i Kolonialna] spreading both stereotypical tropes and genuine knowledge about the continent and its peoples.[2] Still, despite intense actions and propaganda, an ordinary Pole knew extremely little about the 'Dark Continent' and never set his or her foot there.[3]

It was only during the Second World War that a large Polish immigration to Africa occurred – and, therefore, also a direct Polish confrontation with its peoples and colonial realities. By the end of 1941, hundreds of Polish military officers were commissioned by the Royal West African Frontier Force,[4] whereas a year later, thousands of Polish deportees found refuge in British camps erected across East Africa. While the first group was a largely educated elite (at least in respect of military matters), and therefore aware of their government's pre-war colonial aspirations,[5] the refugees came from the least industrialised, easternmost parts of the dismantled Polish state.

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[1] See P. Puchalski, *Poland in a Colonial World Order: Adjustments and Aspirations, 1918–1939* (New York–London, 2022).

[2] See T. Białas, *Liga Morska i Kolonialna 1930–1939* (Gdańsk, 1983); M.A. Kowalski, *Dyskurs kolonialny w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (Warszawa, 2010); A. Kwiatek, '"Oswoić egzotykę". Obraz rdzennych mieszkańców Czarnej Afryki w publikacjach Ligi Morskiej i Kolonialnej ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem miesięcznika "Morze"', *Nauki Społeczne*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2011), pp. 23–49; A. Nadolska-Styczyńska, *Ludy zamorskich lądów: kultury pozaeuropejskie a działalność popularyzatorska Ligi Morskiej i Kolonialnej* (Wrocław, 2005).

[3] Consider, for example, the comment made by Ghana's ambassador to Poland, Ako Nai, calling Poles 'ignoramuses' in African affairs as late as 1962: Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych (Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Departament V, Z-31/66 W-1 T-2, Note from the meeting with the Ambassador of Ghana, Ako Nai, August 1962.

[4] See W. Biegański, 'Legia Oficerska i oficerowie polscy w brytyjskiej służbie kontraktowej w Afryce Zachodniej', *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny*, vol. 62, no. 3 (1972), pp. 148–63; E. Eckert, *Eksperyment. Polscy oficerowie w Afryce Zachodniej w latach 1941–1943* (London, 1988); M. Healy, '"The Polish White Infusion": Polish Officers in Britain's Royal West African Frontier Force, 1941–1945', *The Polish Review*, vol. 44, no. 3 (1999), pp. 277–93; C. Jeśman, 'The "Polish Experiment" in West Africa during World War II', *Royal United Services Institution. Journal,* vol. 110, no. 639 (August 1965), pp. 235–47.

[5] See, for example, L.M. Kneblowski, *Nie taki murzyn czarny* (Edinburgh, 1946).

The latter's memory and understanding of Polish colonial aspirations or any related propaganda was mostly superficial, which rendered them into rather indifferent racial actors. Ironically, the British considered both Polish officers and refugees damaging to the local racial hierarchies and questioned their status as 'white'. Most recently, Jochen Lingelbach has argued that British settlers and administrators in East Africa generally saw the Polish refugees as 'poor whites' competing with Africans for the same jobs and, therefore, as undesirable for a longer presence.[6] By analysing their positions towards race and colonialism, the present article complements existing studies on the Polish refugees and officials in British East Africa during and after the Second World War. By using lesser-known materials in addition to diplomatic papers, I draw a general image of Polish attitudes towards the colonial realities of the region. I suggest that many Poles, despite aspiring to the fully 'white' racial status in the colonies, exhibited a postcolonial understanding of the position of Africans in the British colonial system.

Designed to look at the legacies of empires from the peripheries, the postcolonial theory emerged at the end of the twentieth century, mostly in the discipline of literary studies.[7] Disagreements about its applicability to Poland's historic(al) position continue to this day.[8] Some scholars apply a postcolonial lens to historic Polish lands such as Galicia or the Grand Duchy of Poznań, considering them objects of some form of colonialism, either from within (at the hands of their Polish elites) or from the outside (at the hands of foreigners), or both.[9] Still, apart from a few studies that display elements of the historical toolkit,[10] there are few historical analyses of Polish postcolonial discourse and of instances where Poles considered their surroundings to be

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[6] See J. Lingelbach, *On the Edges of Whiteness: Polish Refugees in British Colonial Africa during and after the Second World War* (New York, 2020).

[7] See P. Williams, L. Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York, 1993).

[8] See C. Cavanagh, 'Postcolonial Poland', *Common Knowledge*, vol. 10, no. 1 (5 Dec. 2003), pp. 82–92; L. Mayblin, A. Piekut, and G. Valentine, '"Other" Posts in "Other" Places: Poland through a Postcolonial Lens?', *Sociology*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2016), pp. 60–76. See also M. Grzechnik, 'The Missing Second World: On Poland and Postcolonial Studies', *Interventions*, 28 March 2019, pp. 1–17.

[9] See articles by G. Borkowska, B. Bakuła, and K. Zajas in *Teksty Drugie*, no. 1, Special Issue – English Edition (2014); T. Nakoneczny, 'Dyskurs postkolonialny wobec historii Polski', *Przegląd Historyczny*, vol. 111, no. 4 (2020), pp. 929–53.

[10] See M. Gillabert, 'Varsovie 1955 et la Guerre froide globale: L'internationalisation de l'Europe centrale au prisme du 5e Festival mondial de la jeunesse et des étudiants', *Monde(s)*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2020), pp. 51–72; D. Gołuch, 'Polsko-postkolonialne podobieństwa? Recepcja tłumaczonej literatury postkolonialnej w Polsce (1970–2010)', *Przekładaniec*, no. 33 (2016), pp. 46–70; A.F. Kola, *Socjalistyczny postkolonializm: rekonsolidacja pamięci* (Toruń, 2018); S. Huigen, D. Kołodziejczyk (eds), *East Central Europe between the Colonial and Postcolonial in the Twentieth Century* (Cham, 2023).

determined by colonial realities.[11] Instead, most scholars categorise Poles as a peripheral but still racist white nation[12] or place them in a postcolonial condition *ex post facto*.[13] By looking at a group of Poles in direct connection to a racial and colonial order, this article presents a postcolonial analysis of their responses to specific historical circumstances. The first part summarises the background story of the Polish refugees in British East Africa. The following section analyses the files of the Polish government-in-exile in London, in which officials addressed the issues of race and colonialism. In the last part, the attitudes of the refugees towards Africans and British colonialism are assessed.

Background

Following the agreement between Gen. Władysław Sikorski and Ivan Maisky on 30 July 1941, Joseph Stalin permitted the establishment of a Polish military force on Soviet territory. However, due to strained relations between the Polish and Soviet governments, about 35,000 soldiers led by Gen. Władysław Anders were evacuated to Iran in March 1942. Destitute civilian deportees, primarily peasants from the Soviet-annexed eastern borderlands of Poland, accompanied the Anders army. By July 1942, there were about 13,000 Polish refugees that had escaped Russia in Persia, considered 'embarrassing' to the Allied war effort in the Middle East.[14] Concerned about potential complications in the Middle Eastern war theatre and wishing to assert control over colonial governments, the British metropolitan authorities decided to settle these individuals in their East African colonies, mandates and protectorates. Another motivating factor for this relocation was the British aim to boost the morale of their (male) Polish allies by ensuring the well-being of their 'women and children'.[15] In fact, according to one Polish official, only 9 per cent

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[11] See M. Cieslak, 'Between State and Empire, Or How Western European Imperialism in Africa Redefined the Polish Nation', *European History Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 3 (2022), pp. 440–60; J. Daheur, '"They Handle Negroes Just Like Us": German Colonialism in Cameroon in the Eyes of Poles (1885–1914)', *European Review*, vol. 26, no. 3 (2018), pp. 492–502; L.A. Ureña Valerio, *Colonial Fantasies, Imperial Realities: Race Science and the Making of Polishness on the Fringes of the German Empire, 1840–1920* (Athens, OH, 2019); P. Zajas, *Postkolonialne imaginarium południowoafrykańskie literatury polskiej i niderlandzkiej* (Poznań, 2008).

[12] See B. Balogun, *Race and the Colour-Line: The Boundaries of Europeanness in Poland* (London–New York, 2023).

[13] See I. Kalmar, *White but Not Quite: Central Europe's Illiberal Revolt* (Bristol, 2022).

[14] The National Archives (Kew, Richmond) (hereinafter: TNA) CAB 66/26/29, War Cabinet. Evacuation of Polish and Greek Refugees from the Middle East, 14 July 1942.

[15] Lingelbach, *On the Edges of Whiteness*, pp. 24–28.

of all refugees were men, and among them, many disabled ones; 44 per cent were women and 47 per cent were children.[16]

Over fifteen camps, referred to as settlements by the Polish refugees, hosted 19,200 people in East Africa. The most well-known of these were Ifunda and Tengeru in Tanganyika, Masindi and Koja in Uganda, Makindu in Kenya, Bwana Mkubwa in Northern Rhodesia, and Rusape in Southern Rhodesia. Lingelbach emphasises that most of the infrastructure and housing in these camps, often situated in remote areas or former mission sites, were constructed by local labour. This resulted in a unique architectural fusion of Polish and African influences. In these distant locations, the Poles had the ability to 'till the land out of sight of natives', which highlighted their uncomfortable position of 'poor whites' within the hierarchical structure of colonial society.[17] Lingelbach notes that Britain wished the Poles to be 'isolated, materially lifted and sent away as soon as feasible'.[18] Still, the motives behind this British strategy differed slightly across colonies. In Uganda, for instance, the British were concerned about potential African resistance to competition from the Polish settlers. Meanwhile, in Tanganyika and Northern Rhodesia, the turn to developmentalism at the end of the Second World War discouraged the settlement of less skilled white individuals.[19]

It is also important to underline the double British-Polish administration of the camps, with the East African Refugee Authority (EARA) and British 'camp commandants' being shadowed by Polish 'settlement leaders' as well as officials of the Polish government-in-exile in London sent to Nairobi, Kenya. Mikołaj Murkociński has analysed the Polish side of this arrangement most thoroughly, underlining competence conflicts between delegates of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare [Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej, MPiOS], charged with the health and wellbeing of the refugees, and the diplomats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, MSZ], charged with the refugees' interests as Polish citizens. One of the first delegates of the former ministry was Kazimierz Kazimierczak. By the end of 1942, the latter ministry established a Consulate General in Nairobi (with Michał Wierusz-Kowalski at its head) as well as Consulates in Kampala, Uganda (Tadeusz Drobniak) and Dar es Salaam, Tanganyika

[16] Archiwum Akt Nowych (Central Archives of Modern Records) (hereinafter: AAN) 2/131/0/2/106, Report by K. Kazimierczak for the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare for the period of 1 January to 29 Feb. 1943, 26 March 1943, p. 10.

[17] Lingelbach, *On the Edges of Whiteness*, p. 34.

[18] Ibid., p. 13.

[19] Ibid., pp. 179–86. Also see B. Tavuyanago, T. Muguti, and J. Hlongwana, 'Victims of the Rhodesian Immigration Policy: Polish Refugees from the Second World War', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 38, no. 4 (2012), pp. 951–65.

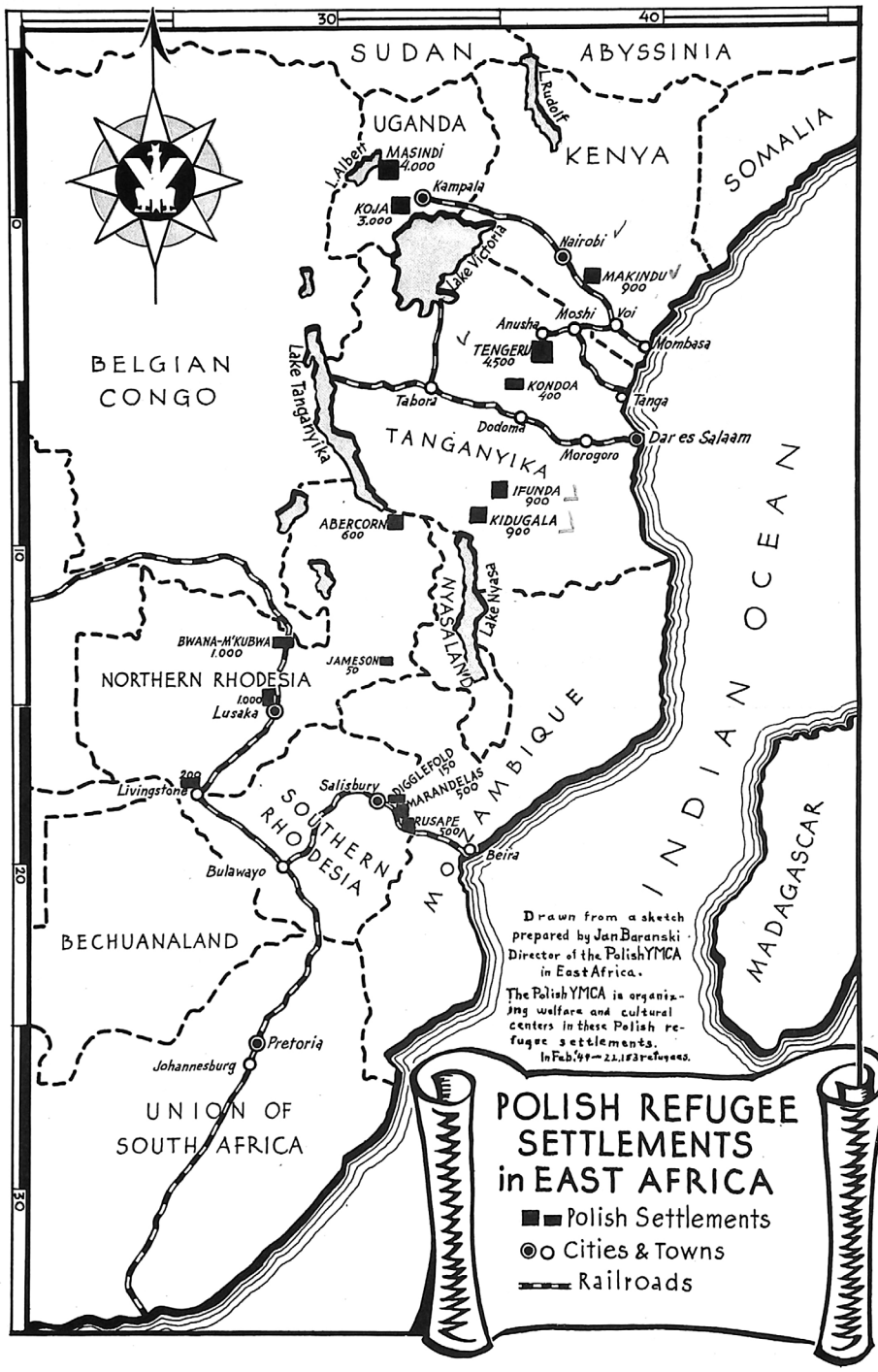

Fig. 1. Map of Polish Refugee Settlements in East Africa; AAN 2/131/0/2/106

(Juliusz Wierciński).[20] By July 1943, the Polish consular network in East Africa was restructured to match the British camp administration, with a Consulate General in Salisbury (Southern Rhodesia) and a Consulate in Lusaka (Northern Rhodesia) added.[21]

The Attitudes of the Polish Administration

The Polish administration formed their perceptions of British colonialism in East Africa while contemplating and lobbying for a particular place of the refugees therein, often in opposition to British desires. The Polish role in organising the camps began with a joint delegation from the MPiOS and MSZ in the late summer of 1942, featuring Kazimierczak and Wierusz-Kowalski. Initially, both men seemed to agree that Polish authorities should demand the largest possible autonomy from the British and that Polish refugees should not 'rot' in Africa while awaiting repatriation to Poland in the distant future. The 'Negro' [*Murzyn*] soon became one of the most important reference points for the Polish officials as they formed their opinions on local dynamics.

Wierusz-Kowalski arrived in Nairobi on 3 September 1942 to start talks with high-ranking British colleagues, including the Secretary General of the Governors' Conference, Henry Lovell Goldsworthy Gurney.[22] Immediately after the talks' conclusion, the Polish delegate embarked on a trip across the region to assess the farming conditions in different colonies. Wierusz-Kowalski became interested in enabling the Polish peasants to spin wool, cotton, and flax, all commodities known to deportees from the eastern borderlands. In addition, he lobbied to release 300 older soldiers (agricultural specialists) from the Polish troops currently stationed in Iraq and to use them to prepare the camps for the refugees in respect of farming.[23] By the end of 1942, instead of attending an important meeting at the Foreign Office, Wierusz-Kowalski prepared a lengthy report from his tour for the Polish government-in-exile, arguing against what he called the 'concept of vegetating', or rendering the refugees dependent on the British and wasting their hard-work ethic.[24]

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[20] M. Murkociński, 'To Govern a Community of Refugees: Some Insights into the History of the Polish Refugee Administration in East Africa, 1942–1945', *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny*, no. 4 (2018), pp. 119–36.

[21] TNA FO 371/51150, M. Budny to E.M. Rose, 1 Feb. 1945.

[22] AAN 2/131/0/2/109, 'Raport M. Wierusz Kowalskiego z objazdu obozów polskich w Wschodniej Afryce', 1942, p. 1.

[23] TNA CO 968/64/2, Record of a meeting held at the Foreign Office on the 7th of December to discuss arrangements for the settlement of Polish civilians in East Africa and consular representation, 10 Dec. 1942.

[24] AAN 2/131/0/2/109, 'Raport M. Wierusz Kowalskiego…', pp. 6–7.

According to Wierusz-Kowalski, aiming for mere autarchy of the Polish settlements would be damaging, as it would render them similar to African villages, where 'locals' grew nothing but the basic food staples (corn, buckwheat, potatoes, bananas) and cotton for clothing production.[25] For Polish 'settlers', economic self-sufficiency would look different than for Africans, as income would need to be generated to purchase 'clothes and other needs of civilised men'.[26] In this manner, the Polish diplomat distinguished his compatriots ('civilised') from Africans, depicting the latter as allegedly not requiring the same standard of living. Still, this racial attitude was different from the analogous British one. Wierusz-Kowalski wrote about the crumbling image of 'white prestige', from Uganda to Tanganyika:

> There is, therefore, a fear among whites concerning the new category of white people (Poles), prepared to work without exploiting [*wysługiwać się*] the blacks. There is a fear that the fiction of a white man's superiority will pop like a soap bubble. This fear lies at the base of all our talks concerning the employment of Poles in East Africa, where the privileged position of the handful of whites relies foremost upon their prestige. Everywhere, I heard the express desire that Poles should not carry out the work of blacks, and it was clearly stated that they [British] preferred to pay extra for an idle stay of the Poles rather than lose the balance so far maintained.[27]

Nonetheless, Wierusz-Kowalski did not deem the arrival of the Polish refugees to be instrumental in tipping off this racial 'balance'. It was instead the transfer to Kenya of West African troops consisting of 'emancipated blacks' from Nigeria, as well as the presence of highly educated blacks among the American units stationed in Africa, that caused British subjects in East Africa to question white superiority.

The Polish diplomat considered inept a colonial order in which 'reputation' was the only justification for white domination, but this did not mean that in his opinion, whites and blacks possessed the same qualities. Wierusz-Kowalski wrote: '[…] a serious fraction of white people begins to understand that an equilibrium between blacks and whites can no longer be based on the fiction of some working for others but should be rested upon a solid foundation, whereby some can work more economically and rationally than others'.[28] He cited the example of an all-Jewish farm in Kenya performing better than African ones. Nonetheless, he argued that other European farms in Kenya could be barely distinguished from their African counterparts and could not supply sufficient produce to either the local whites or, during wartime, to the Middle East. Furthermore, despite the increasing infusion of whites, the local industry was purposely stifled so that it would not become competitive against

[25] Ibid., p. 8.
[26] Ibid., p. 10.
[27] Ibid., p. 15.
[28] Ibid., pp. 15–16.

metropolitan factories. The regional Governor, wrote Wierusz-Kowalski, could not decide whether 'Kenya was to be a reservation for whites or blacks'.[29]

At a June 1943 meeting with Col. N. Stewart, A.L. Pennington and I. Wennington, representing the Aliens and Internees Administration, Wierusz-Kowalski asked why the British limited the scope of staple production in the refugee camps, defending the interests of big producers, in a situation where the empire looked to establish autarchic colonial economies.[30] In this manner, the Polish Consul General in Nairobi cast himself as an imperial reformer, arguing that Polish peasants would demonstrate to the 'Negroes' their superiority in farming, which would, consequently, persuade the latter that land should belong to whites. In line with this idea, Wierusz-Kowalski submitted a list of postulates to the colonial authorities of Tanganyika, which included settling Polish refugees on self-sufficient farms, planting staples crucial for local industrial production, obtaining tractors through the US Lend-Lease program and exempting hundreds of military-age Polish men from army service to form a farming elite. Because of his ambitions, the Consul General was asked to leave his post when he tried to obtain funds to buy farms for the refugees through unofficial channels. According to Lucjan Krolikowski, neither the British nor Polish government was interested in a permanent settlement of Polish refugees in 1943–1944, as it became clear that post-war Poland would become one of the satellite states in the Eastern Bloc.[31] Furthermore, the British suspected Wierusz-Kowalski of entertaining 'secret colonisation plans' in Kenya and of opposing their alliance with Stalin.[32]

In the meantime, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare opposed Wierusz-Kowalski's farming projects, considering them unrealistic to pursue with women and children, so the bulk of Polish refugees.[33] In a letter to his superior, Kazimierz Kazimierczak from the MPiOS accused Wierusz-Kowalski of 'starting a fight to put our people on an equal footing with the Negroes'.[34] Instead, Kazimierczak recommended leasing or buying declining farms from the British, where Africans would carry out most of the labour and Poles would 'supervise the idle Negro'.[35] The program of the MPiOS was to secure the camps' basic food production, with leased farms only supplementing potentially autarchic camp economies.[36] Indeed, the 'Polish' farms that did

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[29] Ibid., p. 20.

[30] AAN 2/131/0/2/101, 'Protokół posiedzenia odbytego w lokalu Aliens and Internees Administration w Dar es Salaam', 9 June 1943.

[31] L. Krolikowski, *Stolen Childhood. A Saga of Polish War Children*, trans. by K.J. Rozniatowski (Buffalo, NY, 1983), p. 86.

[32] AAN 2/131/0/2/101, K. Kazimierczak to the MPiOS, 12 Dec. 1943, p. 6.

[33] AAN 2/131/0/2/101, A. Skąpski to S. Kot, 10 Jan. 1943, pp. 2–3.

[34] AAN 2/131/0/2/101, K. Kazimierczak to S. Kot, 18 Jan. 1943, p. 6.

[35] Ibid., pp. 7–10.

[36] AAN 2/131/0/2/101, K. Kazimierczak to the MPiOS, 5 Aug. 1943, p. 6.

come into being mostly employed Africans. By the end of 1943, these included 'Michalin' (300 acres) near Tengeru, with three Poles and 200 Africans, and 'Dagoretti' (140 acres) near Nairobi, with fifteen Africans and no white workers.[37] Characteristic of this attitude, when a British planter asked the camp in Rongai if older Polish boys could help him on the farm, the Polish educational authorities suggested that it was impolitic for the boys to accept payment in money like 'Negroes', since the wage of a 'Negro' usually employed as a farmhand was 'symbolic'.[38] In this manner, the Polish officials from the MPiOS entertained more 'traditional' racist attitudes towards blacks than Wierusz-Kowalski, trusting the British with running their own colonial empire based on 'prestige', where whites managed 'idle' blacks.

Another issue was the absence of a (male) farming population that would propel the Polish refugees to become better physical workers than Africans, in line with Wierusz-Kowalski's idea. As of May 1943, the group of 300 agricultural specialists detached from the Anders Army was not allowed into British East Africa by the colonial authorities.[39] In addition, many of the Polish elites present in Africa could not assume leadership roles. According to the Polish consul in Dar es Salaam, Wierciński, 'the original intention [of the British] was to place the administration solely in Polish hands', but 'the complete lack of qualified forces on the Polish side' and their inability to speak English turned out to be the deciding factor. In a special case, only the Arusha farm near Tengeru became an experiment, with its Polish leaders learning Swahili.[40] While the British held most Polish elites in low esteem, they distrusted others. Wacław Korabiewicz, a Polish maritime physician, was deemed to be a menace to the British colonial authorities in Tanganyika due to his 'acquired knowledge of Kiswahili' and 'numerous contacts with Africans in the course of his travels about the territory collecting ethnological material for the Dar es Salaam Museum'.[41] Another report stated that Korabiewicz sent some ethnological assets to Warsaw, then already under Stalinist rule, and it accused him of pro-communist sympathies.[42]

Nonetheless, in those colonies with small and, therefore, innocuous Polish populations in the region, the British seemed willing to assist their Polish allies in acclimating to the politics of colonial Africa. In October 1943, the Polish

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[37] AAN 2/131/0/2/106, Report by K. Kazimierczak for the MPiOS, 'Sprawozdanie za okres od 1 VIII do 1 XII 1943', 22 Jan. 1944, pp. 33–35.

[38] TNA ED 128/107, K. Sander to the MPiOS, 10 July 1945.

[39] AAN 2/131/0/2/101, M. Wierusz-Kowalski to the MSZ, 26 May 1943.

[40] Hoover Institution Library & Archives (hereinafter: HILA) 59003/132.29, J. Wierciński, 'Sprawozdanie gospodarczo-polityczne z terytorium mandatu Tanganyika, rok 1943', 24 Jan. 1944, p. 11.

[41] TNA CO 822/146/1, Governor of Tanganyika to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 28 Oct. 1950.

[42] TNA CO 822/359, Claims by East Africa Governments in respect of Polish refugees, 1952.

consul in Blantyre, Nyasaland, wrote a long letter to the MSZ in London, reporting on British indirect rule in the protectorate. Describing the Native Authority Ordinance of 1933, Ignacy Ziętkiewicz wrote that Britain intended 'to rule by the Chiefs on lines laid down by the Government', slowly introducing democratic elements into an autocratic system.[43] He then described his participation in an assembly of local headmen (family heads) in the village of Chigaru, to which he had been invited by a British district commissioner. After reporting to the assembled on the situation on the fronts and price controls in the protectorate, the British official 'introduced me [Ziętkiewicz] into the minds of the Negroes [*umysły murzyńskie*] as an envoy of Poland, which first had the courage to oppose the Germans, and which is still fighting at the side of England'. 'This statement', the Polish diplomat continued, 'was received with a loud Negro murmur: ou… ou, ou, ou, which expressed surprise and contentment. I believe that for the first time, a consul of Poland participated in a meeting of native headmen in Africa'.[44] It seems that, like Ziętkiewicz, most of the Polish officials and 'intellectuals' aspired to a sort of colonial partnership with the British in East Africa, welcoming such introductions into 'the minds of the Negroes'.

It is hardly surprising that since the material well-being of the thousands of Polish refugees depended on the imperial and colonial authorities, the Polish administration refrained from any criticism thereof and, in fact, praised the British rule. In the two newspapers intended for Polish refugee readership, *Polak w Afryce* [Pole in Africa] and *Parada* [Parade], the articles that described anything related to Africa communicated British magnanimity and underlined the historical Polish connections to the continent, as if to warrant the current Polish presence.[45] One article from *Polak w Afryce* – possibly authored by the consul in Kampala Tadeusz Drobniak – praised the fifty years of British rule in Uganda, noted the presence of the Ugandan king at a Polish children's dance show at the Masindi camp and mentioned that one of the monarch's ministers had been likely baptised by a Polish missionary.[46] In the same issue, Kazimierczak appealed to the refugees not to be too intimate with the local population, as that was badly seen by the British.[47] Other instances of Polish praise for British colonialism mentioned,

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[43] HILA 59003/132.38, I. Ziętkiewicz to the MSZ, 7 Oct. 1943, p. 3.

[44] Ibid., p. 7.

[45] Neither newspaper has been analysed from this angle. In his analysis of *Polak w Afryce*, Ney-Krwawicz hardly mentions any publications that suggested the Polish attitudes towards Africa and Africans. See M. Ney-Krwawicz, '"Polak w Afryce" o młodych i najmłodszych uchodźcach polskich z ZSRR w Afryce w latach 1943–1945', *Dzieje Najnowsze*, vol. 52, no. 4 (2020), pp. 25–54.

[46] T.D., 'Pięćdziesięciolecie rządów brytyjskich w Ugandzie', *Polak w Afryce*, vol. 1, no. 3 (16 Apr. 1943), p. 3.

[47] K. Kazimierczak, 'Oszczędzajcie', *Polak w Afryce*, vol. 1, no. 3 (16 Apr. 1943), p. 5.

among others, the introduction of a health care system in the colonies as well as the 'great' imperial figures of Henry Morton Stanley, Frederick Lugard and Jan Smuts.[48] Furthermore, the newspapers published many columns describing the Polish 'contributors' to the colonisation of Africa, such as Maurycy Beniowski, Jan Beyzym and Stefan Szolc-Rogoziński, sometimes underlining their benign disposition toward Africans.[49] Ironically, when the 'slavery' of the Polish population under German occupation was discussed, an analogy to the situation in Africa was not made.[50] On the other hand, both *Polak w Afryce* and *Parada* published articles popularising indigenous cultures, including pieces on the Maasai as well as a Swahili dictionary.[51]

Despite the Polish officials' signalling of loyalty, the British treated the Polish refugees as racially embarrassing 'poor whites' to be isolated from Africans as much as possible and, ultimately, to be sent back to Europe. In contrast to Afrikaners, the Polish refugees had been traumatised by the few years spent in Russian gulags, followed by a gruelling journey to the Middle East. Some Polish women in the camps became prostitutes, offering their bodies to 'racial undesirables' such as Italians and Africans, while many Polish children misbehaved in the absence of father figures.[52] Refugees could also be seen hoarding goods, which was considered normal behaviour imported from the gulags.[53] As one British colonial official put it, 'the proportion of Poles [in East Africa] was very high and their reputation correspondingly low'.[54] When defending their protégées, Polish officials pointed out the prolonged life in Africa as demoralising to whites; this was in reference to a refugee named Czarnowski objecting to a map of Poland without its eastern borderlands being shown in a camp.[55] 'Trifles are exaggerated to absurdity, and the most

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[48] Z.K., 'Blaski i cienie życia Stanleya', *Polak w Afryce*, vol. 1, no. 7 (15 June 1943), p. 6; O.Z., 'Marszałek Smuts', *Polak w Afryce*, vol. 1, no. 8 (22 June 1943), p. 3; M. Kokociński, 'Polacy na szlaku Livingstona', *Polak w Afryce*, vol. 2, no. 3 (26 Jan. 1944), p. 4; A. Miker, 'Afryka walczy z groźnym wrogiem-Anophelesem', *Polak w Afryce*, vol. 2 no. 40 (29 Oct. 1944), p. 5.

[49] Mgr., 'Pierwsza wyprawa polska do Afryki', *Polak w Afryce*, vol. 2, no. 5 (4 Feb. 1944), p. 3; T. Drobniak, 'Na śladach Ojca Beyzyma', *Polak w Afryce*, vol. 2, no. 23 (18 June 1944), p. 3; T. Drobniak, '"Polski król Madagaskaru", cz. I', *Polak w Afryce*, vol. 3, no. 3 (25 Jan. 1945), p. 3. Also see A.W. Parsons, 'Polak misjonarzem w Kenii. Historia brata Józefata', *Parada*, vol. 4, no. 3 (27 Jan. 1946), p. 11.

[50] 'Targowiska ludzkie pod okupacją', *Polak w Afryce*, vol. 1, no. 26 (17 Nov. 1943), p. 3.

[51] I. Mann, 'Poznajcie Afrykę', *Polak w Afryce*, vol. 1, no. 3 (16 April 1943), p. 7; 'Uczmy się swahili', *Polak w Afryce*, vol. 1. no. 13/14 (15 Aug. 1943); W. Ostrowski, 'Masaj', *Parada* 4, no. 89 (22 Sep. 1946), p. 15.

[52] Lingelbach, *On the Edges of Whiteness*, pp. 130–170.

[53] AAN 2/131/0/2/105, The MPiOS to K. Kazimierczak, 30 Oct. 1943, p. 2.

[54] TNA CO 822/146/2, B. Hughes's note, 26 Jan. 1951.

[55] Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (hereinafter: PISM) A.11.E/1132, Director of Refugees at Kampala to the Camp Commandant of Masindi, 13 Dec. 1946.

unimportant matters are blown up ridiculously', wrote one official, partly due to 'four years of life in the Camp far way in the bush'.[56]

The officials in charge of the refugees, especially the British, adopted a colonial attitude towards their protégées, comparing them to Africans and running the camps in the spirit of paternalistic colonialism. Writing to administrators in Dar es Salaam about some unruly Polish refugee recruits leaving his camp to join the army, the British commandant at Tengeru, John Minnery, contrasted their behaviour with that of 'our natives of Tanganyika who, on recruitment, march and sing and behave like soldiers, and remain disciplined from the first day in the African bush'.[57] In their perception of Poles as even worse than Africans in behaviour and realisation that contact between the two groups could not be stopped, the British feared not only the degradation of 'white prestige' but also of the reputation of their colonial collaborators and indirect rulers: the indigenous chiefs. According to one British official, 'native chiefs [in Arusha, Tanganyika] […] were concerned about the political and moral influence they [Polish refugees] had over the natives: there has been drink peddling, and land grabbing is feared if they are allowed to settle locally'. The chiefs feared the drink peddling as a method of enticing Africans into the Polish camps and presumably away from traditional tribal society.[58] Assessing the process of liquidating the camps after the war, the Colonial Office noted that, while about a thousand Polish refugees were resettled internally in East Africa, they 'have already shown signs of becoming a disruptive influence among the native population'.[59] Indeed, the sources left by the Polish refugees suggest a degree of fraternisation with Africans.

The Attitudes of Polish Refugees

The spectrum of Polish refugees' attitudes towards the colonial order in British East Africa has not been analysed at length in the literature. Lingelbach came the closest to assessing the Polish racial self-perceptions in the camps, arguing the refugees' simultaneous 'friendliness' towards Africans and aspiration to the fully 'white' racial status, but his book does not include more than a handful of Polish-language sources.[60] Another reference point is Bartłomiej Noszczak's collection of accounts by Polish wartime refugees about the Middle East. Noszczak argues that Poles regarded Iraqis and Iranians as generous and hospitable 'Orientals', without displaying attitudes of

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[56] Ibid., Director Comments on the letter of the Camp Commandant of Masindi, No. R.C.G./200, 3 Dec. 1946.

[57] PISM A.11.E/439, J. Minnery to the refugee administration in Dar es Salaam, 20 July 1944.

[58] TNA CO 822/145/5, Attachments to T. Hutson's message to I.G. Harris, 28 June 1950.

[59] Ibid., Draft brief for the Secretary of State. Re-settlement of Refugees, July 1950.

[60] Lingelbach, *On the Edges of Whiteness*, pp. 11, 17.

arrogance and superiority, which might suggest their more general attitudes towards non-whites.[61] It is important to fill this gap in the scholarship by analysing a large body of pertinent Polish-language sources for references to Africa and Africans. These include both published and unpublished accounts collected by the Centre for Documentation of Deportations, Expulsions and Resettlements [Centrum Dokumentacji Zsyłek, Wypędzeń i Przesiedleń, CDZWiP] in Krakow.

Most pertinent sources from the CDZWiP are published interviews recorded with former Polish refugees in the twenty-first century, then residents in different cities of the United Kingdom; accounts created in the 1940s are fewer. While the latter are more credible, both sorts of testimonies suggest similar attitudes displayed by their authors. In the first place, the reminiscences of the refugees, then children, oscillated around their lives as school students and scouts in the camps, as scouting was a form of patriotic education and entertainment promoted by camp authorities.[62] The accounts display a degree of nostalgia, with 'colourful' Africa appearing as a land of bliss contrasted with the horrors of 'Russia'. The refugees' most common memories related to Africans are those revealing their fascination (often superficial and patronising) with the local culture, including clothing, dance, and burial rituals. For instance, S. Giermer remembered the indigenous population celebrating the killing of a lion by playing music and parading around the camp.[63] Likewise, M. Polskowska (Koja) recalled indigenous music coming from the jungle during the Christmas season, which she considered an idiosyncratic occurrence, as well as locals eating termites for protein.[64] H. Możejko, on the other hand, reminisced about Polish children making trips to indigenous cemeteries around Abercorn, likely because of the food that Africans placed there as part of burial rituals.[65]

Sometimes, Africans, particularly the Maasai, are also present in the memories as a strange, arbitrary and mysterious menace. Z. Ćwilewicz recalled that in the first stage of building the Tengeru camp, Africans came to steal and that one Polish girl was raped by a Maasai, whom she viewed as 'wild'.[66] Likewise, E. Nowicka, also from Tengeru, described the 'strange' clothing of the Maasai, which consisted of not much at all, and reported that a Polish

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[61] See B. Noszczak, *Orient zesłańców: Bliski Wschód w oczach Polaków ewakuowanych ze Związku Sowieckiego (1942-1945)* (Warszawa, 2022).

[62] See A. Hejczyk-Gołąb, *Sybiracy pod Kilimandżaro: Tengeru: polskie osiedle w Afryce Wschodniej we wspomnieniach jego mieszkańców* (Rzeszów–Kraków, 2013).

[63] H. Chudzio, A. Hejczyk (eds), *Pokolenia odchodzą: relacje źródłowe polskich sybiraków z Wielkiej Brytanii. Nottingham* (Kraków, 2014) (hereinafter: *Nottingham*), p. 102.

[64] Ibid., pp. 228–29.

[65] H. Chudzio, A. Hejczyk, and A. Szopa (eds), *Pokolenia odchodzą: relacje źródłowe polskich sybiraków z Wielkiej Brytanii. Bradford* (Kraków, 2015) (hereinafter: *Bradford*), pp. 217–18.

[66] Chudzio, Hejczyk (eds), *Nottingham*, pp. 53–60.

girl became pregnant with a Maasai man.[67] Most dramatically, D. Wolny remembered a situation at the Kidugala camp where Polish refugees attending mass in a church heard a commotion outside and panicked, thinking that 'Negroes came to murder us'. In fact, however, what really transpired was that a group of Africans managed to catch a boa snake and made noise to attract the attention of the Poles to this feat.[68] Unlike adults, Polish children seemed more excited about than afraid of Africans. At Tengeru, the younger brother of A. Frost accompanied the Maasai on hunting trips.[69] Some Polish boys also apparently engaged in fights with African boys to test whether black skin endowed the latter with special strength.[70]

When recalling the 'autochthons', many interviewees recorded memories of the British ban against Africans coming to the refugee camps to trade with the Poles. In fact, some refugees, such as H. Kolowski (Abercorn), only remembered Africans in this commercial aspect, without offering further comments to the interviewers.[71] Also succinct, Z. Śledzińska (Tengeru) praised their trustworthiness as commercial partners.[72] Nonetheless, other refugees entertained stronger memories concerning their indigenous neighbours. S. Lech underlined the fact that his camp (Bwana M'Kubwa) was surrounded by barbed wire to stop Africans from entering. For Lech, this was an element of their dehumanisation by the British, since Africans made one pound a month and ate little more than pancakes made from water and corn flour.[73] Their poor material well-being finds confirmation in other Polish testimonies, including one by G. Czepiel (Koja).[74] A. Malinowska (Rusape and Gatooma) remembered that African children learned certain Polish phrases, in particular 'Pani daj chleba' (Lady, give bread). When the refugees did not share their bread, the roofs of their huts would be hit with stones.[75] Despite this apparent destitution, the British did not seem to relent: A. Frost recalled that the Askari (colonial gendarmes) whipped Africans caught trading with the refugees at the Tengeru camp.[76] It should also be noted that, in contrast to banned African trade, another important element of the economic (and romantic) life were the legally sanctioned Indian

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[67] Ibid., p. 202.

[68] Chudzio, Hejczyk, and Szopa (eds), *Bradford*, p. 310.

[69] H. Chudzio, A. Chłosta-Sikorska, and M. Buś (eds), *Pokolenia odchodzą: relacje źródłowe polskich sybiraków z Wielkiej Brytanii. Leeds* (Kraków, 2016) (hereinafter: *Leeds*), p. 42.

[70] Chudzio, Hejczyk, and Szopa (eds), *Bradford*, p. 324.

[71] Chudzio, Hejczyk (eds), *Nottingham*, p. 140.

[72] H. Chudzio, A. Śmigielska, and M. Solarz (eds), *Pokolenia odchodzą: relacje źródłowe polskich sybiraków z Wielkiej Brytanii. Birmingham* (Kraków, 2016) (hereinafter: *Birmingham*), p. 443–44.

[73] Chudzio, Chłosta-Sikorska, and Buś (eds), *Leeds*, pp. 162–63.

[74] Chudzio, Śmigielska, and Solarz (eds), *Birmingham*, p. 133.

[75] Chudzio, Hejczyk (eds), *Nottingham*, p. 196.

[76] Chudzio, Chłosta-Sikorska, and Buś (eds), *Leeds*, p. 42.

(Hindu) stores and their owners. K. Przetakiewicz recalled a Polish woman agreeing to marry an Indian merchant, but the engaged couple was not granted marriage permission by the British, most likely for racial reasons.[77]

At least in hindsight, the Polish refugees blamed the British for the destitute condition of the indigenous population. Though she mentioned a rape of a Polish girl by an African man, M. Miarkowska (Masindi) stressed the cruelty of the British towards their colonial subjects, suggesting the rapist had been brutalised.[78] Likewise, L. Filio (Koja) remembered the neglectful and rude attitude displayed by the British towards Africans.[79] In a similar manner, S. Wagstyl underlined the racial separation in East Africa, claiming that blacks could not even drink from the same glass as whites. She also mentioned that Digglefold, the farm turned into a Polish middle school [*gimnazjum*], was owned by a British man whose child had been killed by an African.[80] In the same spirit, M. Krawiec compared the Africans she had encountered in Lusaka to an enslaved population, recalling that even cemeteries in the city were segregated, with at least one reserved only for whites.[81] Religious life was not free of racism, either. A. Różańska (Kidugala) remembered that future African priests were required to attend the theological seminary for two years longer than whites.[82] Albeit recalling his time at the military transit camp at Pietermaritzburg, Union of South Africa, not a refugee camp, K. Staszkiewicz described the disrespectful and brutal treatment of black workers by the British: 'It is not surprising that blacks don't like the English and now sometimes take revenge'.[83]

Many Polish refugees claimed that their response to such racism and destitution was compassion and solidarity. Barbara Urban (Masindi and Koja) gifted an African her late husband's shirt, to the man's great joy. She also said that other Poles largely helped Africans.[84] In the same manner, A. Czepiel reported that girls at the *gimnazjum* at Digglefold shared their food with Africans, despite the threat of their rations being cut.[85] At Kidugala, the Polish refugees built a kindergarten and collected money for Africans

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[77] Chudzio, Hejczyk (eds), *Nottingham*, p. 244.

[78] H. Chudzio, A. Hejczyk, A. Szopa (eds), *Pokolenia odchodzą: relacje źródłowe polskich sybiraków z Wielkiej Brytanii. Coventry* (Kraków, 2016) (hereinafter: *Coventry*), p. 216.

[79] H. Chudzio, A. Hejczyk, A. Szopa (eds), *Bradford*, p. 60.

[80] Chudzio, Śmigielska, and Solarz (eds), *Birmingham*, pp. 500–02. On Digglefold and Gatooma, see W. Chmielewski, 'Education of Polish Children and Youth in Digglefold and Gatooma, Southern Rhodesia, in 1943–1948', *Polska Myśl Pedagogiczna*, vol. 9, no. 1 (10 Aug. 2023), pp. 137–66.

[81] Chudzio, Śmigielska, and Solarz (eds), *Birmingham*, pp. 221–22.

[82] Ibid., p. 380.

[83] Chudzio, Hejczyk (eds), *Nottingham*, p. 277.

[84] Ibid., p. 360.

[85] Chudzio, Śmigielska, and Solarz (eds), *Birmingham*, p. 117.

suffering from wildfires.[86] Other acts of assistance seemed somewhat transactional in nature. A. Gradkowska (Makindu and Tengeru) said that an African named 'Szymon' helped her carry water, for which she paid him in food.[87] Though not claiming personal solidarity with Africans, some refugees still sympathised with them. The mother of E. Pieniążek (Abercorn) made clothes for an African hospital,[88] while B. Kuźmińska (Rusape) sold clothes to African women.[89] Like Gradkowska, A. Różańska (Kidugala) also recalled an African by name: 'David' worked at the school dormitory kitchen and demonstrated a real spirit of egalitarianism while sharing food with his family, which she extrapolated to the entire indigenous population.[90] Likewise, Z. Michalska remembered the happiness and joyful singing of the African workers who attempted to repair a leaking roof at the Masindi camp.[91]

On a rare occasion, the interviewees compared the misery of Africans to their own. K. Skibiński (Masindi) recalled really good Polish-African relations at the camps, including great respect that Africans allegedly displayed towards Poles as *bwana kubwa* (Swahili for 'great white master'). Skibiński said:

> [Africans] were very badly treated by the English. The Englishman felt to be the master of the situation. We had compassion for them precisely because they were badly treated, because we ourselves had gone through so much disgrace of humiliation [*niedogoda poniżenia*], so we had sympathy [*uczucie*] for them for working for us.[92]

Skibiński seemed to feel bad that Africans considered Poles racially superior and worked for them despite a shared experience of suffering. Ironically, however, when the tensions between blacks and whites increased in 1948, it was thanks to the protection of the British that Polish refugees could feel safe at the camps.[93] In either case, Skibiński's direct association with Africans, whether on the ground of common suffering or for another reason, was rarely repeated so explicitly by other refugees. More often, it was stated implicitly. M. Golya (Gatooma), for instance, decided to learn Swahili, the only former Polish refugee to report going through this trouble.[94] Furthermore, cordial relations between Poles and Africans can be deduced from a chronicle left by a boys' scouts' team from the Koja camp in Uganda, which participated in the East African Jamboree in 1947. More than 90 per

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[86] M.H.P., 'Kidugala tętni życiem', *Polak w Afryce*, vol. 2, no. 39 (22 Oct. 1944), p. 3.
[87] H. Chudzio, A. Hejczyk, A. Szopa (eds), *Coventry*, pp. 102, 105.
[88] Chudzio, Hejczyk (eds), *Nottingham*, p. 211.
[89] Chudzio, Śmigielska, and Solarz (eds), *Birmingham,* pp. 256–57.
[90] Ibid., p. 380.
[91] Ibid., p. 294.
[92] Chudzio, Chłosta-Sikorska, and Buś (eds), *Leeds*, p. 258.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Chudzio, Śmigielska, and Solarz (eds), *Birmingham*, p. 177.

cent of the participants of the Jamboree were black, and the chronicle is full of friendly entries by and photographs of both Polish and African scouts. It also features a press article in which the role of scouting in transcending race is suggested.[95]

Did Africans reciprocate any warm feelings towards Poles? Lingelbach has indicated that it is difficult to gauge African attitudes from the 1940s due to the dearth of written sources and reliance on much later oral testimonies.[96] If his interviews partly answer this question, they can be supplemented by Polish sources. An especially interesting account was written by Z. Wójcik, a girls' scouts' leader at Koja, which was one of the targets of an African uprising against colonial rule in January 1945. Riots broke out when a thousand African workers stopped milk from being delivered to the camp and disarmed the Askari. In reaction, the British camp commandant sent for army reinforcements to restore order, while the Polish camp director formed a civil guard to stop Africans from entering the camp. At the same time, the Polish consul in Kampala organised a convoy to transport food to Koja, driving one of the cars himself since his African chauffeur went on strike in fear of being beaten by other Africans.[97] Wójcik was no longer at Koja but in Nairobi when the riots occurred, but offered an interesting interpretation of the general situation in British East Africa:

> Even though the Negroes [*Murzyni*] slaughtered the English when they caught them individually or in small groups, not a single Polish woman lost a hair. In Nairobi, I had some business to care for at the Polish Red Cross office on a street far away from the Delegation [of the MPiOS]. Someone took me there, but I had to return alone. I took the wrong street and ended up in a purely black neighbourhood. Fully aware of what was happening in the neighbouring country [Uganda], I walked alone for three hours, not knowing where to go. Finally, I saw the turret of a famous building high above the rooftops, pointing me in the right direction. I was walking in the middle of the road, afraid of crowded sidewalks and arcades, in a light dress with a bare blond head – and with my heart on my sleeve. But nothing happened to me. The Negroes didn't take me for an English lady. They instinctively understood the difference between Polish refugees and English colonists. It is not impossible that our differences from English and German officials and farmers had some influence on the mentality of the indigenous people of East Africa. Maybe some people realised that skin colour is not the most important difference between people.[98]

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[95] Archiwum CDZWiP (Archives of the Centre for Documentation of Deportations, Expulsions and Resettlements), ref. no. 223, Kronika 1. drużyny skautów im. Tadeusza Kościuszki, hufiec harcerzy w Koji, ZHP na Wschodzie.

[96] Lingelbach, *On the Edges of Whiteness*, pp. 221–23.

[97] PISM A.11.E/537, Chmieliński, the Polish consul in Kampala, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London, 22 Jan. 1945.

[98] Z. Wójcik, *Afryka lat czterdziestych we wspomnieniach instruktorki harcerskiej* (Warszawa, 1997), p. 19.

While such testimonies cannot be considered fully legitimate unless corroborated by sources left by Africans, Wójcik still offered a self-perception, which she probably shared with other Polish refugees, of being different from the British and Germans in relation to Africans. Especially fascinating is the idea that the presence of Polish refugees in the region contributed to the decrease in racism, but among Africans rather than Europeans.

At the end of this analysis, it should be signalled that social class was probably instrumental in determining the Polish attitudes towards Africans, with the lower strata being more sympathetic towards their indigenous neighbours. Most Polish refugees could indeed be classified as 'poor whites', but there were a few upper-class ones present in the camps.[99] One such exception was the so-called 'Cyprus group', which consisted entirely of educated employees of the Polish state transferred from the Greek island to Fort Jameson, Northern Rhodesia from 1941 onwards.[100] One British official described these Polish 'aristocrats' as 'curiously unable to realise that they are living in a pioneer country at war'. This became apparent when the Poles staged a hunger strike upon being granted only one egg per person for breakfast.[101] According to the British, few of them could find employment: the trade unions opposed their placement in the copper mines, and the farmers considered them 'useless'. In addition, the Poles allegedly adopted an unhelpful attitude, refusing to supervise the 'natives' without payment: 'The root of the trouble is that the type of evacuees sent to us is a town-dweller, quite unprepared to make the best of, let alone enjoy, life in what is still a pioneer country'.[102] Offering a different optic, the Polish consul in Lusaka did not mention any idleness on the part of these refugees but only the refusal of white farms and the mines around Broken Hill to employ them. Instead, he underlined that a couple of Polish families fled across the 'green border' into the French Congo, where they took jobs not only in the mines but also on the railway and in textile factories.[103] It is more difficult to gauge the racial inclinations of this group, but a sense of their (also racial) entitlement can be assumed.

Conclusion

After the Polish government-in-exile lost international recognition in July 1945, the Polish administration was relegated to advisory roles. Consequently, the

[99] Z. Ćwilewicz remembered that life at the Tengeru camp was an opportunity to be close to the Polish intellectual elite, including teachers from Lwów (now in Ukraine); see Chudzio, Hejczyk (eds), *Nottingham*, pp. 53–60.

[100] Lingelbach, *On the Edges of Whiteness*, pp. 24, 38.

[101] TNA CO 795/125/15, Gov. J. Waddington to A. Dawe, 29 July 1942.

[102] Ibid., Col. S. Gore Browne to the Chief Secretary, 3 July 1942.

[103] HILA 59003/132.6, Zaleski to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 12 Jan. 1943.

refugees became an increasingly awkward burden in British colonial settings, with their socioeconomic incompatibility highlighted.[104] Starting in August 1946, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) took formal control of their upkeeping, attempting (unsuccessfully) to repatriate them to communist Poland. The International Refugee Organization (IRO), which succeeded the UNRRA in 1947, offered additional resettlement options for the remaining Polish refugees. In the end, most Poles only left Africa for Britain and other parts of the Empire after the passing of the Polish Settlement Act of 1947 and amid the so-called 'Operation Polejump' of the following year, which Murkociński aptly describes as a 'favour' rendered by the War Office to the Colonial Office.[105] The presence of the Polish refugees in British East Africa was, therefore, fleeting: the pressure from the colonial authorities resulted in only a fraction of them being resettled internally after the limiting of the camps circa 1948.

Perhaps, as Lingelbach suggests and Wójcik seconds, the interactions between the 'poor whites' from the eastern Polish borderlands and their African neighbours encouraged the latter to challenge white supremacy in British East Africa. The sources analysed in this article indicate that not only the refugees but also the Polish administration functioning alongside the British camp authorities transgressed the established colonial order in different ways. In 1942–1943, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs attempted to put the Polish peasants 'on an equal footing with the Negroes', with the Consul General in Nairobi judging that white settlement could only be justified if whites demonstrated to blacks their ability to perform hard physical labour. This idea was as contrary to the British concept of 'white prestige' as possible, and it was ultimately implemented to a minimal degree, with Polish officials supporting London in its colonial propaganda. Still, both the Polish newspapers published in Africa and the recorded testimonies of the refugees suggest a significant degree of solidarity with the indigenous population against the commands of the British.

Occasionally, amid strong condemnation of British colonialism, some Polish refugees timidly compared their own fate in Europe to the condition of their colonised African neighbours or claimed a special status as 'different whites'. While loyalty to their British benefactors limited their public pronouncements of anticolonial criticism and analogies of suffering, the refugees, though certainly aspiring to a fully 'white' racial status otherwise denied to them, displayed moments of moral clarity by associating with Africans. It was a postcolonial understanding of the African condition, since it was articulated by European people subjected to German and Soviet colonisation at

[104] M. Murkociński, 'Polscy uchodźcy wojenni w Afryce Wschodniej w polityce Wielkiej Brytanii (1942–1950)', PhD dissertation, Jagiellonian University (Krakow, 2021), p. 201.
[105] Ibid., p. 269.

home. In this manner, unique historical circumstances that brought colonised whites and colonised blacks together made fascinating encounters possible. While we should pay attention to Eastern European racism – and there is a significant amount of scholarship that does – we should also analyse Eastern European voices on race and colonialism on their own terms. For, as in the case of the Polish refugee camps in British East Africa, racism and postcolonial solidarity often cohabited in the same space.

Summary

The article analyses lesser-known diplomatic documents and recorded testimonies related to the presence of Polish refugees in special camps in British East Africa during and after the Second World War. It demonstrates the ways in which not only the refugees but also the Polish administration functioning alongside the British camp authorities transgressed the established colonial order. In 1942–1943, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs attempted to put the Polish peasants 'on an equal footing with the Negroes', with the Consul General in Nairobi judging that white settlement could only be justified if whites demonstrated to blacks their ability to perform hard physical labour. This idea was contrary to the British concept of 'white prestige', and it was ultimately implemented to a minimal degree, with Polish officials supporting London in its colonial propaganda. Still, both the Polish newspapers published in Africa and the recorded testimonies of the refugees suggest a significant degree of solidarity with the indigenous population, against the commands of the British. It is argued that occasionally, amid strong condemnation of British colonialism, some Polish refugees timidly compared their own fate in Europe to the condition of their colonised African neighbours or claimed a special status as 'different whites'. While loyalty to their British benefactors limited their public pronouncements of anticolonial criticism and analogies of suffering, the refugees, though certainly aspiring to a fully 'white' racial status otherwise denied to them, displayed moments of moral clarity by associating with Africans.

Imperialne schronienie: Rasa i kolonializm w polskich relacjach z Brytyjskiej Afryki Wschodniej

W artykule dokonano analizy mniej znanych dokumentów dyplomatycznych oraz zachowanych relacji związanych z obecnością polskich uchodźców w specjalnych osiedlach w Brytyjskiej Afryce Wschodniej podczas i po II wojnie światowej. Ukazano, w jaki sposób nie tylko uchodźcy, ale także polska administracja funkcjonująca obok brytyjskich władz naruszała ustalony porządek kolonialny. W latach 1942–1943 Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych próbowało postawić polskich chłopów „na równi z Murzynami", a Konsul Generalny w Nairobi oceniał, że osadnictwo białych może mieć uzasadnienie jedynie wtedy, gdy wykażą oni czarnym własną zdolność do wykonywania ciężkiej pracy fizycznej. Pomysł ten był sprzeczny z brytyjską koncepcją „białego prestiżu" i ostatecznie zrealizowano go w minimalnym stopniu – z kolei polscy urzędnicy wsparli Londyn w propagandzie kolonialnej. Z drugiej strony zarówno polska prasa ukazująca się w Afryce, jak i relacje samych uchodźców wskazują na znaczny stopień solidarności z rdzenną ludnością, wbrew poleceniom Brytyjczyków. Stwierdza się, że niektórzy polscy uchodźcy, ostro potępiając brytyjski kolonializm, nieśmiało porównywali swój los w Europie do sytuacji swoich skolonizowanych afrykańskich sąsiadów lub nadawali sobie specjalny status „innych białych". Lojalność uchodźców wobec brytyjskich dobroczyńców

ograniczała ich swobodę do publicznego głoszenia antykolonialnej krytyki i polsko-afrykańskich analogii cierpienia. Niemniej uchodźcy, chociaż aspirowali do w pełni „białego" statusu rasowego, którego im odmawiano, okazywali chwile moralnej przejrzystości, utożsamiając się z Afrykanami.

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