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To Govern a Community of Refugees: Some Insights into the History of the Polish Refugee Administration in East Africa, 1942–1945

The relocation of thousands of Polish refugees in East Africa in 1942 required a considerable effort to set up institutions capable of providing social and political care upon their arrival from Iran. The aim of this article is to give some insights into the tremendous task performed by the Polish officials to establish an effective administration in various British territories in Africa. Due to severe shortages of appropriate cadres the governmental agencies in refugee settlements and in Nairobi were understaffed and plagued by conflicts. The erosion of credibility of the Polish Government-in-Exile after the Yalta conference led to the gradual marginalization by the British of the refugees' institutions in Africa. Nevertheless, the Polish administration in Africa survived the end of the war in 1945 and its structures functioned until the departure of the majority of Poles between 1948 and 1950.

Keywords: Displaced Person, East Africa, Polish Government-in-Exile, Refugees

The history of the Polish refugees during World War II in East Africa² has too often been reduced to the rank of a puzzling anecdote about “the children in the African jungle”. Despite the efforts of post-war Polish communist government

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² The term *East Africa* has multiple definitions. The British territories in Africa extended between Egypt and the Union of South Africa. However, during World War II *East Africa* referred to the former East Africa Protectorate comprising Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika, reorganized in 1920. In this article, the term *East Africa* refers to the territories, which remained under the supervision of the Polish refugee administration in Nairobi and of the East African Refugees' Administration (EARA) – the former East Africa Protectorate, as well as Southern and Northern Rhodesia.

aiming at erasing this part of history, this almost legendary wartime episode has survived in the popular memory.

Currently, the Polish refugeehood during World War II is subject to a growing interest among historians. As a result of the continuous works undertaken by various institutions, such as the Center for Deportations and Expulsions Documentation in Cracow, the amount of accessible documents and artefacts testifying about that period is steadily growing. In parallel, the fall of the Iron Curtain has allowed Polish historians to discover archives related to the Polish Government-in-Exile preserved by foreign and Polish institutions abroad, such as the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, the Hoover Institution Library and Archives in California or the British National Archives in London.

Thus, the subject of the Polish war refugees (Displaced Persons)³ in Europe and other parts of the world becomes open to various historical readings. The narrative in the spirit of the everyday history seems to be preponderant and it is reflected in a number of published memoirs and recollections of the former refugees living nowadays in various locations in the world. The tremendous task of collecting those precious testimonies has been carried out by historians including Hubert Chudzio or Norman Davies⁴. These works are completed by a growing number of researches exploring political and institutional aspects of the Polish refugeehood, pioneered by Elżbieta and Janusz Wróbel in 1992, who worked extensively on the archives of the ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government-in-Exile preserved at the Hoover Institution Library and Archives⁵. Other historians, such as Lynne Taylor, touch upon the question of repatriation and relocation of Polish refugees from Africa after the end of the war⁶.

The East African territories accepted the bulk of Polish evacuees from the Soviet Union, who poured into Iran between March and August 1942. Between 1942 and 1944 approximately 18 000 Polish refugees were transferred from Iran to settlements⁷

³ The term *Displaced Person* (DP) was widely used after the end of the war to designate the people who had been displaced during the conflict. In the case of East Africa, the term *refugee* seems to be more pertinent, as the Polish citizens were effectively resettled there following a political agreement.

⁴ H. Chudzio (ed.) (2016), *Pokolenia odchodzą: relacje źródłowe polskich sybiraków z Wielkiej Brytanii*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego; N. Davies (2015), *The Trail of Hope*, New York: Bloomsbury.

⁵ E. Wróbel, J. Wróbel (1992), *Rozproszeni po świecie*, Chicago: Panorama Publishing. More recent works include H. Chudzio (ed.) (2012), *Z mrozów Syberii pod słońce Afryki: w 70. rocznicę przybycia polskich Sybiraków do Afryki Wschodniej i Południowej*, Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza.

⁶ L. Taylor (2010), *Polskie sieroty z Tengeru. Od Syberii przez Afrykę do Kanady 1941–1949*, Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis; Taylor analyzed the relocation campaign led by the International Refugees' Organization in the aftermath of the war.

⁷ The word *camp* was primarily used by the British, while for the Poles the word *settlement* was more appropriate, as it had fewer connotations with the internment camps or labor camps in USSR. In the present article I use both of these terms.

scattered in East and South Africa⁸. Most of them (approximately 13 000 refugees in 1944) were placed in camps located in Tanganyika and Uganda⁹. Several Polish settlements were established in Southern and Northern Rhodesia. Moreover, an additional camp for Polish orphans was built in Oudtshoorn, Union of South Africa¹⁰. While most of refugees left Africa between 1948 and 1950, the last settlements were shut down in 1952¹¹.

The aim of this article is to highlight the general evolution of the Polish refugee administration in East Africa between its inception in 1942 and its official dissolution in July 1945, when His Majesty's Government ceased to recognize the Polish Government-in-Exile. After that date the Polish refugee administration was put under the British tutelage, though its structures remained largely intact until 1948. The article is based primarily on documents produced by the Polish Ministry of Labor and Social Care (Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej – MPiOS) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych – MSZ).

Further research on British and colonial archival sources could shed more light on the complicated Polish-British relations in Africa. A better understanding of the British stance towards the Polish representatives in East Africa is necessary to assess the real authority of the Government-in-Exile in matters regarding the refugees. Furthermore, a study of the Polish refugee administration in respective British territories in Africa could also enhance our understanding of the Polish institutions in the context of local political realms.

1. Building an efficient refugees administration: an impossible task?

1.1. The establishment and expansion of Polish governmental agencies in East Africa

The Sikorski-Mayski agreement signed by the Polish and Soviet representatives on July 30, 1941, under the auspices of the United Kingdom, granted amnesty for Polish citizens detained in the USSR since 1939 and allowed to establish a Polish army (the so-called "Anders Army") on the Soviet territory. At Winston Churchill's insistence, Stalin agreed to transfer the newly formed units of the Polish Army from the Soviet Union to Iran along with thousands of civilians. By mid-1942, masses of Polish evacuees from the USSR flocked into Iran in accordance with the terms of agreement between Churchill and Stalin. The increasingly dire humanitarian situation in Persia

⁸ This figure was reached in 1944 and is cited in J. Wróbel (2003), *Uchodźcy Polscy ze Związku Sowieckiego 1942–1950*, Łódź: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, p. 160. However, this number of Polish refugees in Africa was changing considerably owing to relocations and new arrivals.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 158.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 157.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 256.

forced the Polish Government-in-Exile to examine the possibility of transferring Polish citizens to other, safer locations. During the cabinet meeting on March 31, 1942, the question was tackled by General Tadeusz Klimecki. He noticed that Persia was considered to be an “operational area”¹², from which civilians should be transferred as soon as possible to other locations “such as Kenya or South Africa”¹³.

Uganda and Tanganyika, both under the British control, were the first territories to be considered as a refuge for 12 000 Polish civilians from Iran¹⁴. The Britons, who initially had been skeptical about the idea of the costly and logistically complex operation, were soon convinced of the necessity of moving the civilians out of Iran. The decision to relocate the refugees to East Africa was made in July of the same year¹⁵. On September 11, 1942, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs addressed the cabinet a request to establish new consular offices in African territories in anticipation of the massive influx of the Polish refugees¹⁶. However, in November, the Polish consular network was still not operational as intense discussions between the Poles and the British about the organization of the refugee administration in Africa were held at the Foreign Office in London¹⁷. In parallel, a preparatory team of the Polish Government headed by Consul Jan Chmieliński arrived in East Africa in August 1942¹⁸. Its mission was to discuss the cooperation between the Polish administration and the colonial authorities.

Eventually, two consulates were set to be opened as soon as possible in Kampala (Uganda) and Dar es Salaam (Tanganyika)¹⁹. Moreover, it was agreed that a consulate general would be established in Nairobi (Kenya), which was considered to be the major institutional hub in East Africa. As the Northern and Southern Rhodesian governments agreed to host Polish settlements on their territories, another consulate was planned to be set up in Salisbury, while the Polish consulate in Northern Rhodesia was expanded²⁰. The Consul General in Nairobi had supervisory

¹² In the present article the quotes from Polish documents were translated in English by the author.

¹³ Prezydium Rady Ministrów K.102/44, Protokół posiedzenia Rady Ministrów 31 marca 1942 r. in: M. Zgórnjak (ed.) (1996), *Protokoły posiedzeń Rady Ministrów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. T.4:Grudzień 1941-sierpień 1942*, Kraków: Secesja, p. 196.

¹⁴ Hoover Institution Library and Archives (HILA), Refugees 800/42/0/-/530, notes from the discussion between Ruciński and Randall at the Foreign Office in London on July 7, 1942.

¹⁵ HILA, Refugees 800/42/0/-/530, Memorandum from Minister Edward Raczyński to Minister Alexander Cadogan, April 24, 1942.

¹⁶ HILA, Refugees 800/42/0/-/530, Request by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government-in-Exile to establish new consulates in British territories in East Africa /Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika/ presented at the governmental meeting in London, September 1942.

¹⁷ HILA, Refugees 800/42/0/-/530, notes from the meeting held at the Foreign Office on November 16, 1942, London, November 16, 1942.

¹⁸ HILA, Telegrams between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Poland's foreign representations 800/42/0/-/245, telegram from Stanislaw Kot to E. Raczyński.

¹⁹ J. Wróbel (2003), p. 140.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

powers over his colleagues and was also representing the Polish interests before the joint board of the East African representatives located in Nairobi²¹. In September 1942, Michał Wierusz-Kowalski was appointed a new Consul General in Nairobi, even though he effectively took office in December of the same year²². He played an important role during the first months of the Polish presence in East Africa. Initially, the Polish refugee administration was supervised by Stanisław Kot, the Plenipotentiary Minister of State in the Middle East²³.

The Polish consular agencies were supported by the MPIOS delegates responsible for health and social care in the refugee settlements. The MPIOS field workers were supervised by the head delegate based in Nairobi. The first representative sent to East Africa was Stefan Daszyński, who was part of the preparatory group present in Africa since August 1942. However, lacking support from Kot, his mission was very short²⁴. Kazimierz Kazimierzak, the newly appointed head of the MPIOS agency in East Africa recommended by Kot, arrived in Nairobi in September²⁵.

The number of the Polish institutions present in Africa was steadily growing in the following years. In January 1945, there were 9 independent delegations representing various ministerial agencies in Nairobi²⁶. The arrival of the representative of the Polish Ministry of Economy was a response to the difficulties in establishing an efficient accounting system monitoring the expenditures related to the functioning of the refugee settlements' infrastructure²⁷. Seweryn Szczepański was appointed delegate of the Polish Ministry of Education, responsible for the management of the Polish schools in the camps²⁸. Finally, the Polish Minister of Justice also decided to send his representative to Nairobi in order to apply the Polish judiciary system in the camps²⁹. The prerogatives of those ministerial agencies existing among many

²¹ Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London (PISM), Sprawy personalne placówek Nairobi A 11 E 1000, letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to M. Wierusz-Kowalski, December 5, 1942.

²² HILA, Telegrams between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Poland's foreign representations 800/42/0/-/245, Telegram from S. Kot to E. Raczyński concerning the mission of consul Michał Wierusz-Kowalski in Nairobi.

²³ T. P. Rutkowski (2000), *Stanisław Kot 1885–1975, biografia polityczna*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG. p.294

²⁴ HILA, Telegrams between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Poland's foreign representations 800/42/0/-/245, telegram from S. Kot to J. Stańczyk, Teheran, August 15, 1942.

²⁵ HILA, Telegrams between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Poland's foreign representations 800/42/0/-/245, telegram from E. Raczyński to S. Kot concerning the nomination of M. Wierusz-Kowalski and K. Kazimierzak, August 29, 1942.

²⁶ PISM, Uchodźcy w Afryce Wschodniej A 11 E 537, consul Aleksander Zawisza to Polish delegations in Nairobi, May 18, 1945.

²⁷ PISM, Sprawy personalne placówek Nairobi A 11 E 1000, telegram from M. Wierusz-Kowalski to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 31, 1943.

²⁸ Archiwum Akt Nowych in Warsaw (AAN), Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej (MPIOS) 104, letter from Minister Jan Stańczyk to K. Kazimierzak, January 3, 1944.

²⁹ PISM, Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości A 20 4A/165, letter from Zygmunt Osuchowski to Ministry of Justice in London, November 23, 1944.

other Polish institutions, such as the Polish Red Cross, were often overlapping. It certainly contributed to the cumbersome bureaucracy and fueled internal conflicts, which were the main failure of the Polish administration in Africa.

1.2. Difficulties in staffing the Polish administration agencies in East Africa

The Polish Government faced severe shortages of employees ready to work in East Africa. Similar problems had already been encountered earlier in the USSR and Iran. However, the massive and rapid relocation of refugees to East Africa underscored the issue. The MPiOS delegates were particularly complaining about the lack of suitable candidates to fill the posts of MPiOS representatives in the settlements, as well as in other social institutions, such as schools. In his report describing the current situation in East Africa (January 1943), Kazimierz Kazimierczak informed about the dramatic lack of proper professionals with a comprehensive experience to manage the camp activities or to organize the refugees' cultural life³⁰.

The problem was intimately related to a small percentage of intelligentsia among the civilians arriving from Iran if compared with other Polish centers in the Middle East. Kazimierczak stated that "...Africa is not very popular among our intelligentsia and they are all trying to stay there [in Iran – M.M.]"³¹ In fact, the Middle Eastern countries were more attractive not only owing to their climate but also because of the existence of renowned cultural and educational institutions appealing to more educated refugees. With numerous schools and Polish institutions, Palestine and Lebanon offered better perspectives for families and allowed closer contacts with refugees' relatives enrolled in the "Anders Army" units. Unofficially, East Africa was primarily considered as a destination suitable for farmers and artisans, as they were considered more adapted to harsh African conditions³². The refugees themselves could also refuse to move to Africa, or use their personal influence in the military establishment to secure other destinations³³. As the number of Polish evacuees from Iran soared in Africa, the Polish authorities in Nairobi repeatedly requested new contingents of specialists who would take over key positions in the social administration³⁴.

An insurmountable language barrier was one of the many issues impeding the establishment of efficient institutions. Basic knowledge of English was required by the British and local authorities for swift cooperation. The linguistic skills were

³⁰ AAN, MPiOS 101, report concerning the situation in East Africa, K. Kazimierczak to S. Kot, January 18, 1943.

³¹ AAN, MPiOS 101, letter from K. Kazimierczak to S. Kot, January 20, 1943.

³² HILA, Refugees 800/42/0/-/530, *Notes from the discussion between Ruciński and Randall at the Foreign Office in London on July 7, 1942*. The British officials insisted that refugees departing to Africa should have basic knowledge in agriculture.

³³ AAN, MPiOS 101, letter from Henryk Skąpski to S. Kot, December 12, 1942.

³⁴ AAN, MPiOS 101, letter from K. Kazimierczak to S. Skąpski, December 15, 1942.

particularly needed in the camps, where the Polish representative of the MPiOS had to closely cooperate with the British commandant on a daily basis. In his report to Kot, Kazimierzczak stated that “...the lack of English is one of the biggest issues encountered during the recruitment for the most responsible positions.”³⁵ In fact, the candidates’ level of English was very often considered to be the primary criterion in selecting them for the senior positions. In his correspondence with the MPiOS headquarters in London, Kazimierzczak regularly deplored the necessity of cooperating with people without any previous experience in social work due to severe shortages of English speaking specialists in Africa.

The absence of skilled *cadre* was also a headache for the Polish consuls. Jan Wierciński, the Polish consul in Tanganyika, although rather critical of the MPiOS performance in the East African territories, admitted the great difficulties in recruiting competent staff. Indeed, not all members of the intelligentsia were fit to perform organizational duties in the camps. In his report, Wierciński mentioned the example of doctor Zamenhof, the camp leader in Kondo, who – despite of his noble pedigree (his uncle was the author of the Esperanto language) and his skills as a doctor – was very unhappy with accepting this role: “...he considers this duty with humor and disdain characteristic of a dilettante.”³⁶

2. The Polish refugee institutions in East Africa: conflicts, ill-ambitions and bureaucracy

2.1. Internal clashes and frictions

As the first civilians disembarked in Kenya, the administrative scheme of Polish consular and social care institutions was still unclear. Significant distances between different camps hampered the efforts of the Polish authorities to put the settlements under their effective control. Moreover, communication with the headquarters in London was complicated, thus, forcing the Polish functionaries in East Africa to act without prior consultation with their ministries.

The proliferation of refugee institutions present in Nairobi was the main reason of persisting conflicts among the Polish representatives, especially the MPiOS delegates and the consuls. The misunderstandings over organizational matters emerged shortly after the arrival of the first refugees in Africa. In fact, the authorities were not able to agree upon the system of managing thousands of refugees. The Polish authorities in Nairobi and in London agreed that the new camps should become self-sufficient units, which would produce basic commodities and alimentary goods

³⁵ AAN, MPiOS 101, letter from K. Kazimierzczak to S. Kot, March 6, 1943.

³⁶ PISM, Sprawozdania placówek: Europa, Australia, Ameryka, Afryka i Azja, A 11 E 705, report by consul Jan Wierciński, January 1st, 1944.

satisfying the inhabitants' needs³⁷. That plan required the acquisition of arable land in a direct vicinity of the camps to be cultivated by the refugees themselves. Furthermore, it was expected that the camps' inhabitants would be employed in small workshops, which products could be sold on the local market³⁸. According to the MPiOS delegates, the professional activation of all refugees was imperative in order to avoid the plight of that vulnerable population and to facilitate its transition into the post-war society.

However, the Polish representatives in Nairobi disagreed over the implementation of the self-sufficiency model. Most notably, there was a disagreement over the economic viability of the project. While the MPiOS delegate in Nairobi was a staunch supporter of agricultural development of the camps, Consul Wierusz-Kowalski privileged the potential gains from the industrial production in Polish workshops³⁹. Wierusz-Kowalski soon realized that a full alimentary self-sufficiency was not possible. In response, Kazimierzczak sent a number of bitter reports to Kot and to the MPiOS headquarters in London about Wierusz-Kowalski's views. According to the Delegate of the Polish Ministry of Interior in Nairobi, the latter was lobbying for the acquisition of a coffee plantation that would be managed by the refugees and whose products would be sold on the market⁴⁰. Kazimierzczak argued that the project was hampering his efforts towards self-sufficiency. In his view the Polish agrarian production would provide much needed supplies for the camps' inhabitants. Nevertheless, the refugee settlements never achieved full self-sufficiency, as the authorities faced shortages of labor force in mostly feminine camps and the skepticism of the colonial governments⁴¹.

Despite the multitude of issues, the relations between various ministerial representatives in East Africa were rather good. The conflicts were very often the effect of previous grievances, as many Polish functionaries in Africa already had the opportunity to work together in the USSR or in Iran⁴². Furthermore, the internal conflicts in Nairobi and elsewhere in East Africa were fueled by the political charades in London. The interminable tensions and reciprocal accusations led to the

³⁷ HILA, Refugees 800/42/0/-/530, *Notes from the discussion between Ruciński and Randall at the Foreign Office in London on July 7, 1942.*

³⁸ HILA, Refugees 800/42/0/-/530, report by K. Kazimierzczak September 30, 1942-October 27, 1942, Nairobi, October 27, 1942.

³⁹ AAN, MPiOS 101, letter from K. Kazimierzczak to MPiOS, August 5, 1943.

⁴⁰ AAN, MPiOS 106, letter from the delegate of the Ministry of Interior to MPiOS, October 29, 1944.

⁴¹ HILA, telegrams between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Poland's foreign representations 800/42/0/-/245, telegram from Polish diplomatic mission in Teheran to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, August 27, 1942.

⁴² The best example was K. Kazimierzczak himself. Before his appointment as MPiOS head delegate he had been deputy delegate of the Polish Embassy in the USSR in Samarkand. Prezydium Rady Ministrów K.102/49a, Sprawozdanie W. Arleta, August 11, 1942 in: M. Zgórnjak (ed.) (1996), p. 392.

Wierusz-Kowalski's dismissal on the personal demand of Jan Stańczyk, the Minister of the MPiOS⁴³. In Uganda, a similar conflict between Consul Tadeusz Drobniak and the MPiOS delegate Mikołaj Szyszkowski resulted in replacing the former by Consul Jan Chmieliński. However, the rivalries were also perceptible among the diplomatic corps as the Consul General in Nairobi, on a regular basis, accused his colleagues in other African territories of not respecting his primacy in all decisions relating to refugees matters.

Finally, the animosities were palpable within the camps. The Catholic clergy were deeply suspicious of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) social actions among the refugees as it was considered to be a protestant organization. Despite the personal intervention of Władysław Słapa, the Polish chaplain in East Africa, the priests working in the camps were accused of advising the refugees to boycott the YMCA institutions⁴⁴.

2.2. Problems over the division of responsibility

The Polish administrative structure in East Africa was complicated since its inception. Even before the arrival of the first refugees in Africa, the Minister Jan Stańczyk strongly protested against Stanisław Kot's meddling in MPiOS affairs⁴⁵. The main fault line was between the consulates supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the MPiOS delegations working under the umbrella of the Ministry of Labor and Social Care. The governmental conflict between the two ministries was reflected in Africa, where the representatives of both institutions were formulating mutual accusations of interfering in each other's prerogatives. The existence of these two parallel agencies was the main factor explaining the weakness of the Polish voice in Nairobi⁴⁶. In fact, the MPiOS activities should have been supervised by the consulates, as it was the case in Lebanon, where another bulk of Polish refugees was settled in 1945.

The rivalry between the consul and the MPiOS delegate was particularly visible in the first months following the arrival of the refugees. The Polish authorities could hardly find a common ground of understanding in their talks with the British side, when organizational patterns for the refugee camps were discussed in Nairobi. Michał Wierusz-Kowalski had a very clear vision of the relations with the British. In his opinion, the consulate was the main interlocutor representing the interests of the Polish Government, while the main responsibility of the MPiOS was to supervise all organizational matters concerning the refugees in the settlements. The representatives of the MPiOS were abominated by the idea of their subjugation to

⁴³ E. Wróbel, J. Wróbel (1992), p. 145.

⁴⁴ AAN, MPiOS 104, letter from J. Barański to MPiOS, September 22, 1944.

⁴⁵ T. P. Rutkowski (2000), p. 294.

⁴⁶ E. Wróbel, J. Wróbel (1992), p. 145.

the consulates. In his report addressed to the Minister of State in the Middle East, Henryk Skąpski, MPiOS employee, estimated that the idea of silencing the social care delegate during the talks with the British was "...the will to take over all affairs related to our refugees in Africa by our Ministry of Foreign Affairs."⁴⁷ Skąpski argued that Wierusz-Kowalski's goal was to systematically marginalize Kazimierczak in the talks with the British⁴⁸.

The Polish consul in Nairobi had a radically different stance on that matter, stating that he had always defended the interests of the MPiOS in his contacts with the British side. He elaborated on his point of view in the report addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March 1943:

I have been always willing to compel to the division of competencies between the consulates and the MPiOS delegation. When a ground of understanding with the British was found, I always required the mentioning of the MPiOS delegation as the executive power on the Polish side, in the settlements⁴⁹.

Also according to Wierusz-Kowalski, his cooperation with Kazimierczak was "good, or even cordial"⁵⁰.

The repetitive misunderstandings and redundancy led the representatives of both governmental agencies to establish a clear "division of labor" in the very first months of 1943⁵¹. The main instigator of the pact was Wierusz-Kowalski, whose ideas were reluctantly accepted by the MPiOS leaders. According to the new agreement, the consulates were the main representatives of the Polish cause. The consuls were also responsible for acquiring and lending farms and arable land to be cultivated by the refugees. Interestingly, the agreement between Wierusz-Kowalski and Kazimierczak had not been sanctioned by the headquarters of either ministry in London. Janusz Wróbel suggests that the move prompted the end of Wierusz-Kowalski's mission in Nairobi, as it was considered to be an act of insubordination⁵².

The necessity of designating an interlocutor solely representing the Polish side in talks on refugees' affairs was emphasized by the British⁵³. Undoubtedly, due to their experience abroad and their language capacities, the consuls were seen as "natural" partners to discuss issues concerning refugees. That reality was seen as a "deliberate" action undertaken by the representatives of the Ministry of Foreign

⁴⁷ AAN, MPiOS 101, letter from A. Skąpski to S. Kot, January 10, 1943.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ AAN, MPiOS 101, report by M. Wierusz-Kowalski to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 3, 1943.

⁵⁰ AAN, MPiOS 101, letter from M. Wierusz-Kowalski to S. Kot, March 13, 1943.

⁵¹ J. Wróbel (2003), p. 144.

⁵² E. Wróbel, J. Wróbel (1992), p. 145.

⁵³ PISM, Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości A 20 4A/165, letter from Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Polish Ministry of Justice, January 23, 1945.

Affairs in order to delegitimize the MPiOS delegate. In his letters to Stanisław Kot, Kazimierczak suggested eagerly that the *raison d'être* of the delegations had been put under question⁵⁴. In practice, the new agreement between the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Labor did not solve the issue of dichotomy of the Polish stance, which was additionally aggravated by the steady expansion of the Polish refugees administration in East Africa.

3. The Polish-British relations, a quiet confrontation

3.1. Who's got the power? The misunderstandings concerning the camps' management

The problems of refugees were regularly discussed by the British and the Poles in Nairobi. The East African Refugees Administration (EARA) was a body gathering within its framework the representatives of all African territories where Polish settlements were present, with the exception of the Union of South Africa. The commission, led by Commissioner Charles Lamb Bruton, was the executive organ acting under the auspices of the Governors' Conference, which was a collegial body composed of territorial governors in East Africa⁵⁵. Furthermore, all local authorities established Directorates of Refugee Administration, which task was to apply the policies formulated in Nairobi⁵⁶. The institutions had been established prior to the arrival of the Polish refugees in June 1942, as East Africa was coping with the problems of refugees and Italian internees since the beginning of the war. The EARA meetings were usually held in presence of the Polish representatives (the consul and the MPiOS delegate), even though closed sessions were also organized. Detailed minutes of the meetings in English were then sent to the Polish side.

The Polish-British relations were decent during the first two years following the arrival of the refugees from Iran in 1942. However, several issues emerged even before the establishment of the settlements in East Africa, especially concerning the prerogatives of both sides managing the camps. The Polish representatives and the EARA decided that a document defining the roles in administering the refugee camps should be agreed upon in order to avoid further misunderstandings. The first memorandum in that matter was elaborated by Stefan Daszyński in September 1942. However, it was dismissed by the Polish Government, as it had been discussed neither with the MPiOS, nor with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁵⁴ AAN, MPiOS 101, letter from K. Kazimierczak to MPiOS headquarters, undated.

⁵⁵ AAN, MPiOS 101, report by K. Kazimierczak to S. Kot about the situation in East Africa, January 18, 1943.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Another memorandum concerning the settlements' management was addressed to the British by Kazimierzczak as early as in October 1942⁵⁷. Considering the naïve vision of the refugees administration displayed in the text, attributing quasi-autonomy to the Polish side, one might think that – at that stage – the Polish authorities were confident in the British good-will. Kazimierzczak's proposal suggested a fully Polish command of the refugee settlements with the presence of British liaison officers, as well as the introduction of tribunals working under the Polish law within the camps⁵⁸. In his reply, C. W. F. Frohman, the Governors' Office First Secretary, was deeply critical of Kazimierzczak's ideas⁵⁹. He made it clear to the MPiOS delegate that the British were unwilling to give up the full control of the refugees affairs in East Africa. In the following months, other projects were discussed at the EARA forum⁶⁰.

The British side suggested a dual administration, with the Polish camp leader who was to be subjugated to the British camp command. In addition, the British required full control of camps' institutions, such as schools or canteens. Finally, the commandant had an overview of all payments and money transfers, including the amounts sent by the Polish Government to cover the salaries of the Polish personnel and governmental representatives⁶¹.

The final document determining the organizational pattern of the refugees administration was accepted on July 29, 1943. The agreement, dubbed "Kowalski-Gurney" (signed by Wierusz-Kowalski and Henry Lovell Goldsworthy Gurney, the Secretary General of the Governors' Conference in Nairobi) was to remain in force for two years, i.e. until the expected end of the war⁶². Once again, Wierusz-Kowalski failed to keep the Polish Government in London informed about his proceedings⁶³. According to the agreement, the British commandant was designated by a commission for refugees affairs, and was responsible for the camp's security, infrastructure, moves outside and inside the camp, as well as provisions. The Polish camp leader was nominated by the MPiOS delegate and was subordinated to the camp commandant. That rather disadvantageous agreement was decried by Wierusz-Kowalski's enemies (including the MPiOS delegates). It is true however, that the Polish-British cooperation at the local level was swift until the expiry of the "Kowalski-Gurney" pact. A new document was to be negotiated with the colonial

⁵⁷ AAN, MPiOS 110, memorandum by K. Kazimierzczak concerning the camps' administration in East Africa, October 13, 1942.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ AAN, MPiOS 110, letter from C.W.F. Frohman to K. Kazimierzczak, October 15, 1942.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ AAN, MPiOS 110, minutes of the Conference of Directors and Commissioners of Refugees in East Africa, January 9, 1943.

⁶² E. Wróbel, J. Wróbel (1992), p. 146.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

authorities in 1945. Nevertheless, the process was stopped due to the political plight of the Polish Government-in-Exile and the Colonial Office's lack of interest in creating a new framework⁶⁴.

3.2. Everyday cooperation with the British

The cooperation with the British and the local institutions relevant to refugees affairs was performed on many levels, especially in the settlements. Despite the initially ambitious projects for refugees' activation formulated by the Polish authorities, the British were exerting full control over the camps' administration. That situation was often perceived as a blatant interference in the internal Polish matters. In his letter to Stanisław Kot, Henryk Skąpski expressed his frustration with the situation: "There is a tendency to have an omnipotent British camp commandant."⁶⁵ The British frequently required full information from the Polish authorities about the candidates for the key positions in the camp's administration, all personal changes and, more importantly, money transfers⁶⁶. In return, the representatives of the Polish Government were accusing the British of treating the Polish refugees as internees. According to them, it could have a disastrous effect on the people traumatized by the experience of deportation to the USSR⁶⁷.

The Polish-British relations in the settlements were correct. The level of understanding and cooperation was strictly depending on the command of English language among the Polish leaders of particular camps. However, in several cases the consuls were complaining about the negative attitude of the colonial functionaries towards the Polish population. In his report from January and February 1943, the Consul General in Nairobi denounced disregard for the decisions undertaken by the Governors' Conference in other East African territories⁶⁸. An important conflict erupted in Uganda, where the local Director for Refugees Administration repeatedly denied the authority of the Polish representatives in their settlements. According to him, the Polish refugees had to be put under strict control of the colonial authorities. Eventually, the unpleasant situation was discussed during a special visit of Wierusz-Kowalski and Commissioner Bruton in Uganda in July 1943. At the conference held in Kampala, the local Director for Refugees Administration was asked by the Commissioner to be respectful of the decisions undertaken at the highest level in Nairobi⁶⁹.

⁶⁴ PISM, Uchodźcy w Afryce Wschodniej A 11 E 537, letter from A. Zawisza to the Polish consulate in Dar es Salaam, January 6, 1945.

⁶⁵ AAN, MPiOS 101, letter from H. Skąpski to S. Kot, January 10, 1943.

⁶⁶ AAN, MPiOS 110, scheme for the organization of Polish Refugee Camps in East Africa, undated.

⁶⁷ AAN, MPiOS 101, report by the Consulate of Poland in Nairobi to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 26, 1943.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ AAN, MPiOS 101, letter from M. Szyszkowski to K. Kazimierzak, August 5, 1943.

The British were concerned about the complexity of the Polish administrative scheme in Africa. During the meetings at the EARA headquarters in Nairobi, the colonial directors of the refugees administration were pointing at the bureaucratic chaos in the Polish consulates and MPiOS local offices⁷⁰. Frequent inability of the Polish institutions to find a common position on important matters severely impaired the decision making process in Nairobi. Those antagonisms among the Polish ministerial representatives also helped the British in taking over the control of Polish affairs in East Africa.

Polish plans for the organization of the refugeehood in East Africa were also a source of concern for the local authorities. Even though it was admitted that the economic burden connected with the establishment of the camps was to be minimized by stimulating their self-sustainability, the British were worried about the settlements' impact on the local economies and prices⁷¹. Hence, the colonial functionaries were deeply skeptical about the ambitious plans crafted by Wierusz-Kowalski and Kazimierzczak for the industrial and agricultural development of the camps. The report from the meeting held at the Aliens and Internees Administration headquarters in Dar es Salaam on June 9, 1943 mentions a clear opposition voiced by the British side to excessive agricultural production by the Polish farmers in order to preserve the interests of the local major landowners⁷². According to the authorities of the hosting territories, the output of the camps' industry or farms could not be commercialized as this could destabilize the local market⁷³. Furthermore, the British pointed out that the refugees, as the white people, needed to comply with the racial rules – in order to preserve the “racial prestige” of the Europeans, thus could not perform the duties usually done by the autochthones⁷⁴.

In his report for the year 1943, Kazimierzczak concluded on the state of the Polish-British relations after one year of the refugees' presence in East Africa: “I have the impression that the honeymoon in our relations with the British is gone. The overall attitude towards us gradually became colder. The return of Consul Wierusz-Kowalski from London raised the fear of some hidden Polish colonial plans.”⁷⁵

⁷⁰ PISM, Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości A 20 4A/165, letter from Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Polish Ministry of Justice, January 23, 1945.

⁷¹ AAN, MPiOS 112, correspondence and circulars concerning the Polish refugees' savings in East Africa and in India 1943–1944, letter from British Foreign Office to Polish Ministry of Finance concerning refugees' savings, November 9, 1943.

⁷² AAN, MPiOS 101, minutes of the meeting held at the Aliens and Internees Administration headquarters in Dar es-Salaam, June 9, 1943.

⁷³ AAN, MPiOS 112, letter from British Foreign Office to Polish Ministry of Finance concerning refugees' savings, November 9, 1943.

⁷⁴ AAN, MPiOS 101, report by K. Kazimierzczak about the situation in East Africa, January 18, 1943.

⁷⁵ AAN, MPiOS 101, letter from K. Kazimierzczak to S. Kot, December 12, 1943.

3.3. Gradual deterioration of Polish-British relations after 1944

The changing situation in war geopolitics influenced Polish-British relations in East Africa. After December 1944, Polish representatives were treated with growing disdain and suspicion by the British. The virulent anti-Soviet sentiment among the refugees was also a source of concern for the British authorities, as it was expected that the Poles would leave Africa immediately after the end of the hostilities in Europe. The EARA employees exhorted the Polish representatives to control and to eliminate “untrue information and gossip” spread by the refugee Polish press, such as the *Polak w Afryce*⁷⁶. In April 1945, the Polish consul in Dar es Salaam reported that he had been notified by the local government about its disapproval of the “anti-Soviet” rhetoric of the camps’ bulletins⁷⁷.

The representatives of the Polish Government-in-Exile were well aware of the ever strengthening pro-Russian stance among the Britons. In December 1944, the Polish consul in Salisbury mentioned a notification from the British censorship, which informed him about the deteriorating morale in the refugees camp due to the Soviet presence in Poland⁷⁸. In another letter, from April 27, 1945, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs notified the Polish Ministry of Labor about a meeting – attended by Colonel Marriott, the Makindu Camp Commandant – organized by the “Friends of the Soviet Union/Nairobi Branch” association, held in Nairobi⁷⁹. The Polish diplomats were denied the access to the local media outlets, probably due to special instructions issued by the local Ministry of Information⁸⁰.

By the end of 1944, it was gradually becoming clear that the problem of the Polish refugeehood in East Africa would not be solved only through repatriation to Poland. The failure of the repatriation policy became evident during the campaign by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), whose mission was to organize and to facilitate the return of the millions of Displaced Persons to their countries of origin. On January 23, 1945, the first UNRRA delegate, whose task was to register Polish citizens willing to repatriate after the end of the war, arrived in Uganda⁸¹. In order to avoid riots, the inhabitants of the Kojia and Masindi camps

⁷⁶ PISM, Uchodźcy w Afryce Wschodniej A 11 E 537, letter from A. Zawisza to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 21, 1945.

⁷⁷ PISM, Propaganda – Afryka Wschodnia A 11 E 313, letter from J. Wierciński to A. Zawisza, April 5, 1945.

⁷⁸ PISM, Uchodźcy w Rodezji: Rodezja Południowa i Północna oraz Grupa Cypryjska A 11 E 535, letter from Consul Ziętkiewicz to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, December 8, 1944.

⁷⁹ PISM, Uchodźcy w Afryce Wschodniej A 11 E 537, letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ministry of Education, April 27, 1945.

⁸⁰ PISM, Propaganda – Afryka Wschodnia A 11 E 313, letter from A. Zawisza to J. Wierciński, April 11, 1945.

⁸¹ PISM, Uchodźcy w Afryce Wschodniej A 11 E 537, monthly report (February 1945) by the MPiOS delegate in Kampala, March 20, 1945.

interested in returning to Poland were not obliged to indicate the precise final destination⁸². In fact, the Soviet annexation of the Eastern parts of pre-war Poland, where most of the refugees in East Africa originated from, was practically a *fait accompli*.

At that stage, the Polish institutions were mere intermediaries between the British authorities and the refugees. The representatives of the Polish institutions were aware of those changes. In May 1945, when it became obvious that His Majesty's government would recognize the newly created communist government in Warsaw, the Polish consul in Nairobi started establishing new structures of refugee care, which could – unofficially – continue performing the duties of the consulates and the MPiOS delegations. According to the telegram sent on June 26, 1945, to Nairobi and Bombay, all procedures had to be undertaken in order to create a new institutional administration “that could represent the refugees in all matters relating to social care and education.”⁸³

Conclusion

The efforts by the Polish government to preserve the basic refugees administration in the event of recognition of the communist government in Warsaw by the United Kingdom were a partial success. For pragmatic reasons, the Britons chose not to shut down most of the Polish institutions, which continued to perform their duties under a new status. Despite all sorts of encouragements by the British authorities and the international refugee organizations, vast majority of Poles in East Africa refused to repatriate after the end of the war. The families of the Anders soldiers feared reprisals from the new communist regime, others' motivations explaining the refusal to repatriate could be both economic and political.

Undoubtedly, the Polish functionaries who remained loyal to the Government-in-Exile after July 1945, strongly promoted the idea of the permanent emigration and stressed the task to build the resistance against the new regime in Warsaw. In East Africa, where most of the refugees had fresh memories of their dramatic stay in the Soviet interior during the first two years of the war, special repatriation missions encouraging the Poles to return to Poland had little chances of success – in fact, many of them did not consider it as their country anymore. It was not the case in Germany or Austria, where the Polish DPs' war experience had been completely different and the rates of repatriations were much higher⁸⁴.

⁸² PISM, Uchodźcy w Afryce Wschodniej A 11 E 537, report from the UNRRA representative visit in Uganda, 25 January 1945.

⁸³ PISM, Nairobi VI-VII 1945 A 11 E 1088, telegram from Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Consulates in Nairobi and Bombay, June 26, 1945.

⁸⁴ J. Pietrzak (2012), *Polscy uchodźcy na Bliskim Wschodzie w latach drugiej wojny światowej. Ośrodki, instytucje, organizacje*. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, p. 501.

The success of the Polish Government-in-Exile propaganda among the Polish refugees, not only in Africa, but also in India and in the Middle East, was possible due to the existence of a complex institutional framework regulating the refugees' lives. Despite the numerous internal conflicts and a gradual loss of legitimacy in the eyes of the British authorities, the Polish ministerial representatives built an impressive administration providing social care to thousands of refugees until 1948. Even though the British Camp Commandants played the most important role in the camps administration, they mostly relied on the Polish Camp Leaders and their subordinates. The latter were the real intermediaries between the British and the refugees, and thus had a real influence on the fate of the inhabitants of various settlements.

The challenge faced by the representatives of the Polish Government in East Africa was not only logistical and political. They were forced to manage a population of refugees in an environment that was utterly exotic to most of them. With no viable chances of finding employment for the Polish citizens coming from Iran, the social care services had to organize activities in agriculture or local workshops in order to avoid a widespread demoralization of the refugees, as well as their dependency on the institutional charity. Interestingly, the same issues were faced by the international organizations taking care of DPs in Europe, whose personnel were until the 1950s constantly struggling with refugees who were unable to reintegrate into "normal life". A broader approach, taking into account the overall problem of post-war refugeehood, could be an interesting topic in the future studies of the Polish refugee institutions in East Africa.

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