

BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE: A BRIEF COMPARISON OF POLISH REFUGEES' ADMINISTRATIONS IN EAST AFRICA AND LEBANON¹

Mikołaj Murkociński  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2460-7005>

Jagiellonian University, Kraków

ABSTRACT

In 1942, Polish civilians started to flock into Iran after two years of deportation in the USSR. Many of them found refuge in different territories in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, where the representatives of the Polish government-in-exile were faced with a huge task of administering thousands of refugees, mostly women and children. The aim of the present article is to highlight the impact of different refugee policies on the displaced persons' everyday life through a comparative analysis of two different Polish refugee centers in East African territories and Lebanon. Factors such as the local political context, social composition, as well as the level of autonomy granted to refugees were also crucial in the immediate post-war period, when the Polish refugees had to choose between repatriation and emigration.

Keywords: Refugees, World War II, UNRRA, IRO, Poland, Lebanon, Africa.

The massive influx of migrants and refugees to Europe in recent years has sparked a virulent public debate and contributed to a profound reshaping of the political landscape in several European countries.² The question is, in fact, multifaceted, covering subjects such as asylum policies, crisis management, education or housing. Even though commentators often label the present situation as “the worst refugee crisis since the end of World War II,” historical comparisons do not go beyond that

¹ In the present article the term “East Africa” comprises also Northern and Southern Rhodesia, as all matters related to Polish refugees living in these territories were discussed in Nairobi, Kenya.

² In the present article I use the terms “refugee” and “displaced person” as synonyms. Despite some technical differences, international organizations tended to label all individuals under their supervision as “displaced persons.” However, it should be noticed that historically speaking this term was inaccurate in the case of Poles present in East Africa and Lebanon, as they were settled there after their evacuation from the Soviet Union to Iran in 1942.

statement. There is no doubt that since 1945 migration patterns have become more complex. Conflicts have ceased to be the sole cause of mass displacement, while the post-war period has witnessed the multiplication of categories set to characterize new forms of refugeehood.³ The distinction between a refugee and an economic migrant has also become blurred at the time when long-lasting conflicts do not allow a safe return to the country of origin. However, the phenomenon of displaced persons (DPs) and migration became an element of international politics in the aftermath of World War II. The massive refugee crisis in the context of deepening cold war has triggered a reflection on refugeehood and related questions, such as resettlement or repatriation.

Other parallels between the present context and the past could be drawn. The period 1940–1950 was crucial for the constitution of the international humanitarian and refugees aid system. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the International Refugee Administration (IRO) were established respectively in 1943 and 1946, and were the direct predecessors of contemporary refugees institutions. Surprisingly, these past experiences are absent from the process of building contemporary governmental policies designed to cope with the current migration crises. In this context, a comparison of two distinct Polish refugees centers in East Africa and the Middle East during World War II exemplifies the way in which a historical analysis could be useful in today's debate about the refugees crisis management.

Polish nationals constituted the bulk of DPs after the end of World War II. The vast majority of them were war prisoners and forced laborers deported to the Reich during the conflict in order to serve as workforce for the axis war machine. After 1945, most of the DPs camps were scattered across Germany, Austria and Italy. The Polish deportees to the Soviet Union constituted another group of approximately 70,000 civilians, who found refuge in India, Mexico, New Zealand, Africa and the Middle East (Palestine and Lebanon).⁴ In the present article, I shall focus my attention on the case of Polish refugees in East Africa and Lebanon, as these centers were representative of two radically different models of refugee crisis management and social care.

The aim of the article is to compare two types of everyday life that were carried out by the Polish refugees in those two regions. Even though Polish DPs centers in Lebanon and East Africa were established in very different historical and geographical contexts, they also shared several common denominators. The Polish citizens relocated in Africa and in Lebanon had lived through deportation into the Russian interior. Their everyday life was suspended between war and peace: while the main theaters of the conflict unfolded in Europe, the refugees' living conditions were far from being "normal," as the DPs were fully dependent on international charity in

³ C. Audebert, M. Dorai, "International Migration in the Twenty-first Century: Towards New Research Perspectives" [in:] *Migration in a Globalised World: New Research Issues and Prospects*, eds. C. Audebert, M. Dorai, Amsterdam 2010, pp. 203–212 (retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/h.ctt46mwqx.14>).

⁴ J. Pietrzak, *Polscy uchodźcy na Bliskim Wschodzie w latach II wojny światowej. Ośrodki, instytucje, organizacje*, Łódź 2012, p. 81; other overall estimations of the numer of Polish DPs are also to be found in K. Kersten, *Repatriacja ludności polskiej po II wojnie światowej*, Paris 1974.

countries that were utterly exotic to most of them. Also, for most of the refugees in Africa and in the Middle East the war was far from being over after 1945, as the return to the communist Poland proved to be impossible to many of them.

This comparative analysis should determine what factors had a major impact on the refugees' daily routine. They were internal (e.g. the social profile of the group of refugees, their political orientation), as well as external (e.g. political characteristics of hosting territories, contacts with natives). At the end of the war, as Poland fell under the domination of the Soviet Union, other, ideological factors came to play a significant role in refugees' life and in their choices. These variables had a profound influence on the evolution of refugees institutions, on their vision of the post-war future, as well as on their relations with different international refugees organizations. In the context of the growing antagonism between the communist government in Warsaw and the Polish Government-in-Exile in London, politics came to play an important role on a daily basis, as the Polish refugees centers in East Africa and in Lebanon became the field of ferocious ideological confrontations.

While comparing Lebanon and East Africa, it is also my aim to tackle the question of refugees' life planning by dedicated governmental and international institutions, such as UNRRA or IRO. Unemployment, a gradual disappearance of social bonds and the resulting social pathologies necessitated systemic answers from international refugees organizations, whose main goal became the social reinsertion of DPs in the post-war world. While this aspect of everyday life in the refugees camps in Europe has been analyzed in works by Anglo-Saxon historians, such as Daniel Cohen or Anna Holian, the example of Polish refugees centers in Lebanon and East Africa allows us to evaluate the results of UNRRA and IRO policies outside the European context.⁵ Other authors, such as Jessica Reinich or Laura Hilton have focused their research on the development of social care and the implementation of internationalist liberal ideals in the management of the postwar refugees' crisis.⁶ These works provide us with some important sociohistorical perspectives on the question of postwar migrations.

⁵ D. Cohen, *In War's Wake: European Refugees in the Postwar Order*, Oxford 2011; A. Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism, Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany*, Michigan 2011; K. Salomon, *Refugees in the Cold War: Toward a New International Refugee Regime in the Early Postwar Era*, Lund 1991.

⁶ L. Hilton, "Cultural Nationalism in Exile: The Case of Polish and Latvian Displaced Persons," *Historian* 2009, no. 71, pp. 280–317; J. Reinisch, "Internationalism in Relief: The Birth (and Death) of UNRRA," *Past and Present* 2011, no. 210 (suppl. 6), pp. 258–289.

THE ORIGINS AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE POLISH REFUGEEHOOD IN LEBANON AND EAST AFRICA

1. Historic genesis of the Polish refugee communities in East Africa and Lebanon

The invasion of the Soviet Union by the German troops in June 1941 created propitious conditions to reestablish diplomatic relations between the Polish Government-in-Exile in London and Moscow that had been severed in September 1939. After weeks of negotiations under the auspices of the British government, Polish and Russian sides agreed upon a common document known as the “Sikorski-Majski” agreement. The document was signed on 19 July 1941, by the Polish prime minister Władysław Sikorski, and Edward Majski, the Soviet Ambassador to the United Kingdom, in presence of the British Minister of Foreign Affairs Anthony Eden. It established an amnesty for Polish citizens that had been deported to the Soviet interior after 1939 in order to form a new Polish army in the East. The task of forming this new force was delegated to General Władysław Anders, who for this purpose was released from prison by the Soviet authorities. Following Winston Churchill’s secret meetings with Soviet officials, it was agreed that the Polish army would be transferred from the Soviet Union to Iran, to be used for securing the Middle East area. The evacuation campaign, strongly supported by Władysław Anders, took place in two phases, in April and August 1942. Unexpectedly, the army was accompanied by thousands of civilians, who gathered in Kujbyszew (today’s Samara).⁷ While the army, remembered in the Polish national memory as the “army of Anders” was rapidly transferred to Iraq and later on to Palestine, thousands of women, children and elderly persons were stranded in Iran.

Very soon it became evident that refugees should be evacuated from Iran to safer locations under a temporary resettlement plan. First efforts in this direction were formulated by the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Edward Raczynski, who suggested that East African territories could be a potential land of asylum for the remaining of the war.⁸ In the context of the volatile political situation in Iran following the Anglo-Soviet invasion of this country in 1941 and the subsequent toppling of Reza Shah, the presence of Polish civilians in this strategic corridor linking USSR and its western allies was considered as highly problematic by British militaries.⁹ Furthermore, chronic shortages of basic commodities raised fears of discontent and unrest among local population. For the representatives of the Polish government, the harsh Iranian climate posed a real threat for the lives of tens of thousands of Polish refugees flock-

⁷ M. Gałęzowski, *Ewakuacja z nieludzkiej ziemi, armia polska w Iranie i w Iraku*, Warszawa 2017, pp. 11–12.

⁸ Hoover Institution Library and Archives (HILA), 800/42/0/-/530, Refugees, memorandum from E. Raczynski to A. Cadogan, 24 April 1942.

⁹ J. Pietrzak, *Polscy uchodźcy na Bliskim Wschodzie*, p. 84.

ing into the coastal town of Pahlevi after two years spent in the Russian interior. As the Poles were continuously arriving to Persia, the British hastily explored potential locations willing to accept refugees.

On 7 July 1942, the Polish Embassy in London was informed by the British side about the decision to move Polish refugees from Iran to British colonial territories in East Africa.¹⁰ More specifically, Tanganyika and Uganda were considered as optimal places for temporary settlement for Polish refugees. Soon afterwards other African countries declared their readiness to participate in the relocation scheme.¹¹ Despite persisting uncertainty as for the logistical organization of the transfer to Africa, decisions needed to be taken as fast as possible in order to cope with the swelling numbers of refugees in Iran. However, it became clear that East African territories and later India would not be able to accept all Polish refugees still present in Iran. Moreover, difficulties in organizing refugees' convoys to these areas slowed the evacuation pace.

Since 1944 Lebanon had become the increasingly interesting destination to relocate the Polish DPs present in Iran. Although the newly independent country remained under the political control of the Allies until the end of the war, the very early recognition of its independence by the Polish Government-in-Exile was of deep importance for the Polish community present there until 1950. Africa received the bulk of Polish refugees, whose number reached 18,000 by 1945.¹² Conversely, Lebanon was one the smallest centers with approximately 4,300 people at its apogee.¹³

2. Refugees centers: opposing models

The development of Polish settlements in East Africa and Lebanon occurred in two different historical contexts and purposes. The first contingents of Polish refugees started to pour into Africa at a regular pace since August 1942 by groups of roughly 1,500 people.¹⁴ Conversely, Lebanon received the bulk of refugees coming from Iran in 1946, most of whom arrived to the Country of Cedars by small transports. In fact, the Polish settlements in East Africa were primarily conceived as shelters, where refugees could live until the end of the war in settlements away from bigger urban centers. The construction of several camps was planned in different locations, in Uganda, Tanganyika, and later in Southern and Northern Rhodesia. Some of them were to be built *ex nihilo* in places imposed to the Polish authorities by local

¹⁰ HILA, 800/42/0/-/530, Refugees, "Notes from the discussion between Ruciński and Randall at the Foreign Office in London on 7 July 1942."

¹¹ HILA, 800/42/0/-/237, Telegrams between Ministry and Poland's foreign representations, telegram from J. Chmieliński to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 12 October 1942.

¹² H. Zins, *Polacy w Afryce Wschodniej*, Lublin 1978, p. 43.

¹³ Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London (PISM), A 11 E 761, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych – Korespondencja z placówkami: Liban, Z. Zawadowski to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London, 28 May 1945.

¹⁴ HILA, 800/42/0/-/235, Telegrams between Ministry and Poland's foreign representations, telegrams between Wiktor Styburski and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 1942.

governments, while in Tanganyika it was proposed to accommodate the Poles in the already existing infrastructure of disused internment camps previously housing Italian and German citizens.¹⁵ Special Polish representatives of the Polish government were sent to East Africa in July 1942 in order to prepare the arrival of first Polish refugees from Iran.¹⁶ Not all locations were suitable for Europeans, especially in Uganda, where malaria and other tropical diseases were common.¹⁷ However, the remarks formulated by Polish experts did not have any meaningful influence on the final decisions that were taken by the Governors' Conference uniting the governors of British colonial territories in East Africa.

The new camps were designed in a way to minimize the risk of tropical diseases and to provide all necessary infrastructures to house thousands of refugees. It was planned that the Polish settlements will be isolated from the rest of the country and will be partially self-sufficient thanks to agricultural and artisanal activities employing the refugees themselves.¹⁸ A typical camp was composed of individual houses made of mud with small gardens to be allocated to refugees. It also included other structures, such as school, church, hospital, canteens, as well as the residence of the British Camp Commander. The British and the Polish authorities expected that most refugees would be able to work in the camp administration and agriculture. The representatives of the Polish Ministry of Labor and Social Care (Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej – MPiOS) were convinced that farmers and workers could easily adapt to harsh African conditions and hard work.¹⁹

The idea of placing refugees in Lebanon was born almost two years after the first Poles were settled in Africa.²⁰ In this case, giving shelter was not the only *raison d'être* of the new Polish center. Unlike in East Africa, the decision about the refugee population resettlement was not undertaken in a situation of immediate crisis and was therefore carefully planned and debated among the Polish authorities. After the departure of the bulk of refugees to Africa in 1943, the problem of Poles in Iran had still not been entirely solved. The idea of requesting the Lebanese government to accept small groups was proposed in late 1943, as there was a growing pressure to evacuate the remaining refugees from Iran.²¹ The diplomats working at the Polish consulate in Beirut insisted that Lebanon was a place where Polish students could continue their studies interrupted by the conflict. Three universities located in Beirut (the American

¹⁵ Archiwum Akt Nowych in Warsaw (AAN), 101, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej Rządu RP (emigracyjnego) w Londynie, letter to S. Kot, 15 December 1942.

¹⁶ HILA, 800/42/0/-/245, telegram from S. Kot to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 6 August 1942.

¹⁷ AAN, 109, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej (MPiOS), report by M. Wierusz-Kowalski from his visit to Polish camps in East Africa, 1942.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ HILA, 800/42/-/0/244, Telegrams between Ministry and Poland's foreign representations, telegram from Karol Bader to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 14 July 1942.

²⁰ PISM, A 18 7, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej: Protokoły z konferencji Komisji Międzyministerialnej do spraw uchodźczych, notes from the meeting of the Interministerial Commission for refugees, 14–17 January 1944.

²¹ PISM, A 11 E 762, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych – Korespondencja z placówkami: Liban, telegram from Z. Zawadowski to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 19 July 1946.

University of Beirut, the French Saint-Joseph University and the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts) agreed to accept a limited number of Polish refugees, whose tuition fees were covered by the Government-in-Exile.²² Other arguments were put forward by the Polish authorities in Beirut, such as the clement Mediterranean climate and a good cultural environment: approximately half of the Lebanese population was Christian.²³

All Polish refugees arriving to Lebanon needed to obtain a regular visa through the diplomatic mission in Beirut.²⁴ Unlike in Africa, they were to be housed in individual apartments within the existing urban structures of villages in a 50 km radius around Beirut, as well as in Beirut itself. For this purpose, the representatives of the Polish government inspected several locations, taking into consideration criteria such as climate, sectarian composition and distance from the capital.²⁵

3. External factors: the local political context

The establishment of refugee centers and their organizational pattern depended mostly from social and political conditions in the territories welcoming the refugees. The question of the political status (independent country or colony) became particularly important after the end of World War II, when the United Kingdom recognized the new communist government in Warsaw as the sole representative of the Polish people in July 1945, at the expense of the Polish Government-in-Exile in London. At that point, His Majesty's government became responsible for the fate of the Polish refugees outside Europe. While the British took over the control of Polish consular and social care institutions, most of the experienced Polish staff continued to fulfill their duties for practical reasons. By using this leverage, the Polish Government-in-Exile could still exert a real influence on Polish affairs in Africa and Lebanon. However, the level of autonomy enjoyed by the Poles varied according to local political conditions.

Since the very beginning of the Polish presence in East Africa the British authorities were keen to maintain control on refugees questions, despite the fact that the Polish Government-in-Exile was legally responsible for all of its citizens. In fact, the Poles arrived to Africa at the moment when the war effort and racial policies were contributing to the growing discontent in the British-controlled colonies and protectorates. The Polish authorities were confronted with different policies relative to

²² PISM, A 11 E 760, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych – Korespondencja z placówkami: Liban, letter Z. Zawadowski to Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning the Polish students in Lebanon, 1 July 1948.

²³ PISM, A 11 E 365, Wewnętrzne sprawy placówki, report on refugees in the Middle East, undated, p. 3.

²⁴ PISM, A 11 E 365, Wewnętrzne sprawy placówki, telegrams sent by Zawadowski to London, informing about entry visas to Lebanon, 1944.

²⁵ *Pod cedrami Libanu*, eds. B. Redzisz, H. Adamiak-Wagner, H. Chojecka-Szeremet, London 1994, p. 389.

refugees, as each East African territory had a certain degree of autonomy in managing this question. Kenya, whose capital Nairobi was the center of East African institutions, initially has not accepted permanent Polish settlements.²⁶ Other territories such as Uganda or Tanganyika, which officially were only British protectorates, were less reluctant in offering assistance.

While the Polish authorities were technically co-opted in taking vital decisions regarding the refugees community in East Africa, in practice their influence was very weak. The relations with local governments were greatly impaired by linguistic limitations, which were at the origin of several conflicts opposing Polish consular authorities and territorial departments for refugees. The first crisis involving both sides erupted in the early days of 1943, when the director for the refugees in Uganda openly admitted that the Poles present on his territory should be treated as interned persons.²⁷ Although the robust intervention of the Polish representatives resulted in forcing him to back down from his statements, the situation of Polish refugees worsened in 1944, when it became evident that a new communist government would reshape the Polish political scene.

It would not be an aberration to say that the British colonial authorities and local territorial governments had never allowed the Poles to enjoy a certain level of autonomy in East Africa. In this respect Lebanon presented a completely different situation. Good relations between Lebanon and the Polish Government-in-Exile were sealed in 1944, when Poland became one of the first countries to recognize the independent Lebanon. Interestingly, this initiative was led by the Polish Consul General in Beirut, Zygmunt Zawadowski, who decided to recognize Lebanon without any instruction from the Polish government.²⁸ The latter was under pressure from the British foreign office, urging it not to meddle in the Lebanese questions.²⁹ Therefore, the British, as well as international refugees agencies could not exert a full control on the Polish refugees in Lebanon, as the authorities in Beirut established diplomatic relations with the Polish communist government in Warsaw as late as 1956. Many British representatives and later UNRRA and IRO field officers suggested that the Lebanese authorities should recognize the Warsaw government in order to delegitimize the pro-London Polish legation in Beirut and therefore to transmit the full control over refugees matters to British and international institutions.

²⁶ However, Kenya hosted several transitional camps on its territory.

²⁷ AAN, 101, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej Rządu RP (emigracyjnego) w Londynie, report from Polish Consul to Uganda concerning tensions with Colonial authorities in Uganda, 28 January 1943.

²⁸ J. Pietrzak, *Polscy uchodźcy na Bliskim Wschodzie*, p. 135.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

A LITTLE POLAND ABROAD

1. Social characteristics of Polish refugees settlements overseas

The Polish refugees present in Iran at the end of 1942 originated mostly from Eastern parts of pre-war Poland, which fell under the Soviet occupation in September 1939. These people were deported towards the interior of the USSR between 1939 and 1940. The trauma of the years spent on the Soviet soil shaped the staunchly anti-communist political orientation of the refugees coming to Iran in 1942. However, the group was far from being homogenous, as refugees originated from different social and professional backgrounds. It was dominated by farmers and workers, but it also comprised many representatives of the pre-war intelligentsia, such as actors or academic scholars. Even though there are no accounts indicating that refugees were resettled according to their social affiliation, the Polish centers in the Middle East attracted more intellectuals than those in Africa.³⁰

There was no official policy regulating the repartition of refugees among different centers. Nevertheless, Polish officials in Africa were complaining about those intellectuals, who managed to secure resettlement in Palestine or in Lebanon through their personal contacts.³¹ Very early the MPiOS Polish delegates in East Africa advised the Polish Minister for Middle Eastern Affairs in Cairo about the lack of specialized cadres with a satisfactory level of English that would help in managing the camps.³² They were asking for sending from Iran a group of educated refugees, especially with strong linguistic skills, in order to enhance the dialogue with the local colonial authorities.³³ The lack of competent employees in consulates and in Polish settlements was so important that very often people with no previous experience were asked to perform administrative tasks.³⁴ Undoubtedly this resulted in the weakening of the Polish position in talks with the British authorities.

Though the Polish refugees centers outside Europe were very diverse, especially regarding their inhabitants' everyday life, they shared numerous social and organizational patterns. Unlike in DP camps in Europe, the Polish refugees' communities in Africa and in the Middle East were dominated by women and children.³⁵ Most of them were relatives of soldiers fighting in the Polish Army in the East. In addition, an important number of orphans were evacuated from the Soviet Union, thus present-

³⁰ PISM, KOL 380/IVB, Uchodźstwo Polskie w Libanie, „Parada,” January 1946, no. 4, p. 2.

³¹ AAN, 101, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej Rządu RP (emigracyjnego) w Londynie, letter from N. Szyszkowski to S. Kot, 1943.

³² AAN, 101, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej Rządu RP (emigracyjnego) w Londynie, letter from K. Kazimierzak to S. Skąpski concerning organizational questions in East Africa, 15 December 1942.

³³ PISM, A 11 E 705, Sprawozdania Placówek: Europa, Australia, Ameryka, Afryka i Azja, report from Polish Consulate in Dar es Salaam, 2 January 1944, p. 11.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ J. Pietrzak, *Polscy uchodźcy na Bliskim Wschodzie*, p. 95.

ing the Polish authorities with the task of organizing effective childcare institutions. Most of these children were accepted in India, New Zealand and the Union of South Africa.³⁶ Various data show that men represented only approximately 10% of the total population of civilian refugees in Iran.³⁷ They were mostly unable to be enrolled in the newly constituted army of General Anders, either because they were elderly, or weakened by illness. This domination of women was particularly problematic in East Africa, where it was planned to develop an important agricultural activity for the purpose of producing basic foodstuffs. Even though it was expected that women will not be dispensed from working in the fields, Kazimierz Kazimierczak, the head of the MPiOS in East Africa, requested sending him from Palestine a group of 300 men with experience in farming, who would help in some preliminary works requiring physical force.³⁸

In Lebanon, as well as in Africa, the refugees received monthly allowances, independently from the care they were provided by refugees organizations. Significantly, the monthly allowance per capita in Lebanon was one of the highest, reaching 12 sterling pounds/month. In Africa, this allowance was not higher than 8 sterling pounds/month.³⁹ In the late 1940s, this discrepancy was one of the main arguments used by IRO to shut down as fast as possible the refugees center in Lebanon. The main reason explaining this gap was the choice of two completely different types of inserting the refugees in their land of asylum. According to a widely-shared opinion, the closed settlements could also reduce the costs of refugees' maintenance.

2. Contact with locals and the question of refugees' autonomy

The question regarding the relationship between governmental or non-governmental authorities and the refugees has been explored by many historians working on post-war DPs' crisis. Critics of national and international refugees institutions were particularly vocal in denouncing their object-like attitude towards the refugees.⁴⁰ In fact, the Polish authorities and later different international refugees organizations acting in Lebanon and East Africa were trying to establish a full control not only over refugees, but also over their everyday life. A very dense correspondence by the MPiOS employees testifies that the camps authorities were planning not only housing or occupation, but also calories ratio per refugee and their entertainment program.

³⁶ J. Wróbel, *Uchodźcy Polscy ze Związku Sowieckiego 1942–1950*, Łódź 2003, p. 157.

³⁷ J. Pietrzak, *Polscy uchodźcy na Bliskim Wschodzie*, p. 95.

³⁸ AAN, 101, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej Rządu RP (emigracyjnego) w Londynie, letter from M. Wierusz-Kowalski to S. Kot, 28 December 1942.

³⁹ International Refugees Organization (IRO), AJ/43/1055, Middle East, list of monthly allowances in 1947 in Palestine/Lebanon and East Africa.

⁴⁰ The problem of dehumanization of the refugees in the language of the international refugees agendas has been discussed in D. Cohen, "Naissance d'une nation : les personnes déplacées de l'après-guerre, 1945–1951," *Geneses* 2000, 38, p. 63, <https://doi.org/10.3406/genes.2000.1608> [access: 28.05.2018].

Crucially, the movements of the refugees outside the camps were subjected to the strict control of British camp commanders.

The contact with locals was a substantial subject to be addressed by the refugees authorities. Personal testimonies and records by former refugees in Africa or in the Middle East give us an ample view of the contacts with an extremely exotic environment.⁴¹ Almost all recollections are very positive and underline the intercultural character of these friendships that occurred more frequently among children and students both in East Africa and Lebanon. In practice however, those contacts with natives were limited because of cultural and linguistic differences. Any signs of racism or suspicion towards natives were absent from the Polish official discourse. In East Africa, the refugees who requested black domestic servants were very criticized by the camp commanders.⁴² During his visit in Lebanon in June 1943, General Sikorski urged his compatriots to apprehend their stay in exotic countries as an enriching experience and an opportunity to learn from other cultures, and not to perceive it solely as a refuge. All discriminatory or racist behavior was condemned, as it could harm the reputation of refugees community and the overall Polish national interest.⁴³

In East Africa, where refugees were confined in isolated settlements, the opportunities to forge bonds with autochthones were limited. Unlike in Lebanon, the environment in Africa was considered as unfriendly by the government's representatives. This was especially true after two years of Polish presence in Africa, as the existence of refugees camps was blamed for skyrocketing prices of goods on the local market.⁴⁴ Thus, a careful scrutiny of all movements in and out of the camps was all the more important. The British authorities expected from the Poles a strict compliance to the racial rules that were imposed in some territories (such as South Rhodesia). A number of complaints were formulated by the white population about the contacts between Poles and local black population.⁴⁵ The strict separation between blacks and whites proved to be especially problematic when the new structures of the camps were built, as Polish workers could not perform works that had to be assigned to natives.⁴⁶

⁴¹ These testimonies are especially numerous in the case of Polish refugees in East Africa, whose records are collected by the Centrum Dokumentacji Zsyłek, Wypędzeń i Przesiedleń w Krakow. Conversely, there is no recent compilation of refugees' recollections in the Middle East. However, in the case of Lebanon, an important effort was made by the refugees themselves during and after their stay there in order to collect all necessary material that could be used by historians in the future.

⁴² AAN, 101, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej Rządu RP (emigracyjnego) w Londynie, letter from K. Kazimierzczak to S. Kot, 13 December 1943.

⁴³ J. Ciechanowski, "Konferencja Generała Sikorskiego w Bejrucie 23 kwietnia 1943," *Zeszyty Historyczne* 1985, no. 74, p. 139–148.

⁴⁴ AAN, 112, Korespondencja i okólniki w sprawach oszczędzania przez uchodźców polskich w Afryce Wschodniej i w Indiach 1943–1944, letter from British Foreign Office to Polish Ministry of Finance concerning refugees' economies, 9 November 1943.

⁴⁵ AAN, 101, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej Rządu RP (emigracyjnego) w Londynie, report by K. Kazimierzczak to S. Kot, 13 December 1943.

⁴⁶ AAN, 101, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej Rządu RP (emigracyjnego) w Londynie, report by K. Kazimierzczak about the situation in East Africa, 18 January 1943.

In the “Country of the Cedar” the life of refugees did not differ from normal living conditions in peacetime. This was particularly true in Beirut, which offered the anonymity and all kinds of distraction that could be found in a capital city. In spite of continuous efforts of the Polish Legation to maintain a strict control over the Polish community in Lebanon, the refugees were in fact immersed in local environment and culture. In Beirut, the Poles had to find an accommodation on their own (unlike in villages in Mount Lebanon) and could count only on limited help from the legation and the representatives of the MPiOS.⁴⁷ Polish students used public transportation to go to the University, shopped in local markets and could go to local cinemas, whose repertoires in Africa were strictly controlled by camp commanders. Unsurprisingly, in their recollections of the time spent in Lebanon, the former Polish students offer a very warm account of their excellent contact with Lebanese people, in a country which is portrayed as a “paradise on earth.”

3. How to activate the refugees?

The question of the refugees professional activation was one of the fundamental problems faced by governmental and international organizations. It was argued that on a long term, individuals confined in camps and dependent from financial and material aids were becoming incapable to reintegrate the society after their return to “normal life.”⁴⁸ The Polish authorities had the duty to organize an occupation for all refugees so they could remain *homo economicus* after the war.⁴⁹ In Africa, like in Germany or Austria, the camps authorities were confronted with the rise of negative phenomena, such as alcoholism or prostitution. The problem of criminals and prostitutes was strong enough to alarm the representatives of the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Care in Nairobi.⁵⁰ These issues were practically inexistent in Lebanon.

In Lebanon, as well as in East Africa, there was a real effort in looking for potential employment for refugees on the local labor market. In East African territories, the primary goal at the inception of Polish refugees camps in 1942 was to create employment for their occupants in agricultural units and the settlements’ administration. This strategy could not be applied in Lebanon, although an idea to establish a Polish farm in the Bekaa Valley was floated in 1945.⁵¹ In theory, the Poles were forbidden to interfere in any manner in the economy of hosting countries, including labor market. However, both in Lebanon and in East Africa there were many exceptions made by

⁴⁷ I. Beaupre-Stankiewicz, *My i Oni*, London 1991, pp. 88–89.

⁴⁸ IRO, AJ/43/1056, Middle Est, comment of the letter from the Polish Refugee Office in Beirut to IRO, 4 February 1948, p. 2.

⁴⁹ AAN, 101, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej Rządu RP (emigracyjnego) w Londynie, letter from Szyszkowski to S. Kot, 1943.

⁵⁰ AAN, 101, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej Rządu RP (emigracyjnego) w Londynie, report concerning the situation in Africa, K. Kazimierzczak to S. Kot, 18 January 1943.

⁵¹ PISM, A 11 E 761, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych – Korespondencja z placówkami: Liban, R. Gilar, report concerning the possibility of employing Polish refugees in Lebanon, 2 July 1946.

the local authorities. In Africa, a significant number of Polish women were employed in the Royal Air Force in Kenia as ground staff, while others were sought by British families looking for domestic workers.⁵²

However, refugees were also employable on more specialized positions, especially in Rhodesia, where skilled workers were needed in the Copper belt area. In Lebanon, several studies of job opportunities were conducted by the employees of the Polish Legation in the context of the departure of French and British cadres. A report dating from 1946 stated that Polish specialists could be employed in works related to infrastructure development (particularly railways) as well as engineering projects (such as the urban development of Damascus).⁵³ In some cases, the refugees studying at the Lebanese universities could easily obtain a work permit.⁵⁴

The employment of Polish refugees was also considered as a potential propaganda tool to improve the image of the refugees in the eyes of the hosting countries. The example of women working in the RAF in Africa was widely used by Polish officials in articles published in local newspapers.⁵⁵ In Lebanon, each student willing to continue studies at one of the universities had to consult his choice with the educational department at the Polish Legation in Beirut. Unsurprisingly, the Polish officials privileged scientific studies, such as medicine or engineering, as it was expected that specialists in these fields would be needed in the post-war Poland. From the point of view of the refugees themselves, scientific studies could be easier as humanities required good knowledge of English and French language.

GOVERNANCE AND AUTHORITY IN THE POLISH REFUGEES' CENTERS IN EAST AFRICA AND LEBANON

1. Towards an institutionalization of refugees

The establishment of an institutional framework in refugees centers was a means for the Polish authorities to assert the control over their citizens. After 1945 these institutions were crucial in preserving the pro-London representatives' grip on refugees. Thus, the level of institutionalization of the refugees had a proportional im-

⁵² AAN, 101, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej Rządu RP (emigracyjnego) w Londynie, report concerning the situation in Africa, sent to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London, 3 March 1943.

⁵³ PISM, A 11 E 761, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych – Korespondencja z placówkami: Liban, R. Gilar, report concerning the possibility of employing Polish refugees in Lebanon, 2 July 1946.

⁵⁴ Many recollections by the refugees present in Lebanon were compiled in *Pod cedrami Libanu*.

⁵⁵ AAN, 101, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej Rządu RP (emigracyjnego) w Londynie, report concerning the situation in Africa, sent to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London, 3 March 1943.

pact on their political weight when decisions concerning their future were taken by UNRRA and IRO.

The most heterogeneous institutions were to be found in Lebanon. This burgeoning was partly explained by the presence of many pre-war Polish intellectuals, such as Stanisław Kościałkowski, professor of history at the Stephan Batory University in Vilnius.⁵⁶ The Polish community was extremely institutionalized through a number of associations, political clubs, and religious societies. The student association “Bratniak” was the most important refugees’ organization, whose mission was to organize cultural events, but also to help the poorest students in Beirut.⁵⁷ In parallel, several other cultural institutions were set up, such as the Polish Institute in Beirut, a direct continuation of the Polish Institute for Polish-Iranian studies that had been inaugurated in Teheran in 1942.⁵⁸ The institute included a new publishing house “Cedr i Orzeł,” whose mission was to perpetuate the history of Polish refugees in the Middle East. Other thematic clubs were widespread in Lebanon and in Africa.⁵⁹

The youth education also played an important role in the refugees’ everyday life, as children under the age of 18 made an important part of the population. The formation of schools and high schools was of special concern for the Polish authorities. The recurrent problem in both locations was the chronic lack of teachers, which had a negative impact on the quality of schooling.⁶⁰ Beside a system of schools present in all Polish settlements, scouting was also widespread since the very beginning of the Polish refugeehood in Africa and the Middle East. The setting up of scout formations was one of the first actions undertaken by the Polish authorities in the process of establishing a new refugees center. In his letter to Stanisław Kot, Kazimierz Kazimierzczak was mentioning a well-organized Polish scout formation in all settlements in Africa, even though most of the camps were still under development.⁶¹ Numerous accounts, from both Africa and Lebanon, were left by former scouts. Another youth-dedicated institution was the YMCA, which was running centers for youth as well as special canteens. The initiatives undertaken by this organization were continuously sabotaged by some representatives of the catholic clergy, labeling the YMCA as a tool in the hands of the Protestants.⁶²

The institutionalization of the refugees was also an important task from a social point of view, as it prepared them for the after-war civil activity. However, very often initiatives such as elections of refugees representatives were ignored. For instance,

⁵⁶ S. Kościałkowski authored *Les Polonais et leurs relations avec le Liban à travers les siècles* published in Beirut in 1953.

⁵⁷ See *Pod cedrami Libanu*.

⁵⁸ J. Draus, R. Terlecki, *Polskie szkoły wyższe i instytucje naukowe na emigracji 1939–1945*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź 1984, p. 24.

⁵⁹ These clubs could range from professional associations (e.g. the advocates association in Beirut), political organizations, to clubs uniting people from the same geographic areas.

⁶⁰ K. Kantak, *Dzieje uchodźstwa polskiego w Libanie 1943–1950*, Beirut 1955, p. 120.

⁶¹ AAN, 101, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej Rządu RP (emigracyjnego) w Londynie, letter from K. Kazimierzczak to S. Kot, 13 December 1943.

⁶² AAN, 104, Ministerstwo Pracy i Opieki Społecznej, letter from K. Kazimierzczak to Polish Consulate General, 7 June 1944.

in Africa, the Polish camp commander was selected by the delegates of the MPiOS. Lebanon was an exception, as the elections of refugees' representatives were much more "democratic."⁶³ The community leaders were present at regular meetings with British and Lebanese officials concerning refugees' affairs.

2. To control a refugee community, an ideological challenge?

Despite the recognition of the communist government in Warsaw in 1945 by western powers, the Polish refugees authorities in Africa and in Lebanon did not accept the outcome of the war. As an overwhelming majority of Polish refugees in both locations were staunchly anti-communist, all attempts to repatriate them to Poland carried out by UNRRA or IRO were to no avail. During his visit in the Koja settlement, Uganda, Jacobs, the UNRRA officer in charge of refugees' registration, faced a very hostile attitude of the Poles towards the idea of repatriation.⁶⁴ The Polish consul to Uganda had to be present in order to calm the crowds. The refugees agreed to register under the condition of not mentioning the potential destination of repatriation while filling the registration form.⁶⁵ Although the repatriation campaigns proved to be more effective in East Africa than in Lebanon, the rate of people returning to Poland did not reach 10%.

After 1945, the refugees centers became the flashpoints of an ideological war for the souls of the refugees waged by the Polish Government-in-Exile and the new communist authorities in Warsaw. The general anti-communist mood of ancient deportees to Siberia helped the London government to develop an effective propaganda apparatus, using for this purpose the refugees institutions and media outlets. In Lebanon, "Bratniak" students' association was criticized for insufficient involvement in promoting the "truth" about the totalitarian character of the new regime in Warsaw.⁶⁶ At the same time, the spreading of Polish communist propaganda in Lebanon and East Africa was practically impossible. Such attempts (encouraged by UNRRA, whose representatives were often accused to have communist sympathies) were met with stiff resistance from the refugees, even leading to riots, as it was the case in camps in East Africa. The Polish press under the supervision of Polish legations, such as "Przelotem" in Lebanon or "Polak w Afryce" in Africa, was abundant and hostile towards the government in Warsaw. The attachment to the legal government was also exposed at various occasions, such as the celebration of Marshal Piłsudski's birthday.

We should not overestimate the place attributed to political and ideological conflict within the refugees communities. In their daily routine, refugees were more in-

⁶³ *Polak w Libanie*, May 1949, RIII, no. 4/40, p. 16, comment on elections to the refugees communities in Lebanon.

⁶⁴ PISM, A 11 E 537, Uchodźcy: Afryka Wschodnia, report from the UNRRA representative visit in Uganda on 25 January 1945.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ PISM, A 11 E 761, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych – Korespondencja z placówkami: Liban, letter from Z. Zawadowski to the Ministry of Education, 22 March 1947.

terested in questions such as studies or daily subsistence. Similarly, political choices and sympathies were not the main factor explaining the return to Poland or, in the contrary, refusal of repatriation. More prosaic arguments could prevail: the impossibility to return home now located in the Soviet Union; emigration or repatriation of relatives; illness; facilitation of migration if the husband or brother fought in the ranks of Polish forces (as they and their families were entitled to receive pensions from the British government).

CONCLUSION

The history of Polish war refugees evacuated from the Soviet Union to Iran is very often considered as a curiosity of the World War II. A comparison between Polish refugees communities in Lebanon and East Africa is challenging due to very important differences in their size and geographic scope. However, it proves to be relevant in an attempt to analyze the processes of establishing refugees centers and sheds light on notions such as refugees settlements management or the degree of refugees' autonomy. Both cases can be analyzed in the light of the urban refugeehood vs. camp refugeehood pattern that has been described in recent years. This comparison also helps us to understand the Polish DPs hostile attitude towards the new communist Poland after the war and their ability to influence any decisions setting their fate in the post-war world.

The historical context in which a settlement had been established defined the daily routine of thousands of refugees. In Africa, where the first settlements were set up as early as August 1942, the Polish and British authorities made the choice to place Polish civilians in isolated camps. This entailed central planning, often compared by the refugees to the confinement in internment camps, a strict control over refugees' internal organizations or political propaganda. In this, the refugees settlements in East Africa were the precursors of the infamous DP camps in Germany, Austria and Italy, where millions were amassed in old prisoners camps under the supervision of UNRRA and IRO. Conversely, central planning of the new Polish settlement in the Country of Cedars was virtually impossible, as the Polish refugees enjoyed full freedom of movement and a relative autonomy. The Polish authorities in East Africa saw some advantages in reducing the living space of refugees to isolated camps. In fact, the maximal limitation of refugees' autonomy was in the interest of all governmental and international organizations. For the colonial administration and United Nations refugees organizations this control was suitable in order to ramp up the rates of repatriation by preventing the spread of propaganda hostile towards the new communist regimes. For the Polish Government-in-Exile, it was critical to protect the Polish refugees from all communist propaganda that could erode its legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens.

The stance of asylum countries regarding the question of the political evolutions in Poland, especially after the establishment of the communist temporary government

in Warsaw, was also crucial for the refugees' situation after the end of the war. In East Africa, where the Polish representatives had been submitted to the British colonial authorities, the official structures of the Polish government-in-exile were dismantled almost immediately after the recognition by His Majesty's government of the Polish authorities in Warsaw as the legitimate representatives of the Polish people. The position of the Polish authorities in Lebanon was much more comfortable, as Lebanon refused to recognize the Warsaw government until 1956. Thus, the Polish envoy to Beirut enjoyed full legitimacy and could use this fact as a leverage against the British Foreign Office and UNRRA or IRO. Undoubtedly, this difference explains the very late departure of the last Polish refugees from Lebanon in 1950 and the failure of all repatriation and relocation campaigns.

The case of Polish refugees in East Africa and Lebanon highlights the failure of international refugees institutions such as UNRRA or IRO to cope with smaller DPs centers located outside Europe. The two organizations were unable to solve the problem of thousands of civilians who refused to be repatriated to the new communist Poland. While the remote location entailing logistical issues partly explain these shortcomings, a lack of proper understanding of the refugees' political affinities by UNRRA and IRO officers had undoubtedly impeded their actions in Lebanon and East Africa. In reality, the two agencies neither did have the means nor the procedures regarding smaller *hard-core* refugees' centers. Both organizations faced accusations of transforming human beings into mere statistical figures, thus ignoring the refugees' needs and their legitimate reservations about any repatriation plans. This was especially the case in Lebanon, where UNRRA and IRO personnel were confronted with a staunchly anti-communist Polish community spread in different locations of the country.

Finally, the freedom enjoyed by the Polish refugees in Lebanon and its limitations in East Africa partly explains the different processes of memorization. The history of the Polish community in Lebanon was enshrined by the refugees associations, such as the Association of Polish Students in Beirut in London. Interestingly, a similar documentation was not performed by former refugees in Africa. Undoubtedly, the question of memorization by the refugees should be taken into consideration by historians as one of the facets of the history of war migrations and refugeehood.

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