

**Jochen Lingelbach, *On the Edges of Whiteness: Polish Refugees in British Colonial Africa during and after the Second World War*, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2020, 306 p.**

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**R**efugees from eastern Poland travelled the world as they found refuge in places as far dispersed as in Iran, India, Britain, Canada, Australia and on the African continent. About 20,000 of them found sanctuary in Britain's African colonies Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya and Northern and Southern Rhodesia between 1942 and 1967. This book tells their story. It skillfully does so by paying attention to their complex roles in colonial societies and the diverse relationships that developed between the refugees and the British colonizers, settler populations, and African workers and neighbors. The very presence of groups of white refugees in Africa runs counter to conventional images of colonial societies. As the evocative title of the book suggests, Polish refugees took up a place "on the edges of whiteness," simultaneously white but also marked as in-between the world of the British colonizers and that of the African subjects. This study reveals the importance of race for the maintenance of hierarchies in colonial societies, for the allocation of support within the contemporary refuge regime, and exposes the careful construction and daily contestation of racial boundaries.

Jochen Lingelbach sheds light on an underexplored aspect of the global refugee crises of the World War II era and late colonial period in five chapters plus introduction and conclusion. We already learn in the preface that a conversation with Mzee Asman, a resident of the Kijitonyama neighborhood of Dar es Salaam in 2009, sent him down the path of exploring the Polish refugee presence in Africa. It is this contextualization and attention to place and time that is among the book's many strengths. As Jochen Lingelbach reviews, much ink has been spilled on the story of Polish refugees the world over. It has been told as integral part of Polish national history, as immigration histories of resettlement countries, and, much less and only in article form, as an African colonial history (p. 3-5). It is here that the monograph makes its contribution by bringing into a single frame the different African colonies. Through a focus on colonial social history, it reveals the many fault lines along gender, religious, class, and race lines that were brought to the fore by the Polish presence.

Not long ago, people fled from Europe to find safety in Africa. The introduction carefully situates the study in time and place both historically and historiographically, lays out its motivating questions, discusses its sources and goal to write "an entangled history of colonial whiteness" (p. 5) through a multidimensional global history approach, a bold promise, which the book convincingly keeps. To tell such a global story, visits in archives in London, Dar es Salaam, Nairobi, and Paris became necessary to capture the perspectives of



the British colonial administration, the Polish refugees, and the International Refugee Organization (IRO). Moreover, Jochen Lingelbach conducted 9 interviews in Tanzania and Uganda with Africans who worked in Polish refugee settlements or remembered their stay. He discusses the benefits and shortcomings of these sources (p. 221-223) and carefully analyzes the – sometimes contradictory – claims, the rumors and many roles in which the Poles appeared to the Africans, who worked for them or lived in their vicinity, and thus paints a varied picture of Polish-African and refugee-host interaction, ranging from the economic, to the religious, to the affectionate spheres.

The heterogeneous nature of the group known as Polish refugees and their varied experiences across British Africa are part of a global history of refuge-seeking in which refugee status intersects with other social categorizations. Chapters 1-3 bring the reader up to speed regarding the necessary historical background and contextualization of the case study, while chapters 4 & 5 delve into the context of the refugee camps. Chapter 1 lays out the prehistory of the Polish refugees and the various refugee settlements across Africa and tells of their permanent resettlement once their Africa years came to an end after the war. Chapter 2 engages the postwar refugee regime mainly through the IRO, involved in the case between 1947 and 1950, arguing that the IRO officials' technocratic and universalist understanding of their interaction with refugees diverged from those of colonial administrators. Chapter 3 brings the national history of the refugees into relief, comparing colonialisms in Africa and Poland and stressing that "East is not South" (p. 123). In Chapter 4 the reader gains a better understanding of the living conditions in the settlements with a focus on the gendered story of refuge-seeking. Women emerge both as independent actors, e.g., marrying against the wishes of the colonial and IRO administrators to be able to set down roots in Africa, but simultaneously as dependent on Polish male soldiers. The Polish army, which was constituted to fight against the axis powers after the Sikorski-Maisky agreement in 1941 freed Polish citizens from labor camps and Prisons in the USSR, was the very reason for the protection of their families by the British in temporary "wartime homes" (p. 29). Male Polish and British administrators saw Polish women as both asset in stabilizing the Polish community and potentially a threat to that community and the broader white colonial society through transgressive behavior, such as sexual relations with Africans. Despite women and children making up the largest percentile of the refugee populations – only 11 % of the Polish refugees in Africa were men (p. 133) – a more substantive treatment of the issue of child refugees, on par with Chapter 4 for female refugees, is missing. We learn of the potential for the topic e.g., through mentions of the Polish Children's Centre in Oudtshoorn in the South African Union, the Polish School Centre at Diggelford in Southern Rhodesia, and of orphans from Tengeru in Tanzania being sent to Canada, not least thanks to the active support of their community (p. 208).

The varying perspectives of the British colonial society, the Polish refugees, and their African contacts on the Polish refugee experience in Africa are the subject of Chapter 5. With 85 pages, it is the longest and richest of the chapters. It could have easily been broken down into one chapter per actor category to balance out the chapter lengths. It is here that the complexity of the temporary stay of Polish refugees in Africa comes alive with anecdotes for instance of the anthropologist John Barnes who observed the uncertainty of white men close to Fort Jameson in Northern Rhodesia, unsure how to treat a Polish servant who was by skin color read as white and therefore demanded respect but by position as servant, a job usually performed by Africans, could be ignored in the social protocol of colonial society (p. 188) demonstrating the challenge that Polish women posed for the stratification of colonial societies. Outlining the cosmopolitan lives of Karol Szustek, who was neither Polish nor a refugee, Waclaw Korabiewicz, both Polish by nationality and citizenship, and a poet, journalist and doctor, and Dr. Julian Zamenhof, widely travelled nephew of Esperanto inventor Ludwik Zamenhof, who rose to camp commandant in Konoda in Tanzania (p. 201-203), drives home the heterogeneity of a group often read as Polish peasants. The way in which the author carefully discusses the heterogeneous nature of the refugee group is another strength of the book.

Jochen Lingelbach is to be applauded for his elegant handling of a complex narrative, switching between British colonies without losing the reader; the author writes in clear prose, masterfully leads his readers through each chapter, and brings home his points powerfully in the conclusion. This enlightening study is enriched with helpful maps, drawings and photographs depicting life in the refugee settlements. This book is most certainly of interest to researchers and students of refugee studies and refugee history in general looking for a carefully contextualized case study of refuge-seeking on the African continent which allows for a thorough discussion of race, class, gender, and religion. Moreover, it appeals to upper class students and

researchers engaging with whiteness studies and the history of colonial societies. This is an excellent read that provides much food for thought about the history of refugee groups perceived as “out of place” (p. 263), a topic that is timely and here to stay.

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