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"Uganda's long Connection with the Problem of
Refugees: From the Polish Refugees of World War II
to the Present".

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POLISH REFUGEES IN UGANDA, 1942 - 1952

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INTRODUCTION:

Between 1942 and 1944 7,000 Polish refugees, mainly women and children, were received in Uganda. They were settled in two camps, Nyabyeya, in Masindi district and Koja (Mpunge) in Mukong District. In 1948 most of these refugees were resettled in Britain, Canada and Australia. Some of the remainders took up employment in Uganda and in the other former British colonies of Eastern and Central Africa. The "hard core" cases (those refugees who could not easily be absorbed in Europe because they were very old and infirm or those with criminal records) remained at the Koja camp until 1952 when the camp was finally closed down and its assets disposed of.

During the Second World War (1939-1945) Uganda became home to many Europeans displaced by the war. They included refugees from Poland (these were the majority) civilian internees and prisoners of war from the Axis Powers, and assorted detainees from the Allied side.

Camps were established in various parts of Uganda to accommodate them.

Italian prisoners of war were accommodated at a camp in Jinja, and the Italian civil internees at Entebbe. The Italians were mostly drawn from Ethiopian, Eritrea, and Somaliland.

The Arapai camps (near Soroti) accommodated Axis Powers civilian internees brought to Uganda from Cyprus, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. These were a polyglot lot which included Germans, Austrians, Romanians, Bulgarians, Yugoslavs, Hungarians and Stateless Jews.

The allied internees included French Legionnaires who had refused to join the Free French Forces in order to continue with the war. Some Maltese detainees were also moved to Uganda in 1942. These were initially settled at Bombo, then moved to Uganda in 1942. These were initially settled at Bombo, then moved to Arapai and finally to Entebbe.

Axis nationals who were in Uganda when the war broke out were interned in Fort Portal but by 1942 all the inmates had left and the camp closed.

All the British colonies in East and Central Africa—Kenya, Tanganyika, Nyasaland, North and Southern Rhodesia, received their share of Europeans displaced by the war. These colonies were remote from the active theatres of war whose enemy nationals and friendly aliens could be accommodated with maximum security.

THE POLISH BACKGROUND:

Poland had been divided many times before between her powerful neighbours — Russia and Austria between 1772 and 1918.

At the end of the First World War all the major powers including the United States of America wanted an independent Polish State established. Poland was indeed an independent state between 1918 and the outbreak of the second world war in September 1939. The Poles had taken advantage of the vacuum that had been created by the disintegration of the powers that had dominated her in the past. None of those powers, however, had accepted Polish independence and between 1918 and 1921 the fledgling Polish state went through a baptism of fire. Indeed the Russo-Polish confrontation threatened the very existence of Poland. Ultimately the Soviets were defeated and the Polish state survived. This precarious existence had to be buttressed

by non-aggression pacts between Poland and the Soviet Union (1932) and between Poland and Germany (1934).

In the 1930s the Nazi regime in Germany tried to draw Poland into its orbit but failed. The distinguished Polish Foreign Minister Colonel Jozef Beck (1932-1939) considered preventive action against the pretensions of the Nazis but got no real support, only empty promises from the allies who were to eventually confront Germany and her allies during the second world war.

In March, 1939, the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain had assured Poland that Britain would resist, by all means necessary, any attack by Germany on Poland. The French had also proposed to send their army to assist Poland in the event of German aggression.

Hitler responded by renouncing the Polish-German Non-aggression Pact and by concluding, in July 1939, a secret Protocol (The Molotov - Ribbentrop agreement) with the Soviets to partition Poland and the Baltic states amongst themselves.

On 31st August, 1939, Germany invaded Poland from the West and on 17th September, 1939, the USSR invaded Poland from the East. Poland was quickly divided between the two powers and by the beginning of October, 1939, the whole of Poland had been overrun.

Out of the Polish population of 34.8 million people at the outbreak of the war 22 million were put under German control and the rest under the Soviets. In the area of their jurisdiction the Germans formed a rump state the General Government embracing Central and Southern Poland and annexed the rest to their country.

In the area of General Government, there was no civil law and most offences were punishable by either death or internment in the concentration camps. People were classified into German, non-Germans and Jews. Poles were displaced internally while the Jews were driven to the death camps. Most of the Poles were displaced in order to make room for Germans from Soviet Latvia and Estonia. Many were taken to Germany to work in conditions that amounted to slavery.

Between October 1939 and August 1940, the Germans carried out two extermination campaigns against the Polish population. The Euthanasia Campaign eliminated cripples and embeciles and the Extraordinary Pacification Campaign eliminated Polish intellectuals.

The Soviets also acted brutally towards their Polish subjects. They deported those they considered undesirables - intellectuals, rich merchants and landowners. Between February 1940 and June 1941 these undesirables were condemned to penal exile in Siberia where they were subjected to hard labour. 1.5 million Poles were deported to the Soviet Union and in the process, half a million Poles died. During this same period 15,000 Polish officers were executed in Western Russia (in the Katyn Forest) a fact which was recently admitted by former President Mikhail Gorbachev. Stalin's intention was "to reduce the Poles to the condition of a slave nation unable to rule itself". (1)

It was against this background of betrayal by Britain and France and the battering between the Soviet anvil and the German hammer that those Polish nationals, lucky to escape the European inferno, found their way to India, the Middle East and to Eastern and Central Africa by September 1942.

THE SETTLEMENT OF THE POLISH REFUGEES:

The location of the Polish refugee camps, at Nyabyeya and Koja (Mpunge) are notable for their remoteness. Nyabyeya is at the edge of the tropical Budongo Forest (nineteen miles from the town of Masindi) and Koja is actually a peninsula of Lake Victoria (forty miles out of Kampala). Both locations must have been very well secluded from the centres of population in the 1940s. It was, therefore, difficult in both camps, for the refugees to come into contact with unauthorised persons and, as we noted later, this splendid isolation of the Polish refugees was intended to preserve the superiority of the caucasian race intact in the esteem of the natives. Unfortunately, for the colonial government, the superiority of the caucasians was to become badly dented whenever the Poles got the opportunity to do so to the utter bewilderment and disgust of the British authorities.

Given their isolation it was also very difficult for enemies to infiltrate the camps. Although Uganda was remote from the theatres of war there was real fear, amongst the British officials, of pro-axis organisations within the camps. There was a fear of Ukranian fifth columnists within the camps.

The Ukranians concentrated mainly in South-eastern Poland, were "the most nationalistic, the most pro-German, the most anti-Russian, and the most Europeanised element of the Ukranian nation".⁽²⁾ One important Ukranian political organisation The Union of Ukranian Nationalists, had worked very closely with the Germans during the invasion of Poland. In return the Germans had promised the Ukranians an independent Ukranian state and the Ukranians sincerely believed that a German victory would guarantee them freedom from the hated Russians. There were some Ukranians in the refugee camps and the remoteness of the camps ensured their

inability to create problems for the allied powers.

It is ironical that anti-semitism persisted amongst the Polish refugees given the fact that the Poles were suffering as such as the Jews from the depredations of Nazism and Stalinism. All over East Africa, the camp commandants reported that there was a strong anti-semitic feeling amongst the Poles. Indeed there was a suggestion that Jews should be accommodated in a separate camp somewhere in East Africa. However, the problem was that the Jews were amongst the best qualified for "clerical and other duties of camp maintenance". (3)

REFUGEE ADMINISTRATION

In 1942 the British Government established the East African Refugee Administration with its headquarters in Nairobi to take charge of refugees in their East and Central African Colonies as well as in the Belgium territory of Rwanda-Urundi. Below this regional organisation were the territorial refugee offices headed by Directors of Refugees. The Directors of Refugees supervised the running of the refugee camps under the control of the Camp Commandants. The Camp Commandants were British officers seconded from the local Civil Services to administer the camps.

In the camps the policy was to give as much authority as possible to the poles to run the show. If you will, a policy of Indirect Rule was pursued where the British Commandants left the Poles a lot of latitude in the administration of the camps. The Commandants only intervened when the Polish authorities either strayed from the beaten path or encountered problems they were unable to handle.

The Polish administration in the camps was led by the Polish Camp Leader assisted by an Advisory Council completely composed of

refugee representatives. The Poles took charge of all basic administration including internal security, Health, Education, Recreation, Work, and Religious Affairs.

The Polish Government-in-Exile (based in London since June 1940) established a Consulate in Kampala in 1942 (4) which was maintained throughout the duration of the war. There was also a representative of the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to specifically take care of the complaints regarding welfare raised by the Polish refugees.

Camp buildings were largely constructed out of local materials - grass thatch, poles and daub; they were also largely erected with local African labour. In all 2000 African labourers were involved in the construction of the buildings at Nyabyeya and 1000 at Koja (Mpunge). At Nyabyeya boreholes were sunk by the Geological Survey Department and at Koja piping and pumping installations were laid to get water from the nearby Lake Victoria.

By the end of 1942, £36,000 (a great deal of money those days) had been spent on the construction, equipping and provisioning of the camps. About 10% of the money for the equipment of the camps came from Polish sources and the rest from the British Government.

In order to facilitate the welfare of the camp inmates each camp was divided into villages of around 500 people each headed by village headmen. These were directly answerable to the Polish camp leader. At Nyabyeya each village had a water well and at Koja each village had easy access to piped water.

There were primary schools and one Secondary Vocational school at each of the camps in addition to hospitals, churches, orphanages, recreation centres and cemeteries. At Koja electric lighting was installed and in Kampala a Polish Rest House was acquired for the use of refugees. The European Hospital in Kampala was also put at the disposal of the Polish refugees as a general referral facility.

As noted earlier the policy of the government was to make the camps self-sufficient as quickly as possible. To this end the refugees were encouraged to cultivate their own food and to make their own clothing.

At Nyabyeya weaving, spinning, tailoring, cobbling and basket making were enthusiastically undertaken and at the Secondary Vocational school these trades as well as Home Economics, were very important in the curriculum.

Initially the supplies came from Europe. The British authorities provided the wheels and looms with which the spinning and weaving industries were established. From Kenya the camps obtained wheat, maize flour and dried milk. However, within a relatively short time considerable progress was made at the camps in the production of food, especially vegetables. It was through these efforts by the inmates that the initial scourge of malnutrition was quickly defeated.

The refugees, provided and maintained the internal organisation of the camps. They took responsibility for the religious, educational, cultural and the general occupational pursuits of the refugees to the extent economic circumstances allowed and as long as their activities were not in conflict with the policy of the British authorities.

British officers provided the necessary manpower where suitable Polish personnel could not be found to run the multifarious functions in the camps. The Protectorate Government seconded administrators, forest officers, Public Works Overseers, Health Inspectors, Doctors and Nurses. The Roman Catholic Church provided the priests and lay brothers to attend to the spiritual needs of the refugees.

Most of the refugees who arrived in Uganda in 1942 had been on the move since the outbreak of the war in September, 1939. They were part of the wave of Polish refugees who had moved into Russia, Iran, Iraq and all over the Middle East. India and finally into Uganda. They were described as destitute on arrival.

In order to provide the basic amenities the European community organised assistance for them. (5) When they arrived they desperately needed clothing and other basic amenities and the European community was extremely forthcoming and generous to these people. Many advertisements were run in the English newspaper, The Uganda Herald to solicit donations of clothing, books, journals, magazines and above all radios. The refugees were, understandably, keen to follow the progress of the war in

Europe and did not have the equipment to do this. Eventually a Polish Refugee-Relief Fund was established to cater for their basic amenities.

The major health problem was malaria to which the Poles did not have any resistance initially. - The authorities took a lot of care to provide every refugee with a mosquito net. In addition a considerable African labour force was employed to keep the grass low and the lawns clean in the camps and employed a special force of Mosquito Searchers to hunt for and destroy them. Jiggers were also a nuisance initially but the refugees soon learnt to deal with them.

Poles seem to have made a very good impression on the Africans. In an article entitled Abapolanda mu Uganda (Poles in Uganda) published in a Uganda Newspaper, Matalisi, in October 1942, the writer noted the following:-

- (i) They (the Poles) men, women and children were extremely strong in build.
- (ii) They do not practise discrimination (emphasis added)
- (iii) Their language is nice sounding but extremely difficult to write.
- (iv) There is a rumour that they are contented with life in Uganda and do not intend to go back to their country. (6)

So impressed were the natives that they enthusiastically entertained the Poles in their camps, performing dances, -concerts, and playing music. Their efforts were gratefully appreciated by the Poles.

During the 1940s the ordinary European residents in the whole of Uganda were around 2000. Between 1942 and 1948 close to 7000 Poles (Europeans) were concentrated in just two settlements. In the colonies where the "superiority" of the Europeans was taken for granted and where the regimes were clearly racist and discriminatory the presence of the Poles in such large numbers, it was feared, would dent this "superiority". It was, therefore, extremely important to maintain the superiority of the white race whatever the circumstances. Given the big numbers of single women in the camps and the inadequate numbers of single men who

constituted only about 20% of the population of the camps it became extremely difficult to maintain the superiority of the white race but this was not for lack of trying. Both the men and women of the camps, unfortunately, had inferior traits. The men loved the local gin-waragi and were given to rowdy behaviour in the presence of natives when they were high on the local brew. Some of them also regularly battered their women and children whenever they got high on the gin.

The alarm bells of this unseemly behaviour were first sounded by Nixon Burton, Chief Secretary, Nyasaland. He circulated a "Confidential" and "personal" letter of inquiry to his fellow Chief Secretaries in The Rhodesia, Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda into the behaviour of the Polish refugees, Nixon Burton's letter is worth quoting in extenso. He wrote.

"There was a great deal of illicit intercourse between Polish women refugees and Africans, especially Askaris. If, however, there is any truth in the statements, perhaps we could combine in making a representation to East Africa Command emphasizing the undoubted trouble which does result when Europeans misbehave themselves in native countries let alone have intercourse with natives". (7)

Burton reported that the settlers (white) in Nyasaland intended to raise the issue in the Legislative Council in Zomba.

In reply the Chief Secretary of the Uganda Protectorate (J.E.S. Merrick) elaborated on the issue of policy. He wrote.

"It is our policy to reduce occasions on which Africans and Poles come into contact to a minimum... At the same time we must recognise that there are large numbers of women who have been denied male society for a considerable period and that such circumstances form a suitable ground for the development of illicit relations". (8)

The authorities in Kenya had noted some "misconduct" (read intercourse) between Greek women refugees and Africans but not between Africans and Poles. The Kenya Director of Refugees had indeed asked the authorities in Teberan and Cairo not to include "prostitutes" amongst the refugees they were sending to Kenya. The Kenya authorities further noted that so

far as Askaris are concerned those who had been in the Middle East were more likely to be contaminated. At the Tengeru Camp, Tanganyika there were also some stories that a few Polish women had lent themselves to illicit intercourse with non-Europeans, more likely Asians rather than Africans.

In February, 1944, the Camp Commandant, Koja reported to his superiors specific incidents where Polish women had intercourse with Africans. In these particular cases two Polish women (allegedly prostitutes) had had sexual intercourse with African Policemen employed on patrol and gate duty. The Camp Commandant recommended that the women should be removed from the country and sent to some other camp where detention was possible. He lamented:

"Not only do cases of this kind lead to a bad reputation being undeservedly given to the Polish people as a whole... but in addition, a bad effect is created amongst the Africans locally and I cannot help feeling sympathy with a young African Policeman whose character is ruined by the experienced importunities of a degraded street walker from some Polish town". (9) (Emphasis added).

As a result of the Commandant's recommendation the two women were removed from the Koja Camp and taken to the Polish Penitentiary of Makindu, Kenya.

The official assumption was that if a white woman had sexual intercourse with either Africans, in particular, or non-Europeans in general, then that person was automatically a prostitute!

Crude attempts were made to use psychiatry for racist purposes. Thus two women of Masindi camp were described as "feeble minded" and sexual pervers by doctors. However, the doctor could not certify them mad but recommended that a special home for the "feeble minded" should be found for them. The doctors came to that conclusion simply because the women had been discovered in the sleeping quarters of the African Askaris of the Mobile Propaganda Unit.

The Nyabyeya Camp Commandant was so revolted by the behaviour of these women that he reported to his superiors that "these women have no compunction about contact with Africans of any class.

By this they lower the prestige of the Europeans here.

I therefore feel that drastic steps should be taken to prevent a recurrence". (10)

Even before the occurrence of these incidents measures had been put in place to control the contact between the refugees and the rest of the population:-

- (i) Entry to the Polish camps by non-Poles was forbidden, except with a pass.
- (ii) African workers employed in the camps were housed outside the perimeters of the camps. Africans were not allowed to enter the Polish camps after working hours.
- (iii) Visits by the inmates outside the camps were strictly controlled. However, permission to visit shops was given regularly by the Polish Camp Leaders but permission to go to Kampala was only given by the British authorities.

Unfortunately, the above measures did not prevent 'misbehaviour' and by 1945 the Nyabyeya Camp Commandant was desperately appealing to the authorities.

"I should be grateful if I could receive a supply of barbed wire which may now be available as the war is over. This will assist me in segregating mental cases".

(11) (Emphasis added).

The Poles impressed the Africans as non-racist and had "illicit" contacts with them whenever possible to the chagrin and great embarrassment of the authorities. Much as the British authorities tried to prevent contact between the Poles and Africans it was impossible to completely stop it because Africans worked in the camps and established contacts while on duty and arranged "illicit" meetings thereafter. The many single women in these camps in most cases took the initiative to establish "illicit" contacts with what to them were fellow human beings who provided them with the friendship and warmth which they lacked and craved for. This craving for human warmth and contact was, unfortunately, interpreted as prostitution by the British authorities and was punished severely.

Behind the fuss that the authorities made was the struggle to maintain the superiority of the caucasians in whatever circumstances. The Africans had discovered during this period that Europeans were human and not gods. This experience may have translated into the political agitation that shortly followed the end of the war in 1945 and gained intensity towards the end of the decade especially in Buganda.

REPATRIATION

At the outbreak of the war Poland was divided between the Soviets and the Germans who between them badly mistreated the Poles who were condemned to slave labour in Siberia and in the war industries in Germany. Had it not been for the war which broke out between Germany and Russia most Poles would probably have been dispersed or annihilated by the Soviets and the Nazis.

Before the war broke out between Russia and Germany there was a plan to displace the slave population between the Oder and the Dnieper with German settlers. Some 20 million Poles would be resettled in Siberia, 3-4 million, germanised and the rest eliminated.

Poland became the major battleground between the Russians and Germans from 1941 to 1945. During that period the former Polish Republic lost 6 million people, 1.9 million of them Jews. Most of these people had been lost in executions, pacification exercises and in the internment camps. Poland became the home of the worst holocaust that humanity had experienced so far. The Camp de grace came in September 1945 when, following the Warsaw Rising by the Polish underground movement, the Germans completely destroyed the city. 93% of the buildings had been completely destroyed; Hitler had given the order to raze the city to the ground.

In December 1941 the Soviets and the Polish Government-in-Exile signed a Declaration of Friendship and Mutual Assistance. According to this declaration a Polish Army was to be formed in Russia from the huge pool of Poles who had been interned there. The Declaration also granted amnesty to all Polish internees in Russia.

The allied forces held conferences between November 1945 and July 1945 where the fate of post-war Europe was determined. At these conferences it was decided that Poland would fall under

Soviet influence. It was also agreed the "Curzon line" (12) would form the basis of Poland's eastern frontier. At the Yalta Conference of February 1945 Poland's right to the lands annexed from eastern Germany was recognised. Finally at the Potsdam Conference in July/August 1945 the present boundaries of Poland were fixed. The western borders between Poland and Germany were fixed along the river Oder and the western banks of the Neisse: the Conference also endorsed the expulsion of Germans from Poland.

-In the re-organisation of Poland only 54% of her former territory was included in the new Poland. Poland had been extended westwards into Eastern Germany: she lost her eastern territories to the Soviet Union. All in all Poland lost 178,200 square kilometers from Germany.

-In addition to the territorial realignments the USSR had put in place a puppet government in Poland; Poland firmly remained in the Soviet orbit until 1989.

So the repatriation exercise must be seen against the background of what happened to Poland during the war and of what had become Poland by the end of the war. In a way the Poles had been divided between their former enemies and this arrangement was not reassuring to those Poles who had suffered so much at the hands of both the Russians and the Germans. This explained the unwillingness of most Polish refugees in Uganda and elsewhere to return to their homeland. The Poland they had left behind in 1939 was very different from the Poland they were being asked to return to.

The official policy of the British Government was not to put pressure on the Polish refugees to leave (13) but they were to be persuaded to leave Uganda and go back to Poland. By the end of 1947 it had become clear that the majority of Poles were unwilling to go back to Poland; only 60 refugees had voluntarily returned to Poland out of the 6750 refugees in Uganda. It was, therefore, necessary to use as much subtle pressure as possible to "persuade" them to go back to their homeland.

- Many of the Polish refugees who came to Uganda had been prisoners in Russia where they had been branded like cattle. They feared that if they were to fall in the hands of the Russians again they would be shot. (14) The refugees also regarded the

Communist government which had been installed in Warsaw after the war as an instrument of Russian domination; they, therefore, mistrusted and disliked it. The election which had brought that government to power, they regarded as having been rigged and worse still there was no great risk of counter-revolution that would liberate Poland. The population had completely been cowed and there was no possibility of intervention by the erstwhile allied powers on behalf of Polish nationalists to change the status quo.

Given the Polish unwillingness to return home the British got involved in the game of subtlety, at which they excel, to get the Polish refugees into Poland; they did not succeed.

In November 1946 an article was published in the London Times entitled "Poland and the Soviets: Psychology of the Eastern Alliance". This was seized upon by the Uganda Protectorate authorities to try and convince the Polish refugees that it was alright to return to Poland. The article was considered such a valuable piece of propaganda that it was translated into Polish for the "benefit" of the refugees. The author of the article pointed out that Russians in the Polish Army were decreasing steeply, that Education, Railways, Post Office, Telegraphs and the entire national economy were in the hands of Poles, that they were masters of their lives. The writer noted.

"Having divided land among the landless and nationalised the main industries, they now follow a conception of their own by promoting co-operatives, as well as state-enterprises along with a considerable margin reserved for private initiative". (15)

After attending to Polish independence it is paradoxical that in the same article we are informed that the Soviets still controlled internal and foreign affairs in Poland!! It is not clear whether or not only those parts of it which were of propaganda value were translated in Polish.

As the Poles could not be moved it became necessary to tighten the nuts and bolts a little against those Polish refugees who somehow thought that they could make Uganda their permanent home. Government pointed out that opportunities for permanent European settlement were extremely limited in Uganda arguing that

in the interests of the African population, it was the policy of the Protectorate government for many years to restrict the opportunities open to non-natives with regard to the ownership of land and employment in occupations which were and would shortly be handled by Africans. It was also pointed out that those Polish refugees unwilling to return to Poland were actually stateless and that it would be unfair to Africans if they settled and began to regard Uganda as their country. The British authorities were not even willing to absorb a small number of Polish refugees on a permanent basis. There is no evidence that the Africans were consulted on the settlement issue although the policy was purported to take care of their interests.

Temporary employment passes valid for four years at a time, were only issued to those refugees who were returnable to a country other than Uganda. It is noteworthy that throughout the eleven years that the Polish refugees stayed in Uganda not more than fifty were employed outside their camps at any one time. For the duration of the war some refugees were recruited for service in either the Polish or British armies. Some Camp Commandants and Directors of Refugees in British dependencies in East and Central Africa found it a convenient way of getting rid of stubborn and undesirable characters from the camps. Altogether 1000 Polish women from East Africa were working for the Polish or British Air Forces in Great Britain and Kenya by 1944. (16)

At the end of the war there were some 19,000 Polish refugees in East and Central Africa. 9500 of them, dependants of the Army of General Anders, were moved to Britain by the British Government in 1948. By 1950 a total of 11,000 had been accepted by Britain. Others settled in Australia, the USA, Canada, France, Argentina and South Africa.

In 1947, the United Nations established an International Refugees Organisation (IRO) based in Geneva to assist displaced people from Central Europe and other places. It was intended to accomplish its task in a limited period. It was, therefore, urgent that refugees be resettled before its dissolution. By 1950, the IRO had 18 member nations and by the time it was dissolved in March 1951, the organisation had resettled 744,790 people. The IRO was involved in the transportation, housing, and the provision of education and health facilities.

Repatriation was a very complicated exercise involving the mobilisation of funds, the arrangement of passages and the finding of countries willing to accept the repatriates, the whole exercise of getting travel documents and visas. In all these actions the IRO worked closely with the United Nations Refugee Administration (UNRA) which mainly assisted in the mobilisation of funds.

Uganda Protectorate authorities had given the 31st of December 1948 as the last day by which all Polish refugees had to leave Uganda. In spite of this deadline there were still 350 Polish refugees left in Uganda in 1949, mainly widows and children plus 50 others working throughout Uganda on temporary terms. Amongst these residues were to be found the infirm, the old and the mentally sick who could not be accepted by any country. They proved a big headache to the authorities especially as the IRO was not a permanent institution. This meant that those hard-core refugees who could not leave by the time the IRO wound up its activities would become the responsibility of the countries where they were stranded. There was a suggestion that all the remaining Polish refugees, hardcore and non-hardcore

should be absorbed in British where it was easier to find work and where the health and education facilities were readily available. The hardcore cases would be catered for by the National Assistance Board, and in any case, it was the responsibility of Britain to look after the refugees.

By 1950 no responsibility had been taken, over the hardcore case but there was a tentative suggestion that they should all be sent to Tanganyika. Ultimately, the majority of Polish refugees left in Uganda by August 1951 were given visas for Britain. Only six mental patients were left; they were sent to Mulago Hospital and eventually ended up at the Dodoma Mental Hospital.

THE DISPOSAL OF CAMP ASSETS

In May 1948, the Masindi Camp (Nyabyeya) was closed down and those refugees who had not left transferred to Kojja Camp. The buildings and stores were sold to the Forestry Department who turned it into a school for African Assistant Forest Officers. The Camp buildings and stores were sold at £11,595. Out of that amount £1,830 was paid to the Polish Government, this having been the contribution the Polish Government-in-Exile had made towards meeting the cost of materials and stores for the camp.

Kojja Camp was dismantled and the fittings shared out between various Government departments. Old items were auctioned and sold to the public.

CONCLUSION

The Masindi Camp (Nyabyeya) at the edge of the Budongo Forest continues to exist up to to-day as a Forestry School. Some of the original houses of a unique architecture that were erected by the Polish refugees still stand and are in use. The magnificent church which was built for their use still stands and is extremely well preserved. It stands as a monument to the Polish refugees devotion to their God and to the Catholic church. They never lost hope that one day the Lord would deliver their country and people from the yoke of the Germans and the Russians.

At Kojja the only monument that remains at what is now a Dairy Farm is a low wall of about 20 square metres and a cenotaph on which were inscribed the names of 129 Polish refugees interred in the cemetery. The cemetery was badly neglected and almost completely levelled; what really remains is the wall and the cenotaph.

Polish blood runs amongst some Ugandans still living. the result of the "illicit" unions especially between Ugandan women and Polish men. The Polish refugees saw Africans simply as human beings and their loneliness as refugees was happily mitigated by their human and sometimes very intimate contacts with Africans. There was a racist colonial regime in Entebbe who employed psychiatry to isolate the aberrant Polish. To the Africans this relationship with white people to some extent demystified whiteness and gave many of them the courage to demand their lost freedom.

16 AUGUST 1993.