

Unequal refugeeeness. Race, gender, and co-belligerence from Poles in colonial Africa to Ukrainians in Poland

Jochen Lingelbach ^{1,*}

¹Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (African History), University of Bayreuth, 95440 Bayreuth, Germany

*Corresponding author. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (African History), University of Bayreuth, 95440 Bayreuth, Germany. E-mail: jochen.lingelbach@uni-bayreuth.de

Abstract

Refugee-receiving states do not live up to the universalist ideals of international refugee legislation but are selective and discriminatory. The case of Poland's acceptance of Ukrainians while simultaneously building a border wall to keep out non-Ukrainians is an obvious case. Based on historical research on the British Empire's policies towards European refugees, this article looks into a comparable moment when governments made an exception to their established anti-refugee policy and accepted certain groups of refugees. The British colonial administration in East Africa rejected Jewish refugees but accepted a specific group of Poles during the Second World War. This exception under war conditions was legitimized with an emphasis on the group's gender, race, and connection to the co-belligerent Polish army. They were the white women and children of the Polish male soldiers fighting with the British against the Axis. The recent welcome for Ukrainian refugees in Poland followed similar lines of argumentation.

Keywords: race; Poland; colonialism; Ukraine; war; history; refugees

... [the Polish refugees] are the wives and families of some of those gallant, indomitable Polish soldiers who are fighting with the Allied forces in the Middle East. To them we owe a duty. To look after their wives and families will be a pleasure.¹

This is why we are proposing to activate the temporary protection mechanism to provide them [Ukrainian refugees] with a secure status and access to schools, medical care and work. They deserve it. We need to do that now.²

¹ East African Standard (hereafter EAS) 30 June 1942: 'Refugees from Persia,' Editorial.

² Ursula von der Leyen, President of the Commission, speaking at the European Parliament on 1 March 2022 ([European Commission 2022a](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip-22-110)).

Received: 22 March 2024. Revised: 15 October 2024.

© The Author(s) 2024. Published by Oxford University Press.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

1. Introduction

When some 20,000 Polish refugees started arriving in the East African harbours in 1942, the colonial public was astonished. For years, the colonial governments and established white settlers had successfully fended off any attempts to settle poor white refugees from Europe into the colonies and now they welcomed them with open arms. Apart from some—mainly Jewish—residents who had lobbied for the acceptance of persecuted Jews from under the German Nazi yoke, the colonial establishment had been firmly against hosting any sizeable number of refugees from Europe. This sudden turn-around needed some serious explanations and the leading white settler-dominated Kenyan newspaper did just that in an editorial cited above. The main reason given was the refugees' connection with the 'gallant' Polish soldiers who were fighting with the Allies against the Axis forces threatening Britain and its Empire. Added to this, the editorial and colonial officials underlined that these were mainly women and children. It was a 'duty' and a 'pleasure' to host them. Their whiteness needed no further explanation, but their non-Jewishness was stressed to appease possible anti-Semitic opposition. A few days later, it was written in the same paper: 'The refugees are mostly catholic, probably 90 per cent of them'.³ The sudden turnaround in refugee policy had to be explained.

Some 80 years later, I was reminded of this history when Poland welcomed Ukrainian refugees after Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Governed since 2015 by a right-wing government, the Polish state followed an increasingly aggressive anti-refugee stance. In national policies and on the EU level, the Polish government was arguing against the acceptance of refugees, aiming especially at Muslims and people of colour (Klaus and Szulecka 2023). This trend intensified in the year 2021 when refugees started arriving at the Polish–Belarusian border and were portrayed by Polish government politicians and media as 'weapons' in a 'hybrid attack' by the Belarusian and Russian regimes (Adam and Hess 2023). This rhetorical armament against undesired, mostly non-European people on the move was accompanied by the fortification of the border with barbed wire, the declaration of a state of emergency, the deployment of military units, and the construction of a massive fence (Krępa and Judzińska 2023). However, while Polish border guards were illegally pushing back people along the Polish–Belarusian border, the country opened its border to the Ukrainians fleeing the war and welcomed them warmly. Despite the longer history of violent Polish–Ukrainian conflict, in the wake of the Russian attack, only the fringe-right wing groups in Poland tried to stir up anti-Ukrainian sentiments. Poland suddenly became one of the top refugee-hosting nations in the world. The whole European Union made an unprecedented move, abandoned its policy of closure for this particular group of refugees, and activated its Temporary Protection Directive granting protection to all Ukrainian citizens. Barely more than a week after the Russian invasion, the EU Commission's president, Ursula von der Leyen, declared: 'Europe stands by those in need of protection. All those fleeing Putin's bombs are welcome in Europe' (European Commission 2022a). While the enthusiasm may have faded in the meantime, in the first days after the full-scale invasion, Polish civil society was firmly supporting and welcoming Ukrainian refugees.

The inequality of this 'bifurcated' border regime became glaringly obvious (Adam and Hess 2023). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, noted on 21 March 2022:

We have (...) witnessed overwhelming acts of welcome and compassion as neighbouring countries, particularly local responders, have opened their hearts and homes to Ukrainians (...) while I am humbled by the outpouring of support we witnessed by host countries and communities, we also bore witness to the ugly reality that some Black and Brown people fleeing Ukraine—and other wars and conflicts around the world—have not received the same treatment as Ukrainian refugees. (UNHCR 2022)

³ EAS 3 July 1942, 'Polish Refugees from Persia'.

The most obvious illustration of this discriminatory behaviour was the treatment on the border of Africans who had been studying or working in Ukraine before the war and fled along with thousands of Ukrainians from the Russian attack (Kingston and Ekakitie 2024). The other group was Ukrainian Roma who, unlike other Ukrainians, did face discrimination upon arrival in Poland (Mirga-Wójtowicz et al. 2022). In addition, Syrians fleeing the same Russian bombs as Ukrainians were not welcome. Chechen refugees are another interesting case as they fled Russian state aggression but are largely Muslim. They were the largest refugee group in Poland before the Ukrainians arrived but encountered an increasingly hostile Polish border regime from 2016 onwards (Stummer 2016; Szczepanik 2018; Klaus and Szulecka 2023: 479).

The question I want to answer with a look into history is: What explains this glaring difference now and then? And how did officials legitimize their obviously discriminating behaviour? I am not the first to try to explain the discrimination and a central aspect to explain this is racism. The accepted refugees are considered White, the ones who are condemned to freeze to death or drown are largely seen as Black or Brown. This has been rightfully criticized by many observers, emphasizing the racialized logic of the preferential treatment of Ukrainians in Poland and the workings of First-World border regimes as 'racial borders' generally (Achiume 2022; Balogun 2023; Zessin-Jurek 2023). While this does explain the discrimination in part, I argue that it is more complex and other interrelated factors play a role in determining the delineation between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' refugees (see also Holmes and Castañeda 2016). Answering calls for historically grounded refugee studies (Marfleet 2007; Gatrell 2017; Kleist 2017; Banko et al. 2022) I analyse the discursive strategies around the acceptance of Polish refugees in East Africa during the Second World War to shed light on recent developments in Poland's refugee policy. I propose this diachronic comparison of discourses around refugees as a way to bring insights from refugee history into fruitful conversation with refugee studies' focus on more recent forced migration movements. I am not arguing that it is the same in the past as now, but I show the similarities in governments' explanations of their selective acceptance of refugees. Especially the gendered relation with the military forces fighting against a common enemy is an aspect that can be found today as well as in the imperial refugee regime of the past (on the latter see Lingelbach 2022a). Looking into the history of Polish refugees in British colonial Africa shall serve to highlight some of these issues and the intersection of race, gender, and war. I argue that the changing geostrategic situation of the war led governments to host demarcated refugee groups who were perceived as white and had a gendered relation to the soldiers fighting against the common enemy.

This article will start with some theoretical considerations about the unequal treatment of refugees and its history. In the second section, I will delve into the history of the Jewish refugees who tried to enter Kenya to escape Nazi persecution before explaining the massive shift happening when the mostly non-Jewish Polish refugees were warmly welcomed. Based on these historical observations, I will relate the legitimizing rhetoric to current discursive strategies explaining the unequal treatment of refugees in Poland. I will do this along the lines of race and gender, culminating in the discursive figure of the white 'womenandchildren' of the co-belligerent brothers in arms as exceptionally deserving refugees.

2. Explaining unequal refugeeeness

The universalism of the international refugee regime is an aspirational ideal that was never achieved. As historians and legal scholars have made clear, the parochialism of the United Nations refugee regime and the 1951 Geneva Convention was there from its beginnings in the aftermath of the Second World War (Gatrell 2013; Behrmann 2018; Krause 2021; Lingelbach 2022b). In his forceful and influential critique of the refugee regime and refugee studies, Bhupinder Chimni lays bare this inequality in the international protection for refugees (Chimni 1998). Calling out the 'myth of difference' Chimni argued that during the global expansion process of the refugee regime around the 1960s wave of decolonization, its applicability was at the

same time restricted. While newly independent states in the Global South pushed for the universalization and extension of the global refugee regime (Rahal and White 2022: 350), others limited its provisions. This limitation was based on the claim that the new 'Third World refugees' were different from the Europeans for whom the legislation and institutions were initially set up. Building on Chimni's work, Lucy Mayblin showed in the case of the British discussions about the applicability of the Geneva Convention to the colonized that the colonial legacy of this difference was intentionally there. British officials in the 1950s were not reluctant to assist non-European refugees, but they were convinced that 'a line must be drawn at access to fundamental rights' (Mayblin 2014: 432).

Despite this parochialism and flawed practice, the UN-centred international refugee regime did establish at least the 'aspirational' fiction of equal rights without discrimination. As Claudena Skran describes it:

In the international refugee regime, the humanitarian principle had an aspirational quality and the assistance norm set a very high standard—assistance for all refugees without discrimination on the basis of race, religion, nationality, creed, strategic importance, or any other factor not directly relevant to the needs of the refugees. (Skran 1995: 272)

Earlier legal instruments for refugee protection in the interwar years did not have this universal aspiration and only covered delineated groups of refugees. The simultaneous activation of the EU's Temporary Protection Directive for the Ukrainian refugees and the ongoing hollowing out of refugee rights seem to take us back to this earlier stage.

The idea that states discriminate between refugee groups is the basic assumption of political scientist Lamis Abdelaaty's book *Discrimination and Delegation* (2021). Based on a broad comparative set of cases she states: 'Each country also discriminates among refugee groups, welcoming some and excluding others' (Abdelaaty 2021: 4). Examining the differences in the reaction of states to the influx of refugee groups, she argues there are two puzzles to be solved: The first is discrimination. When do states accept and when do they reject refugee groups? The second is delegation. When do states delegate refugee reception (especially refugee status determination) to UN organizations? Summing up her findings, Abdelaaty observes that states either turn refugees away, accept them or hand over the decision-making procedure to international organizations.

Abdelaaty (2021: 10) identifies *interstate relations* and *ethnic affiliation* as the core variables for understanding these differences: 'policymakers will adopt generous policies when refugees are fleeing a hostile state and share the policymaker's ethnic identity. They will adopt restrictive policies when refugees are fleeing a friendly state and do not share the policymaker's identity'. In this definition, ethnicity is to be broadly understood and can include language, race, or religion—whatever is important politically in the host country. Proximity between refugees and host society increases the likelihood for refugee groups of the constituency of the host country's leadership to be accepted. The related argument concerning international relations between the sending country's government and the receiving country observes that it is more likely that states accept refugees fleeing from a hostile government. This makes three possible combinations: Refugee groups, who are fleeing a hostile state and share some ethnic affinity with policymakers are welcomed. Refugee groups who flee from a friendly state and do not share the ethnic affinity get rejected. In conflicting cases, the refugee status determination is delegated to UN institutions.

To sum up, discrimination between refugee groups is a common phenomenon and geostrategic considerations as well as socially constructed markers of identity (like race, nationality, religion, class and gender) play a role in this. Let us keep this in mind regarding our cases and now jump back to the Second World War in Africa where we can observe related issues playing out.

3. Jewish refugees hindered from entering Kenya

In 1938, amidst a growing number of applications for entry into Kenya, the colonial government set up a special board to deal with Jews fleeing Nazi persecution. As one official summed it up in

an internal report after the war: 'During 1938 the Principal Immigration Officer was perturbed by the increasing number of applications coming from Central Europe—chiefly from parties of Jewish extraction—for permission to enter Kenya.'⁴ The Immigration Board was supposed to review and advise on the treatment of refugees who were applying for entry into the colony. However, this did not result in more permissions or preferential treatment on humanitarian grounds. Quite the contrary, the Kenyan Immigration Restriction Ordinance was instead amended in late 1938 to give officials more power to keep 'undesirable persons' out, aiming primarily at lower-class Jews without sufficient capital (Kennedy 1987: 89).

While the Board was set up as a reaction to the increasing number of applications by Jewish refugees, Kenyan colonial officials were quick to declare that they did not discriminate. In November 1938, the Kenyan Principal Immigration Officer George Pritchard Brown cautioned the immigration officers in Mombasa, Kenya's principal port of entry. They had been asking arriving immigrants whether they were Jewish and categorized them accordingly as 'Jewish refugees'. For Pritchard Brown, this was too blunt because Kenyan policy was officially not discriminating 'on grounds of race or religion'. The Mombasa border officers were instead ordered to simply categorize them as 'refugees' although it was quite clear to the authorities whom they were talking about.⁵ Once more this shows the importance of 'labelling' and classification for refugees (Zetter 1991; Glasman 2017).

In the internal correspondence, the main argument for excluding the Jewish refugees was that they could not return to Germany and were thus likely to stay permanently and could become a charge to public funds if they did not find gainful employment. Due to the anti-Semitic Nazi laws, Jews became 'de facto stateless',⁶ and British officials in Kenya were aware that they could not deport them back to Germany once they had been admitted. While this was not stated openly, anti-Semitism did play a role in the rejection of Jewish refugees—in the same way that most other countries in the world refused to accept German Jews, epitomized in the infamously failed Evian Conference of 1938 (Arendt 1958: 282; Caestecker and Moore 2010).

The chairman of the board stated in retrospect about a scheme proposed by well-established Jewish residents to accept more refugees: 'With some difficulty we held off more entrants at that time and the scheme lapsed at the beginning of the war.'⁷ The board rejected all other proposals for group settlements, ranging from a group of thirty people to another plan that was supposed to bring 10,000 refugees from Hungary. Only a few hundred individuals managed to enter Kenya to escape Nazi persecution. As a result, only very few found a safe place in East Africa or elsewhere on the continent (Shapiro 2002; Kasper-Holtkotte 2019). With the outbreak of the war in 1939, all refugees from Germany were considered enemy aliens and interned or barred from entering.

Next to anti-Semitism, opposition against Jewish immigration was also argued on the connected matters of class and race. An illuminating example of the widespread anti-refugee sentiment among Kenya's white settlers can be seen in a 1936 book by the British Kenyan settler Evelyn Brodhurst-Hill. Defending white settler domination in Kenya against reformers and critics in Britain, she spoke out vehemently against any plans for accepting refugees from Europe into the colony. She claimed instead to represent 'the point of view of the settler, who is not in favour of the introduction of "poor whites" into a "black country"' (Brodhurst-Hill 1936: 126). After citing some other examples, she made her stance clear on the possible acceptance of Jewish refugees fleeing the worsening condition under Nazi rule. It is worth quoting at length here:

[some people] want to make Kenya the dumping ground for yet another distressed minority or misunderstood section of the earth's teeming millions... something like 50,000 persecuted Jews

⁴ Kenya National Archives (hereafter KNA): BN/46/63/11, Member for Health and Local Government to Attorney General, 23 November 1946.

⁵ KNA: BN/46/62, p. 79, G. Pritchard Brown, Ag. Principle Immigration Officer, Nairobi to Immigration Officer, Mombasa, 5 November 1938.

⁶ KNA: AG/7/8, p. 19A, 'Minutes of the 6th Meeting of the Immigration Board held on Monday the 14th November 1938, at 9 am,' Nairobi.

⁷ KNA: BN/46/63/11, Member for Health and Local Government to Attorney General, 23 November 1946.

from a particularly chilly part of Central Europe, and they were in the limelight for a time as potential settlers—that *dreadful* Hitler, *poor* miserable people, so persecuted, so frugal &c. (we knew all the catchwords and the formula by that time and considering how sympathetic most people were with the Jews in Germany, anything might have happened!). (Brodhurst-Hill 1936: 126f)

While Brodhurst-Hill might be an extreme case in her condescending tone, there was a long-standing opposition among the British settlers and administrators towards poorer Whites as well as against non-British. From the 1920s onwards, Jewish immigrants to South Africa were increasingly perceived as impoverished Eastern Europeans and not as wealthy settlers bringing investment. In this period, the image of the problematic 'East European Jew' emerged as an 'undesired' migrant (F. Wolff 2014: 194, 197). Generally, poor Whites posed a challenge to the colonial division between Blacks and whites and images of white superiority. Prominently in South Africa, but also elsewhere, established settlers and colonial administrators were concerned about the emergence of a poor white class and took precautions against this threat (Cooper and Stoler 1997: 4–11; Mlambo 2000; Terreblanche 2002). The colonial governments in East Africa did not want to arouse the settler opposition and endanger the fragile colonial social order.

The reluctance to accept refugees into the colonies was not limited to East Africa. When the Foreign Office approached the Colonial Office in December 1940 and asked if they could accommodate refugees from allied nations, the refusal was clear. Colonial Secretary George Lloyd replied in a sympathetic tone, but clearly negative in the matter: 'I am afraid that there is little that the Colonial Empire could undertake to do in providing asylum for friendly aliens, however desirable such action might be in principle'.⁸ John G. Hibbert, the so-called 'refugee expert' in the Colonial Office summed it up in a note: 'The possibility of settling refugees in the Colonial Empire has been exhaustively explored on a number of occasions during the last seven or eight years'.⁹ The two refugee groups for whom the Empire was 'raked over'¹⁰ to find options to resettle them had been first Assyrians from Iraq and then Central European Jews. In both cases, only a few individuals were accepted, if any, at all.¹¹ The consensus in the British administration of the 1930s was clear: The colonies were no place for refugees.

4. An unexpected welcome for Polish refugees

In 1942, in the middle of a massive war threatening the British Empire and its metropolitan core, something remarkable happened. The British colonial administrations in East and Central Africa opened their doors and accepted nearly 20,000 destitute refugees from the Polish rural periphery. In contrast to earlier efforts to fend off Jewish refugees, some of them even received a warm welcome with music, snacks, donations, and speeches. Michael Marrus noted on the group: 'In striking contrast to what was claimed about the Jews, namely, that there was no room anywhere for them, space was somehow found for the Polish civilian exiles, seen as cobelligerents against Hitler' (Marrus 1985: 246). What led the colonial governments to accept this particular group?

To understand this episode, we have to go back to the beginning of the war. After the German attack on Poland in 1939, the Soviet army occupied the country's eastern part, as agreed in the Hitler–Stalin Pact. In the winter of 1940, the Soviet authorities started deporting thousands of Polish citizens from the Eastern part of the country (what is today Western Ukraine and Belarus) to labour camps and special settlements in Siberia and Kazakhstan. After the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, the London-based Polish government-in-exile and Moscow reached an

⁸ National Archives of the United Kingdom: Public Records Office (hereafter PRO): CO 323/1750/12, p. 5, George Lloyd, Secretary of State for the Colonies to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary, 10 January 1941.

⁹ PRO: CO 323/1750/12, p. 1, 'Settlement of Refugees in the Colonial Empire' by J.G. Hibbert, Colonial Office, n.d.

¹⁰ PRO: CO 323/1750/12, p. 2, George Lloyd, CO to Ernest Bevin, MP [Secretary of State for Labour], 12 December 1940.

¹¹ PRO: CO 323/1750/12, p. 1, 'Settlement of Refugees in the Colonial Empire' by J.G. Hibbert, Colonial Office, n.d. According to Hibbert, the Iraqi Assyrians were supposed to be resettled to Brazil first, but when this scheme collapsed, the alternative was British Guiana until this also proved unfeasible. Settlement schemes for Jewish refugees from Nazism were examined in preparation of the Evian Conference, but showed only very limited results, e.g. 25 refugees to Kenya and 'a few dozen' to Northern Rhodesia or Nyasaland.

agreement including the release of all Poles in the Soviet Union to form a Polish army and join the Allies in the defence against the German aggression. Eventually, this army was transferred to British-controlled Iran where they arrived over the Caspian Sea in 1942. Most men of fighting age (and some women) joined the Polish Army fighting under British Supreme Command against the fascists. But to the surprise of the British officials receiving the Poles in the port of Pahlavi, some 40,000 destitute civilians were arriving with the soldiers in Iran. Realizing they had to take care of them in order to have the soldiers fighting with them, the British set up tented camps in Iran. The Foreign Office informed Churchill in a note: 'The morale of these troops could hardly be good had those with wives and children been compelled to leave them behind in the USSR' (cited in [Sword 1994](#): 68). Due to logistical problems, the proximity to a strategically crucial war area and the danger this brought, British strategists in the Middle East decided that the civilians had to be brought somewhere else. They tried to find any place in the world but eventually ended up with the British colonies as the only available option (see [Lingelbach 2020](#)).

Nearly 20,000 refugees stayed from 1942 up until 1950 in the British colonies in Africa. Most of them were in Tanganyika and Uganda, some in Northern and Southern Rhodesia, and a few hundred in Kenya and South Africa. They lived in refugee camps in relative comfort and were privileged by their whiteness. At the same time, the colonial authorities were not happy with the newcomers, isolated them, and considered them dubious, potentially transgressive, and therefore dangerous for the boundaries of whiteness and thus the colonial order of society ([Lingelbach 2020](#)). In this suspicion, they followed arguments earlier brought forward in opposition to the Jewish refugees. Blocking out the Poles was, however, no option available to the colonial governments.

While colonial officials and settlers were still concerned about the refugee influx, the Poles did receive a warm welcome upon arrival. On a stopover at the Nairobi train station, white settler women and wives of colonial officials organized a reception with a live band, fruits, sandwiches, and cakes for the refugees ([Lingelbach 2022b](#): 15–6). In Tanganyika, the administration organized the colony-wide collection of toys for refugee children for their first Christmas in the camps.¹² In Lusaka camp, one refugee later remembered to her astonishment 'The war is so bad, how can they give us so much meat?' ([Chappell and Milek 2004](#): 158). After the suffering, hunger, cold, disease, and death in the Soviet camps, the Poles enjoyed a rather privileged position. At least materially, the living standards in the refugee camps were better than that of many of their African neighbours. For many of them, the material standards in the refugee camps were even better than in their home villages in peripheral Eastern Poland ([Lingelbach 2020](#): 210).

After years of fending off refugees, the sudden turn-around needed explaining, however. In June 1942, pending the arrival of the refugees in East Africa, Nairobi's most important, settler-dominated newspaper published an editorial on the issue. Complaining that the government did not inform the public sufficiently about the incoming group, they outlined the circumstances:

On inquiry we elicited the important fact, which changes the complexion of the problem presented, that they are the wives and families of some of those gallant, indomitable Polish soldiers who are fighting with the Allied forces in the Middle East. To them we owe a duty. To look after their wives and families will be a pleasure.¹³

The important point emphasized here was the refugees' gendered relation to the brave Polish fighters. Just to illustrate the urgency and precarious situation of the Empire at that time in the war, let me highlight a small quote from the next day's editorial on the situation in Egypt. Describing the military situation in North Africa and the Soviet Union, the newspaper warned: 'This reverse on the southern flank of a vast battlefield stretching from the Nile delta to Kharkov is disappointing and even alarming'.¹⁴ The Axis' advances in Egypt and towards the Caucasian oil fields were a direct threat to the future of the British Empire and indirectly led to the

¹² Tanzania National Archives (hereafter TNA) 69/782/4, Neil Stewart, Commissioner for Aliens & Internees, Darassalaam to all Provincial Commissioners, 19 November 1942.

¹³ EAS 30 June 1942, 'Refugees from Persia,' Editorial.

¹⁴ EAS 1 July 1942, 'The Battle for Egypt,' Editorial.

acceptance of the refugees into the colonies. The Middle East was crucial for the British Empire and the other Allies as well. It was imperative to keep the logistical support for the Red Army flowing through the Persian Corridor (the weapons, vehicles, food, and other material supplies given to the Soviets through the US Lend-Lease Act), protect the Soviet oilfields and the Suez Canal to keep communications open with India. In this critical situation, reinforcements by the Polish soldiers were more than welcome.

It was the connection to the soldiers that made the British Empire and its colonial officials accept the civilian refugees, and this connection was stressed extensively. This is the reason why the East African Standard went to such lengths to explain that these were not the kind of destitute Eastern European refugees like the ones they eagerly kept out earlier. The British Ministry of Information made another release in September 1942 reporting on the 'rousing reception' the 'Polish women and children' were given in Nairobi. The report went on: 'Speeches made at the reception stressed the high appreciation felt for the magnificent services rendered by the Polish troops for the Allied cause, and sympathy for the extreme hardships suffered by the Poles in the determined fight for the liberty of their country'.¹⁵ It was an explanation through two motivations: military and compassion. The head of the colonial refugee administration in East Africa even noted in retrospect that its activities were 'actuated more by military and strategic considerations than by humanitarian as it was imperative to remove these refugees from Persia'.¹⁶

While the refugees lived a rather comfortable life in the camps, their status was nevertheless ambiguous, and the colonial authorities kept them as far as possible away from disturbing the colonial social order. Their Catholic religion and Eastern European peasant-class background made them potentially transgressive and a classificatory problem in societies resting on the sharp distinction between a poor Black majority and a rich and powerful small white ruling class. After the war, most Poles refused to go back to a by-then Soviet-dominated Poland. The colonial governments were clear that they did not want to settle the refugees permanently in the colonies and insisted on the temporariness of their sojourn. Eventually, most of them were allowed to go to Britain and joined the demobilized soldiers there. In 1951, the last Polish refugee camp was finally closed, and only a few individuals were allowed to stay on (Lingelbach 2020).

5. Exceptionally deserving refugees: race, gender, and co-belligerence

I argue that we can observe the lines of argumentation deployed to legitimize the selective refugee hosting in the British colonies spelt out comparably in the recent history of Poland concerning Ukrainian refugees. There are multiple intersecting explanations at work of which the most important are race (partly coupled with religion), gender, and co-belligerence. The condition of war and the existence of a common enemy is the underlying strategic rationale, but the legitimization is additionally argued in gendered and racialized terms. In both cases, we can sum up that the hosting societies supported the white brothers in arms by taking care of their women and children. I will first address race, then gender, and finally bring the two together in connection with the status as co-belligerents. Throughout, I will draw on historical and recent examples.

5.1 Race and the eastern borders of Europe

Race is no stable, given property of persons, but constructed relationally (Steyn 2001: 5). There is no whiteness without Blackness. This difference has to be constantly created and reproduced and is 'fundamentally asymmetrical' with whiteness describing the position of privilege (Frankenberg 1993: 236). However, it remains historically specific, who occupies this position, where its boundaries are drawn and this always intersects with other categories of difference. As the cases of the Poles in Africa and the Ukrainians in Poland show, the question of who belongs

¹⁵ PRO: CO 323/1845/24, 'Polish Women & Children in Nairobi' by Ministry of Information, 10 September 1942.

¹⁶ Bodleian Libraries: Commonwealth and African Collections, Oxford, s. 1366/9, 'The East African Refugee Administration' by Charles Lamb Bruton, no date.

to the privileged position of whiteness can shift in response to strategic considerations and local social circumstances (for a related case in postwar Australia, see [Persian 2017](#)). Some people who are seen as inferior/different/other can become privileged/equal/same if the circumstances make this opportune. Questions of class and religion play intersecting roles in this context.

If we take into perspective the longer history of East-Central Europe, we see that Poland had been a diverse space up until the Second World War and its aftermath. Poland had been a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, and multi-confessional patchwork. To be sure, there was friction, discrimination, and conflict, but in any case, the population of the interwar years was a diverse mix. About one-third of the population of the Second Polish Republic before the war were members of an ethnic minority group. The Second World War and its aftermath put an end to this diversity and led to a homogenization never seen before ([Zielinski 2009](#)). This homogenization was the outcome of the murder of most of the Jewish population by the German Nazis and the post-war 'disentanglement' of populations including the expulsion of the Germans and the Ukrainian-Polish population exchange ([Gousseff 2011](#); [Reinisch and White 2011](#)). From then onwards, the Polish nation became a rather ethnically homogeneous Catholic, Polish-speaking society. The communist years saw no large-scale immigration into Poland, and from the 1990s onwards, Poland witnessed a strong labour emigration out of the country. In many Western European countries, Poles encountered discrimination themselves. The largest group migrating to Poland in recent years were Ukrainian migrant workers, increasing since the beginning of the military conflict with Russia in 2014 ([Górny 2019](#); [Klaus and Szulecka 2023](#): 473).

In the eyes of British settlers and officials in Africa, the whiteness of the Eastern Europeans was in doubt. However, the connection of the Poles to the armed forces and the need to contribute to the Imperial War Effort made it imperative to accept them. In contrast, Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution had no army, and widespread anti-Semitism among the British settlers made them seem dangerous. The Polish officials in Africa emphasized their whiteness continuously. For example, the Polish government-in-exile Minister in the Middle East, Henryk Strasburger, stated in an interview with a Kenyan newspaper in 1944: 'The Poles really belong to Western Europe—we have what is called Roman culture'.¹⁷ Public performances of high culture and folklore from refugee troupes, like traditional dances, classical music, or theatre shows, emphasized the commonality and Europeanness of the Poles. The music school in Tengeru camp in Tanganyika may be the most prominent example. Under the leadership of Lwów Conservatorium graduate Jadwiga Marko, it had over 150 students who sometimes performed for white settler audiences in neighbouring Arusha town.¹⁸

The Europeanness of the Ukrainians was likewise in doubt for a long time. The Polish quasi-colonial domination of the Eastern borderlands (so-called *Kresy*) in the interwar period and the conflicts over the eastern parts of the Second Polish Republic led to strong antagonisms between Poles and Ukrainians in the area ([Bakuła 2007](#)). The massacres of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia committed by Ukrainian nationalists during the Second World War fuelled this conflict even more (see [Gross 1988](#); [Snyder 2003](#)). Since the 1990s, bilateral relations got better, and Poland supported Ukrainian independence from Russia. Echoes of the earlier antagonism resurfaced again in Polish debates about the commemoration of the massacres and the role of Ukrainian nationalists therein. Apart from this, larger numbers of Ukrainian migrant workers did low-paid jobs in construction, domestic, and service work in Poland. Polish-Ukrainian relations were not always unproblematic, but Russia's full-scale attack made all this fade into the background.

While race may not be the determining factor in Polish-Ukrainian relations, there are strong discourses of 'Eastness' in East and Central Europe, whereby the eastern neighbour is constructed as less civilized ([Zarycki 2014](#); see also L. Wolff 1994; [Bakić-Hayden 1995](#)). Instead of racial binaries, complex ethnic and religious boundaries and ideas of civilizational superiority do play larger roles in the region as recent scholarship shows (see [Kalmar 2023](#)). In Polish nationalist

¹⁷ EAS 15 April 1944, 'Polish Minister's Impressions of His E.A. Tour.'

¹⁸ *Głos Polski* 2 December 1945, p. 9, 'Szkoła muzyczna w Tengeru.'

self-constructions, Catholicism is central and the country is seen as the last bulwark of Christianity against the Muslim and Orthodox threat from the East (Snochowska-Gonzalez 2012). With the Russian attack on Ukraine, this idea of the bulwark got a new urgency and the Western European discourse on Ukraine changed. While Ukrainians were ignored, belittled, or seen as dubious by most people in the EU, this changed in 2022. Ukraine became Western civilization's last bulwark against Russian barbarism, shifting the boundaries of Europe further east. In this process, the whiteness of Ukrainians was emphasized and their Europeanness was underlined (Balogun 2023: 2–3).

The figure of the bulwark between European civilization and Asian barbarism persists despite its changing geographies. American author Louis E. van Norman wrote in 1907: 'For four centuries Poland was the bulwark of Europe against the floods of barbarism from the East' (Van Norman 1907). Drawing on a quote from Victor Hugo, he described Poland as 'The Knight among Nations' protecting the frontier against the Asian savages. In today's European discourse, this frontier runs along the frontline in Ukraine and further North along the Polish–Belarusian border. As the Ukrainian speaker of Parliament, Ruslan Stefanchuk put it in a speech at the European Parliament on 1 March 2022: 'I would like you to understand that today Ukraine is defending the border of the civilised world' (European Parliament 2022). Even more recently, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk argued for the continuing fortification of the Poland–Belarus border in February 2024: 'This is a question of the survival of our Western civilization' (Tilles 2024). The discourse remains the same, only the supposed line between civilization and barbarism is shifting and today includes Ukraine, which has taken over the role of the 'Knight among Nations'.

5.2 Gender and womenandchildren as deserving refugees

Both groups are usually portrayed as consisting exclusively of women and children. To start with the numbers, the Polish refugees in Africa were 47% women, 42% children and youth, and only 11% men (Lingelbach 2020: 133). The Ukrainians in Poland in 2022 showed nearly the same composition and were 49.4% women, 42.6% children, and 8% men (World Health Organisation and Statistical Office of Poland, Rzeszów 2022). The statistics thus indeed show a dominance of women and children, albeit some men are among them as well. The unwanted refugee groups are instead gendered as male in current anti-refugee discourse with the non-white Muslim young man portrayed as the ultimate danger (see Bloch 2023). In the moral panic that erupted in Poland when some migrants entered through Belarus in 2021, the people were described as dangerous 'weapons' in 'hybrid warfare' sent by Belarusian dictator Lukashenko (Zessin-Jurek 2023: 108–9). Although they were simply seeking safety from war and misery elsewhere and consisted not only of single men, they were portrayed as invaders sent by the enemy. Only civil society groups and oppositional media emphasized their humanity as well as the presence of women and children among the refugees (Bloch 2023: 45; Pietrusińska 2022). In East Africa, the Jewish refugees were relatedly seen as a danger, although a more subtle one. The Polish refugee group was almost exclusively described as female and thus supposedly in need of protection.

As feminist International Relations scholar Cynthia Enloe emphasized, 'womenandchildren' are amalgamated into an indistinguishable category of innocence, vulnerability and victimhood (Enloe 1990). In humanitarian discourse, *womenandchildren* are the epitome of innocence and the object of care and protection. At the same time, they are deprived of their agency and treated as speechless, silenced victims. As Lisa Malkki (1995: 11) argues, 'women and children embody a special kind of powerlessness' crucial to the construction of refugees as 'bare humanity'. In humanitarian and charity representations, refugees are deserving because they are innocent and this innocence is best shown by focusing on women and children. Recently, this could also be observed in UNHCRs social media campaigns for Syrian and Ukrainian refugees (Ongenaert and Soler 2024). The accepted refugee groups are gendered as female and thus seen as posing no

danger to the dominant male groups in the host societies. Instead, they are portrayed as in need of protection, control, and guidance.

Relatedly, being white and women opens the opportunity to potentially become part of the dominant white, patriarchal society. As long as they do not transgress the boundaries of whiteness and respectability, they are no competition but even a possible enforcement. Indeed, about 200 Polish refugee women married white residents in Africa and therewith lost their nationality (constructed as dependent on the male head of household) and increased the ranks of white settler society (Lingelbach 2020: 138–40). Likewise, most of the 500 Polish orphans who stayed in the South African camp in Oudtshoorn continued their education in the country and joined the White part of Apartheid South Africa. For Ukrainian refugee women and children, the possibility of blending into European societies is given as well. Non-white refugees do not have the same possibility of disappearing into Polish society (Balogun 2024).

5.3 Co-belligerence and connecting soldiers and refugees

The protection of the *womenandchildren* of the brothers in arms is portrayed as a contribution to the common fight. As Nira Yuval-Davis pointed out in her work on gender, war, and nation: 'Wars are seen to be fought for the sake of the "womenandchildren," and the fighting men are comforted and reassured by the knowledge that "their women" are keeping the hearth fires going and are waiting for them to come home' (Yuval-Davis 1997: 111). While women also fight in wars, their supposedly 'natural' role is more often seen in the reproduction of the nation. The heroic male soldier fights the enemy, but women are the reproductive core of the nation and thus integral to the nation's war effort. As women are an integral part of the fighting nation, the protection they get abroad is a reassurance for the fighting men—in the case of the Polish refugees as well as in the case of the Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

On his visit in 1944, Polish Minister Strasburger underlined the close connection of the two parts of the Polish nation. The 'needy' Polish refugees in Africa and 'the Poland which is fighting with all the means at its disposal at the side (of) her allies' and underlined: 'They are the wives, children and parents of the Polish fighting soldiers'.¹⁹ News stories of Ukrainian women visiting their fighting soldier men in Ukraine are a recurrent topic in European media. Due to the geographical proximity, Ukrainian women and children can regularly visit their fighting family members and stay in contact through EU-facilitated free or price-reduced mobile phone and internet options (European Commission 2022b). In contrast, Ukrainian men who tried to flee from the war despite the ban to leave were portrayed as cowards and shamed in Polish state media (Bloch 2023: 46–8). Their supposedly rightful place was on the frontlines. Likewise, Kenyan settlers criticized Jewish refugee men who were supposedly sitting idle in the safety of the colony.²⁰ Some of them answered these accusations with a series of reader's letters in the local paper underlining the fact that they were not allowed to work or fight due to their status as 'Enemy Aliens'.²¹ The Polish refugees in Africa sent letters and parcels to the Polish soldiers reiterating their close bond repeatedly. The Nairobi-based Polish refugee newspaper *Głos Polski* was sent to the Polish troops as well, and its editors encouraged the refugees in the camps to report on their activities to keep up the bond between refugees and soldiers.²² The relationship between the army and the refugees was close and emphasized constantly.

This relationship with the army is what sets these groups apart from other refugees. Just like Malkki observed concerning Burundian refugees in Tanzania, the Ukrainians were portrayed as innocent. In contrast to other refugee groups, however, they were not constructed as depoliticized and 'ahistorical, universal humanitarian subject' (Malkki 1996: 378). As the Bulgarian Prime Minister put it tellingly in March 2022, the Ukrainians are not 'the usual refugee wave of people with an unknown past' (Adam and Hess 2023: 66). They are, like the Poles in the British

¹⁹ EAS 15 April 1944, 'Polish Minister's Impressions of His E.A. Tour.'

²⁰ EAS 10 July 1942, 'Refugees' by John Williams, Kitale.

²¹ EAS 21 July 1942, 'Refugees' by H. Weyl, Kisumu; EAS 24 July 1942, 'Refugees' by 'Give us the Chance', Ol Joro Orok; EAS 31 July 1942, 'Refugees' by 'Refugee.'

²² *Głos Polski* 14 October 1945, 'Z Osiedli' p. 10.

colonies, portrayed as having a very specific past and relation to an ongoing war and this legitimizes their preferential treatment. Both are no representatives of universal human suffering but exceptionally deserving groups of refugees.

6. Conclusion

There are striking similarities between the acceptance of Polish refugees in the British African colonies and the recent acceptance of Ukrainian refugees in Poland and the rest of the EU. Governments gave both groups an exceptional welcome while they continued their general anti-refugee policies. Even more striking is the similarity in the way that this exceptional welcome was legitimized along racialized and gendered connections with the war. Building on Lamis Abdelaaty's work, I argue that both international strategic considerations and domestic opinion do play a role in the discrimination between different refugee groups. In contrast to the model, however, the accepted refugee groups received a warm welcome not primarily because they fled from the enemy, but because they were connected to allied fighting armies. Additionally, this connection was discursively produced in a clearly gendered way: Taking care of the wives and children of the 'brave' male soldiers fighting 'gallantly' for the side of the hosting government was portrayed by politicians and journalists as a contribution to the common war effort. Looking into the current situation and past incidents of sudden turn-arounds in refugee hosting from closed to selectively open doors, my argument here is that race, gender, and the fight against a common enemy do play important and intersecting roles. All three have to fall in place at a moment when the dominant actors in the hosting societies feel urgently endangered to produce such a massive exception to established policies.

The discursive figure of the exceptionally deserving women and children of the white brothers in arms is the epitome of this intersectional argumentation. They are not simply deserving because women and children are portrayed as helpless, speechless, and harmless victims par excellence. They are more than the humanitarian object of bare life that needs to be saved. At the same time, they are not only deserving because they are members of an allied nation in a common struggle—a nation that is in the logic of enmity and co-belligerence a nation of tragic and admirable heroes. And they are not simply white Europeans like the dominating actors within the hosting countries. They are all this combined and therewith the multiple and intersecting refugee groups for whom an exception can and must be made when it comes to refugee admittance. They are the group for whom the well-guarded and nearly shut door of the border needs to be thrown wide open—just to close it again after them. Or in the above-cited words of Ursula van der Leyen: 'They deserve it. We need to do that now'.

Both the British Empire and the Polish state, like many other EU countries, had an entrenched and firm anti-refugee policy. Both had just fended off other refugees when they suddenly made exceptions for a specific, delineated group. The British colonial governments were clear in their refusal to admit Jewish refugees from Germany or any other group in the interwar period. The Polish government followed an increasingly harsh anti-refugee policy since the early 2000s. Both made an exception without changing their overall policy. In both cases, this came in a moment of vulnerability and fear from the threat by an advancing enemy—the British from Hitler and the Axis forces, Poland, and the EU from Putin and the Russian forces. The war changed policies and strategic considerations became paramount. In both cases, the welcomed refugee group was connected to soldiers fighting the common enemy, consisted mainly of women and children and was considered white.

Other people were not given the same welcome, even when they ran from the enemy like the Jewish Germans fleeing the Nazis, Syrians and Chechens fleeing from Russian bombs, or African students and Ukrainian Roma escaping from Russia's attack on Ukraine. Due to anti-Semitism, antigypsyism, anti-Muslim, or anti-Black racism, these refugees were not considered deserving and worthy of acceptance and support. In Poland, they were considered dangerous 'bogus' asylum seekers with mere economic motives (Kmak 2015; Klaus and Szulecka 2023) or potential

'public charges' in the case of impoverished stateless Jews in Kenya.²³ In addition, they were not directly linked to military forces fighting the common enemy. There needs to be a clear strategic interest for the host governments, and the group has to be perceived as harmless.

Focusing on one case of selective refugee hosting from the 1940s and another one from the 2020s shows the value of history for refugee studies. More than simply stating the similarities between the two cases, the view into the past can help to contextualize what is going on in the present. Oftentimes, the urgency and suddenness of massive refugee movements seem unprecedented, and indeed, March 2022 was the very first time the EU Temporary Protection Directive was invoked. However, as I showed here, earlier episodes of unequal treatment of refugees show that the situation is not unique. Bringing together historical and recent observations helps us to see the combination of factors coming together in the legitimizing argumentation for the exceptions. Going beyond universalist appeals to human rights, the exceptional welcome is explained through the specific deservingness of clearly delineated refugee groups based on strategic considerations and their social, racialized, and gendered categorization. Combining history and recent observations in one article may serve to illuminate changes and continuities in the argumentation and advance the interdisciplinary exchange in the field of refugee studies.

Acknowledgements

This article profited deeply from the generous feedback by members of the 'Internalizing Borders' research group at ZiF Bielefeld, especially Frank Wolff, Witold Klaus, Magdalena Kmak, Sabine Hess, Levke Harders, Jens Adam, Maurizio Albahari, Volker Heins, Elissa Helms, Albert Manke, Deborah Bunmi Ojo, Marijana Hameršak, and Mareike Gebhardt. I received valuable feedback on an earlier version I presented at the ECAS Conference in Cologne in a panel organized by Bolaji Balogun and Stephanie Rudwick. Finally, I want to thank the two anonymous reviewers and the journal's editors for their helpful comments and support. All remaining mistakes and shortcomings are my own responsibility.

Conflict of interest. None declared.

Funding

This article is the outcome of research conducted within the "Africa Multiple" Cluster of Excellence at the University of Bayreuth, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany's Excellence Strategy EXC 2052/1–390713894. Substantial parts of it were written as a residential fellow in the research group "Internalizing Borders: The Social and Normative Consequences of the European Border Regime" at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF) at the University of Bielefeld.

References

- Abdelaaty, L. E.** (2021) *Discrimination and Delegation: Explaining State Responses to Refugees*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Achiume, T.** (2022) 'Racial Borders'. *The Georgetown Law Journal*, **110**: 445–508.
- Adam, J., and Hess, S.** (2023) 'Fortified Nationalism. Racializing Infrastructures and the Authoritarian Transformation of the Body Politic. A Field Trip to the Bifurcated Polish/EU Border Regime'. *Movements. Journal for Critical Migration and Border Regime Studies*, **7**: 65–91.
- Arendt, H.** (1958) *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Second enlarged edition). Cleveland: Meridian Books.
- Bakić-Hayden, M.** (1995) 'Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia'. *Slavic Review*, **54**: 917–31. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2501399>

²³ KNA BN/46/62, p. 1, G. Pritchard Brown, Ag. Principle Immigration Officer to British Passport Control Officer, Vienna, 14 August 1938.

- Bakula, B.** (2007) 'Colonial and Postcolonial Aspects of Polish Discourse on the Eastern „Borderlands“'. <http://www.postcolonial-europe.eu/index.php/en/studies/68—colonial-and-postcolonial-aspects-of-polish-discourse-on-the-eastern-borderlandsq>, accessed 13 January 2013.
- Balogun, B.** (2023) 'Refugees Separated by the Global Color Line: The Power of Europeaness, Whiteness, and Sameness'. *International Migration Review*, 01979183231218981. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183231218981>
- Balogun, B.** (2024) *Race and the Colour-Line. The Boundaries of Europeaness in Poland*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Banko, L., Nowak, K., and Gatrell, P.** (2022) 'What is Refugee History, Now?'. *Journal of Global History*, 17: 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022821000243>
- Behrmann, S.** (2018) *Law and Asylum: Space, Subject, Resistance*. Oxon: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203730348>
- Bloch, N.** (2024) 'Is a Woman a Better Refugee than a Man? Gender Representations of Refugees in the Polish Public Debate'. *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny*, 49: 39–56. <https://doi.org/10.4467/25444972SMPP.23.028.19143>
- Brodhurst-Hill, E.** (1936) *So This Is Kenya!*. London, Glasgow: Blackie and Son.
- Caestecker, F., and Moore, B.** (2010) *Refugees from Nazi Germany and the Liberal European States*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Chappell, T. M., and Milek, J.** (2004) *The Persian Blanket: The Life of Janina Milek*. Freemantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press.
- Chimni, B. S.** (1998) 'The Geopolitics of Refugee Studies: A View from the South'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 11: 350–74. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/11.4.350-a>
- Cooper, F., and Stoler, A. L.** (1997) 'Between Metropole and Colony—Rethinking a Research Agenda', in F. Cooper and A. L. Stoler (eds) *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, pp. 1–56. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Enloe, C.** (1990) *Bananas, Beaches and Bases. Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- European Commission.** (2022a) 'Commission Proposes Temporary Protection Status'. European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_1469, accessed 16 February 2024.
- European Commission.** (2022b) 'Ukraine: EU Facilitates Coordinated Steps by Telecom Operators to Help Refugees Stay Connected'. European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_2371, accessed 6 December 2024.
- European Parliament.** (2022) *Verbatim Report of Proceedings—Russian Aggression Against Ukraine*. Brussels: European Parliament. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-03-01-ITM-011_EN.html, accessed 23 February 2024.
- Frankenberg, R.** (1993) *White Women, Race Matters. The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gatrell, P.** (2013) 'Putting Refugees in Their Place'. *New Global Studies*, 7: 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ngs-2013-001>
- Gatrell, P.** (2016) 'Refugees—What's Wrong with History?'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 30: few013. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/few013>
- Glasman, J.** (2017) 'Seeing Like a Refugee Agency: A Short History of UNHCR Classifications in Central Africa (1961–2015)'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 30: 337–62.
- Górny, A.** (2019) 'New Dimensions in Immigration from Ukraine to Poland'. *CMR Spotlight*, 9: 1–8.
- Gousseff, C.** (2011) 'Evacuation versus Repatriation: The Polish-Ukrainian Population Exchange, 1944–6', in J. Reinisch and E. White (eds) *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe, 1944–9*, pp. 91–111. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gross, J. T.** (1988) *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Holmes, S. M., and Castaneda, H.** (2016) 'Representing the "European Refugee Crisis" in Germany and Beyond: Deservingness and Difference, Life and Death'. *American Ethnologist*, 43: 12–24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12259>

- Kalmar, I.** (2023) 'Race, Racialisation, and the East of the European Union: An Introduction'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, **49**: 1465–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2022.2154909>
- Kasper-Holtkotte, C.** (2019) 'They Called Us Bloody Foreigners' Jewish Refugees in Kenya, 1933 Until the 1950s. Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich.
- Kennedy, D. K.** (1987) *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890–1939*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Kingston, L. N., and Ekakitie, I.** (2024) 'Fleeing Ukraine: The Forced Migration Journeys of Black African Students'. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2024.2363808>
- Klaus, W., and Szulecka, M.** (2023) 'Departing or Being Deported? Poland's Approach towards Humanitarian Migrants'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, **36**: 467–88. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feac063>
- Kleist, J. O.** (2017) 'The History of Refugee Protection: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, **30**: 161–9. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fex018>
- Kmak, M.** (2015) 'Between Citizen and Bogus Asylum Seeker: Management of Migration in the EU through the Technology of Morality'. *Social Identities*, **21**: 395–409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2015.1071703>
- Krause, U.** (2021) 'Colonial Roots of the 1951 Refugee Convention and Its Effects on the Global Refugee Regime'. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, **24**: 599–626. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-020-00205-9>
- Krepa, M., and Judzińska, N.** (2023) 'Production of the Crisis: Discourses on the Polish-Belarusian Border'. *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny*, **49**: 9–14. <https://doi.org/10.4467/25444972SMPP.23.033.19301>
- Lingelbach, J.** (2020) *On the Edges of Whiteness. Polish Refugees in British Colonial Africa during and after the Second World War*. New York: Berghahn.
- Lingelbach, J.** (2022a) 'Imperial Refugee Management. Moving Greek Refugees through the British Empire and into the Belgian Congo (1942–1945)'. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, **50**: 1005–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2022.2084939>
- Lingelbach, J.** (2022b) 'Refugees in the Imperial Order of Things: Citizen, Subject, and Polish Refugees in Africa (1942–50)'. *Africa Today*, **69**: 14–35.
- Malkki, L.** (1995) *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Malkki, L.** (1996) 'Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization'. *Cultural Anthropology*, **11**: 377–404.
- Marfleet, P.** (2007) 'Refugees and History: Why We Must Address the Past'. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, **26**: 136–48.
- Marrus, M. R.** (1985) *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mayblin, L.** (2014) 'Colonialism, Decolonisation, and the Right to be Human: Britain and the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees'. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, **27**: 423–41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12053>
- Mirga-Wójtowicz, E., Talewicz, J., and Kołaczek, M.** (2022) *Human Rights, Needs and Discrimination. The Situation of Roma Refugees from Ukraine in Poland—Report on Research and Intervention Activities*. Heidelberg: Central Council of German Sinti and Roma. <https://fundacjawstronedialogu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/EN.pdf>, accessed 22 March 2024.
- Mlambo, A. S.** (2000) 'Some Are More White than Others': Racial Chauvinism as a Factor of Rhodesian Immigration Policy, 1890–1963'. *Zambezia*, **27**: 139–60.
- Ongenaert, D., and Soler, C.** (2024) 'Beyond Victim and Hero Representations? A Comparative Analysis of UNHCR's Instagram Communication Strategies for the Syrian and Ukrainian Crises'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, **37**: 286–306. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feae035>
- Persian, J.** (2017) *Beautiful Balts: From Displaced Persons to New Australians*. Sidney: NewSouth Publishing.

- Pietrusińska, M. J. (2022) 'People from the Forest': Discourse about Migrants in the Narratives of NGO Workers and Activists Involved in the Humanitarian Crisis at the Polish-Belarusian Border'. *Sprawy Narodowościowe. Seria Nowa*, **54**: 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.11649/sn.2803>
- Rahal, M., and White, B. T. (2022) 'UNHCR and the Algerian War of Independence: Postcolonial Sovereignty and the Globalization of the International Refugee Regime, 1954–63'. *Journal of Global History*, **17**: 331–52. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022821000449>
- Reinisch, J., and White, E. (eds) (2011) *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe, 1944–9*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Shapiro, F. (2002) *Haven in Africa*. Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House.
- Skran, C. (1995) *Refugees in Inter-War Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Snochowska-Gonzalez, C. (2012) 'Post-Colonial Poland—On an Unavoidable Misuse'. *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures*, **26**: 708–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325412448473>
- Snyder, T. (2003) 'The Causes of Ukrainian-Polish Ethnic Cleansing 1943'. *Past & Present*, **179**: 197–234.
- Steyn, M. (2001) 'Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used to Be' *White Identity in a Changing South Africa*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Stummer, K. (2016) 'Forgotten Refugees: Chechen Asylum Seekers in Poland'. *Krytyka Polityczna*. <http://politicalcritique.org/cee/poland/2016/forgotten-refugees-chechen-asylum-seekers-in-poland/>, accessed 16 February 2024.
- Sword, K. R. (1994) *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939–48*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Szczepanik, M. (2018) 'Border Politics and Practices of Resistance on the Eastern Side of "Fortress Europe": the Case of Chechen Asylum Seekers at the Belarusian–Polish Border'. *Central and Eastern European Migration Review*, **7**: 69–89.
- Terreblanche, S. J. (2002) *A History of Inequality in South Africa, 1652–2002*. Scottsville: University of Natal Press.
- Tilles, D. (2024) '"Survival of Western Civilisation" Depends on Stopping Uncontrolled Migration, Says Polish PM Tusk'. *Notes From Poland*. <https://notesfrompoland.com/2024/02/12/survival-of-western-civilisation-depends-on-stopping-uncontrolled-migration-says-polish-pm-tusk/>, accessed 28 May 2024.
- UNHCR. (2022) 'High Commissioner's Message on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination'. UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/news-releases/high-commissioners-message-international-day-elimination-racial-discrimination-0>, accessed 9 December 2024.
- Van Norman, L. E. (1907) *Poland, the Knight among Nations*. New York, Fleming H. Revell.
- Wolff, F. (2014) 'Global Walls and Global Movement: New Destinations in Jewish Migration, 1918–1939'. *East European Jewish Affairs*, **44**: 187–204. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501674.2014.950542>
- Wolff, L. (1994) *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- World Health Organisation and Statistical Office of Poland, Rzeszów. (2022) *Ukrainian Refugees in Poland Survey 2022. Preliminary Findings*. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/97052>, accessed 22 March 2024.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (1997) *Gender and Nation*. London: SAGE.
- Zarycki, T. (2014) *Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Zessin-Jurek, L. (2023) '(Non)Responsibility for Refugees—Communicating about the Belarusian-Polish Border (2021–2023)'. *Studia Migracyjne—Przegląd Polonijny*, **3**: 101–19. <https://doi.org/10.4467/25444972SMPP.23.031.19146>
- Zetter, R. (1991) 'Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, **4**: 39–62. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/4.1.39>
- Zielinski, K. (2009) 'To Pacify, Populate and Polish: Territorial Transformations and the Displacement of Ethnic Minorities in Communist Poland, 1944–49', in N. Baron and P. Gatrell (eds) *Warlands: Population Resettlement and State Reconstruction in the Soviet-East European Borderlands, 1945–50*, pp. 188–209. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

© The Author(s) 2024. Published by Oxford University Press.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Journal of Refugee Studies, 2025, 38, 674–689

<https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feae089>

Original Article