

POLSKI UNIWERSYTET NA OBCZYŹNIE
W LONDYNIE

ZESZYTY NAUKOWE

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**REPORT ON THE 12TH INTERNATIONAL
ANNUAL APRIL CONFERENCE TITLED
„THROUGH THE CENTURIES. CHRONICLES
OF POLISH PRESENCE ON THE AFRICAN
CONTINENT. SPATIO-TEMPORAL
CHARACTERISTIC OF POLISH DIASPORA
IN AFRICA”**

**ORGANISED ON 9 APRIL 2022
BY THE AFRICA STUDIES UNIT
OF THE POLISH UNIVERSITY ABROAD
IN LONDON (PUNO)**

The Polish University Abroad in London has since 2010 been organising the annual International April Conferences, in memory of the last Polish president in exile – Ryszard Kaczorowski. The conferences aim to highlight the contributions of Poles to culture, art and science in the world. Organised on 9 April 2022, 12th International Annual April Conference explored the history of Polish presence on the African continent. The presence of the Polish diaspora on the African continent can be traced back as far as the 15th century, where the

first archival records could be found in North Africa and from the 17th century in the south of the continent. From the early 19th century, Polish scientists began to travel to the African continent to undertake research into the languages and cultures of the African indigenous people as well as conduct studies on the continent's topography. The 20th century filled the pages of Polish history in Africa very extensively – with Polish missionaries working in many African countries, as well as scientists, artists and journalists visiting selected places, becoming a part of the culture and history of the African societies.

The Second World War opened a new chapter in the history of Polish relations with, and migration to, Africa. From 1942, Polish refugees evacuated from the depths of the Soviet Union began arriving in Eastern and Southern Africa. The end of the war and the British withdrawal of recognition for the Polish government in exile on 5 July 1945 raised the question of the future of Poles in Africa. The following decades saw an increase in Polish contract workers, especially in West Africa, and the difficult 1980s contributed to another wave of emigration from Poland. Today, decisions to emigrate, although no longer dictated by dramatic political events or harsh economic conditions, are taken by young people to discover and get to know the African continent – finding out that the culturally heterogeneous and socially diverse continent has so much to offer and still remains mysterious to many Poles.

The scope of the conference covered the beginnings of the Polish diaspora settlement in African countries up to the 20th century, with particular emphasis on the history of Poles evacuated to the east and south of Africa during the Second World War, and contemporary Polish-African cultural, social and religious contacts. The conference was a unique opportunity to tell a complicated story of Polish connections with the African continent, against the background of important events in world history, interwoven with the social history of African countries, in order to make us aware of the very important role played by Africa in the modern world.

The scientific committee of the conference was formed from international academics from four countries including Germany, Poland, South Africa and UK and the language of the event was English. The conference was organised in two dimensions, online and live in the Sapphire Room of POSK Polish Centre in London-Hammersmith, where the organisers and a group of guests were joined by three speakers from Poland and the UK. The organisation of the event was overseen by the Africa Studies Unit of PUNO's Social Sciences Department.

The conference was opened by PUNO's Deputy Rector, prof. Grażyna Czubińska. The moderator of the conference panels was Dr Teresa Naidoo. There were three thematic panels divided historically, scientifically and culturally and socio-economically. Each of the panels was represented by four or five speakers. The conference hosted its honourable speakers from eight countries, including five African states.

The first panel titled „History of the First Polish Settlers in Africa until 1939” began with the presentation from prof. Arkadiusz Żukowski, of the Institute of Political Science, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland. The presentation titled „The History of Poles in Southern Africa (from the 16th century to the beginning of the 21st century)” referred to the contacts of Poles with the South African coast in the 16th century, as well as their permanent presence in the Cape as soldiers of the Dutch United East India Company and the first free citizens. It also covered the participation of Poles in successive waves of emigration to South Africa during the diamond and gold rush in the second half of the 19th century and at the turn of the 20th century. What was also discussed was the activity of Polish missionaries in the 20th century.

The next speaker was Dr Cobus Rademeyer, who is an acting head of School for Humanities at Sol Plaatje University in Kimberley, South Africa. His presentation „Retracing the History of Polish Diaspora in Africa: The South Africa/Poland History Project” focused on historical information on the Polish diaspora in Africa and the special project that is running in South Africa to preserve the history, especially the painful history of the Second World War of Polish migrants in South Africa. The project aims to preserve the memory of 500 Polish orphans, evacuated to Oudtshoorn, SA, during the Second World War. We learnt that the project runs successfully and is constantly expanding.

The third speaker of the panel was Dr David N. Tshimba, representing the Centre for African Studies, at Uganda Martyrs University in Uganda, who presented the topic titled „Jan Czekanowski and His Revelations About Swahilisation Astride a Congo-Uganda Border, 1907–1909”, making the audience aware of a great researcher Jan Czekanowski, a Polish anthropologist, who took part in the German-sponsored Mecklenburg scientific expedition to central Africa in May 1907 embarking on a 20-month cultural and anthropological fieldwork.

The last speaker of the first panel was Eric Tackie Tawiah Ankrah, who currently serves as a Junior Researcher in the Africa Studies Unit of the Polish University Abroad. Eric's speech titled „The Exploits of a Lone Polish Photojournalist on the African Continent” was a biographical presentation of Kazimierz

Nowak, Polish lone ranger who as a traveller, correspondent, reporter and photographer explored the whole continent of Africa during a five year voyage in 1930s.

After a short break, the second panel of the conference, titled „Polish Odyssey in Africa during the Second World War”, began. Five speakers took part in this panel. First, Dr Jochen Lingelbach, representing the University of Bayreuth, Germany, presented his paper, titled „On the Edges of Whiteness. Polish Refugees in British Colonial Africa during and after the Second World War”. In his talk, Dr Jochen presented key findings from his book focusing on the interaction of the Polish refugees with different actors of the hosting colonial societies in East and Central Africa, despite the intention of colonial officials to isolate the Poles and minimise their interaction with members of the hosting societies. The talk addressed the question: Where did the mainly poor, female, peasant-class refugees belong in colonial societies signified by the „politics of difference”? He concluded that while they were privileged by their whiteness, they were nevertheless marginalised as refugees, women, Eastern Europeans and peasants. Consequently, they found themselves on the edges of colonial whiteness.

The next speaker, representing University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa and Polish Association of Siberian Deportees in Africa, Stefan Szewczuk, MA, referred the topic titled „Victims of Russian aggression – preliminary findings on a history of the Polish Children of Oudtshoorn, South Africa” that focused on the history of five hundred Polish refugee children evacuated to Oudtshoorn, South Africa in April 1943. The talk was based on the wider project led by Mr Szewczuk, that aims to document the untold lived experiences of the Oudtshoorn Children in their deportations to Siberia, their journey out of Siberia to Persia then onto Oudtshoorn and subsequently their lives in South Africa.

The third speaker of the panel was Dr Piotr Puchalski from Pedagogical University of Kraków, Poland and his paper titled „Confronting Colonialism. Poles in British Colonies in Africa as Imperial Agents, 1939–1945” focused on the fact, while Polish refugees posed a threat to the racial hierarchy that supported the British colonial system in Africa also during wartime, the British did not refrain from using more elite Poles to acquire the sympathy of collaborating African elites.

The next speaker of this panel was prof. Janusz Zuziak of Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa, Poland, who presented paper titled „Polish Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade in the Siege of Tobruk” focusing on one of the bat-

tles and symbols in the history of the Polish Army of the Second World War, that was the battle of Tobruk and also the participation of the Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade commanded by Brig. Gen. Stanisław Kopański.

The last speaker of the panel, was Jennifer Grant, MA, representing Queen Mary University of London, UK, who's paper titled „The Graves of Polish Officers and Men in a Strange land: Khartoum War Cemetery and Polish Relations with the Imperial War Graves Commission” focused on the Polish military presence in Africa during the Second World War and the Khartoum War Cemetery, that contains the graves of Polish airmen killed in 1943, who served as British allies for whom remit had expanded to include a commitment to honouring the war dead of Britain's allies in the same way as the British, for the duration of the war. Due to the anomalous political situation of the Poles in the West, however, and hostility from the Anders Poles to the transfer of Polish graves overseas into Warsaw's hands, discussion about the erection of permanent headstones entered a period of administrative limbo. Long after the headstones of the other Allies had been engraved and set in place in the cemetery, the Polish graves remained with their temporary markers. The paper explored Poland's standing as a wartime ally and the status of the Polish veterans in the West alongside the sacrifice of commemoration to diplomatic disputes.

After the second panel, an exhibition featuring Polish presence on the African continent was presented. A virtual exhibition related to the historical facts that happened between the Second World War and present times. Thanks to the virtual format, it was easy to move from post-war Ugandan or South African reality to today's Kenya or Sierra Leone. The exhibition was supported by the Polish Library in London and PUNO's own multimedia database.

Third and the last panel of the conference focused on more contemporary times and shifted from the history of eastern and southern Africa to the west of the continent. It featured „Polish Scientific, Cultural and Socio-Economic Contribution to the African Continent”.

The first speaker, prof. Paweł Boski, representing the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw, Poland, told the story of Polish presence in Africa during the time of communism regime in eastern Europe. The speech titled „Poles as Expatriates in Africa during the Last 15 years of Polish People's Republic: an Economic and Psycho-Cultural Phenomenon” was focused on Poles being sent to Algeria, Libya, Nigeria and Zaire/Congo as professional experts, and on the process that was coordinated by PHZ Polservice, a state

company of foreign trade. Motivations for the departure were predominantly economical, but with the end of 15 years long contract period, they left Africa not leaving behind any durable legacy.

Prof. Stephen Muoki from Pwani University, Kilifi, Kenya told us in his speech about „Technologies of Imaging In Communication Art And Social Sciences (TICASS) Project and Africa-Polish Partnerships”, a project that Polish University Abroad was actively participating over the years alongside five other universities from several countries.

A deeply personal speech presented by former Sierra Leone's Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, and current author, journalist and Junior Researcher at Africa Studies Unit of Polish University Abroad, hon. Sheka Tarawalie, who referred to diplomatic contacts between Poland and Sierra Leone and his personal experience with the Poles in Africa and the UK, from fascination by Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski's literature to the personal contribution into the ASU and Floor 4 Africa project.

The last presentation of the conference came from South Africa. Representing the University of Cape Town, Dr Wanda Chunnett's speech titled „An Assessment of the Characteristics That Enabled Resource Constrained Polish Entrepreneurs to Establish Sustainable, Job Creating Businesses in Southern Africa”, addressed the discussion on the value that is created by migrant entrepreneurs in Africa. As an example Dr Chunnett referred to the group of Polish orphans that was involuntarily transported to south and southern Africa during the Second World War, and was allowed to establish a locus of power in their host country, bringing the benefits to their hosts and achieve their long term vision.

After the formal discussions ending each panel, the conference was closed. Almost immediately the organisers received a lot of positive feedback and congratulations on the success of the event. The conference was successful indeed. One of the most important topics in Polish history was brought to public attention, and was beautifully referred to by the academics and professionals from several European and African countries. Learning about that part of history brought us closer to know and understand the Polish odyssey on the African continent. The broad view of the subject however has not been explored sufficiently in one event, so it is worth taking on further challenges in the future, to preserve African history, in which Polish diaspora have played a significant role.



**Through the Centuries. Chronicles of Polish Presence on the African Continent.
*Spatio-Temporal Characteristic of Polish Diaspora in Africa.***

12th International Annual April Conference

9 April 2022, LONDON

www.puno.ac.uk

Polish University Abroad in London (PUNO) in cooperation with:

***Social Sciences Department of Sol Plaatje University, South Africa
Polish Association of Siberian Deportees in Africa***



1.-5. 12th Annual International April Conference PUNO – „Through the Centuries. Chronicles of Polish Presence on the African Continent. Spatio-Temporal Characteristic of Polish Diaspora in Africa”, Londyn, 9 kwietnia 2022 r.

PROGRAMME

9 April 2022, London

Language of the conference: English

10.00 - 10.30

OPENING REMARKS

Prof. Włodzimierz Mier-Jędrzejowicz, *RECTOR, Polish University Abroad in London*

MODERATOR OF CONFERENCE PANELS:

Dr Teresa Folga-Naidoo, *Chairperson, Africa Studies Unit, Polish University Abroad in London*

10.30 - 12.05

Panel 1. History of the First Polish Settlers in Africa until 1939

(20-minute presentation, 15-minute discussion after presentations)

1. **Prof. Arkadiusz Żukowski**, *Institute of Political Science, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland: **The History of Poles in Southern Africa (from the 16th century to the beginning of the 21st century)***
2. **Dr Cobus Rademeyer**, *Sol Plaatje University, Kimberley, South Africa: **Retracing the History of Polish Diaspora in Africa: The South Africa/Poland History Project***
3. **Dr David N. Tshimba**, *Centre for African Studies, Uganda Martyrs University, Uganda: **Jan Czekanowski and His Revelations About Swahilisation Astride a Congo-Uganda Border, 1907-09***
4. **Eric Tackie Tawiah Ankrah, BA**, *Africa Studies Unit, Polish University Abroad in London, UK: **The Exploits of a Lone Polish Photojournalist on the African Continent***

Discussion

12.05 - 14.00

Panel 2. Polish Odyssey in Africa During WW2

(20-minute presentation, 15-minute discussion after presentations)

1. **Dr Jochen Lingelbach**, *University of Bayreuth, Germany: On the Edges of Whiteness. Polish Refugees in British Colonial Africa During and After the Second World War*

2. **Stefan Szewczuk, MA**, *University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa: Victims of Russian aggression - preliminary findings on a history of the Polish Children of Oudtshoorn, South Africa*

3. **Dr Piotr Puchalski**, *Pedagogical University of Kraków, Poland: Confronting Colonialism. Poles in British Colonies in Africa as Imperial Agents, 1939-1945*

4. **Prof. Janusz Zuziak**, *Jan Długosz University, Poland: Polish Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade in the Siege of Tobruk*

5. **Jennifer Grant, MA**, *Queen Mary University of London, UK: The Graves of Polish Officers and Men in a Strange land': Khartoum War Cemetery and Polish Relations with the Imperial War Graves Commission*

Discussion

14.00 - 14.20 **Break**

14.20 - 15.55

Panel 3. Polish Scientific, Cultural and Socio-Economic Contribution to African Continent

(20-minute presentation, 15-minute discussion after presentations)

1. **Prof. dr hab. Paweł Boski**, *University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Poland: Poles as Expatriates in Africa During the Last 15*

years of Polish Peoples Republic: An Economic and Psycho-Cultural Phenomenon

2. Prof Stephen Muoki Joshua, Pwani University, Kilifi, Kenya: Technologies of Imaging In Communication Art And Social Sciences (TICASS) Project and Africa-Polish Partnerships

3. Hon. Sheka Tarawalie, Africa Studies Unit, Polish University Abroad in London, UK: Polish Presence In Sierra Leone: Minimal But Meaningful – A Personal And Intellectual Perspective

4. Dr Wanda Chunnnett, School of Business, University of Cape Town, South Africa: An Assessment of the Characteristics That Enabled Resource Constrained Polish Entrepreneurs to Establish Sustainable, Job Creating Businesses in Southern Africa

Discussion

15.55 - 16.30

Conclusion, Discussion and Closure of the Conference.

MEDIA PARTNER:



SPONSOR:

The De Brzezcie Lanckoronski Foundation

ONLINE EXHIBITION DATA SOURCES:

Polish University Abroad, Polish Library in London, Polish Association of Siberian Deportees in Africa



Scientific Committee of the Conference:

Prof. Paweł Boski, SWPS University, Warsaw (Poland)
Prof. Grażyna Czubińska, Polish University Abroad, London (UK)
Dr Teresa Folga-Naidoo, Polish University Abroad, London (UK)
Dr Jochen Lingelbach, University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth (Germany)
Dr Cobus Rademeyer, Sol Plaatje University, Kimberley (South Africa)
HONORARY MEMBERSHIP: Eugenia Maresch, London (UK)

Organising Committee of the Conference:

Dr Teresa Folga-Naidoo PUNO, London
Dr Anna Watoła PUNO, London
Roman Mazur MBA, PUNO, London
Stefan Szewczuk MA, PASD, South Africa
Hon. Sheka Tarawalie, PUNO, London
Ewa Łukaszewicz MSc, PUNO, London
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