

PIOTR PUCHALSKI

Pedagogical University of Cracow (Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny im. KEN w Krakowie)
ORCID: 0000-0003-4530-959X

DIRECTED BY MOSCOW? COMMUNIST POLAND'S POLICIES IN DECOLONIAL AFRICA, 1918/1945–1964¹

This article presents selected issues from communist Poland's diplomatic, economic, and cultural relations with decolonial Africa from 1945 to 1964. The discussed topic has encouraged some scholarship in Polish but, apart from being mentioned in broader studies concerning socialist internationalism, it has not been the subject of many English-language works.² In one of the few, Małgorzata Mazurek has shown that Polish socialist economists, considered less dogmatic by colleagues in the Global South, supplied countries such as India with useful knowledge aimed at economic progress.³ At the same time, Przemysław Gasztold has pointed out that unlike other satellite states such as Bulgaria, the Polish People's Republic did not appear to be a major socialist global

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² Concerning Poland's relations with countries in West Africa, see J. Knopek, *Stosunki polsko-zachodnioafrykańskie*, Toruń 2013. For South Africa, see A. Żukowski, *Polsko-południowoafrykańskie stosunki polityczne*, Olsztyn 1998. Concerning the question of socialist internationalism, see B. Balogun, "Cold War Internationalism: The Myth of Race-Blind Eastern Europe" [in:] M. Lipska, M. Talarczyk, *Hope Is of a Different Color: From the Global South to the Lodz Film School*, Chicago/Warsaw, 2021, pp. 141–62; ed. by J. Mark, P. Betts, *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonisation*, New York 2022. Also see relevant chapters in, ed. by M. Kałczewiak, M. Kozłowska, *The World beyond the West: Perspectives from Eastern Europe*, New York/Oxford 2022. Marta Grzechnik's article on Poland as the missing "Second World" in postcolonial studies is also important: M. Grzechnik, "The Missing Second World: On Poland and Postcolonial Studies", *Interventions* 2019, pp. 1–17. Other important Polish- and English-language studies are cited later in the article.

³ M. Mazurek, "Polish Economists in Nehru's India: Making Science for the Third World in an Era of De-Stalinization and Decolonization", *Slavic Review* 2018, 77/3, pp. 588–610; *eadem*, "Measuring Development: An Intellectual and Political History of Ludwik Landau's Scale of World Inequality", *Contemporary European History* 2019, 28/2, pp. 156–71. Also see K. Lebow, "The Polish Peasant on the Sugar Plantation: Bronisław Malinowski, Feliks Gross and Józef Obrębski in the New World", *Contemporary European History* 2019, 28/2, pp. 188–204.

actor.⁴ In response to the need for an English-language synthesis of the topic, I argue that communist Poland's state apparatus made attempts to increase trade with and facilitate knowledge transfers to independent countries in Africa. Most importantly, I underline that World War II was not a total watershed moment in Poland's approach to Africa. In fact, many Polish policies can be considered continuities from the interwar period, in particular (1) pursuing a sphere of interests nested in larger imperial structures; (2) supporting anti-colonial forces; (3) promoting the story of Poland as a German colonial space; (4) attempting to establish direct commercial relations and increase trade; and (5) using non-state social institutions as government proxies. In addition to pointing out these continuities, I demonstrate that Adam Rapacki's foreign policy, which is considered quasi-independent from Moscow, made instrumental use of the processes that occurred in Africa during the Eastern European "thaw" of the late 1950s and early 1960s. I conclude by assessing Poland's outlook on the affairs of Africa at the end of the "thaw" in 1964.

SEARCHING FOR COLONIES⁵

The entanglement of Polish elites in Africa dates to the years of the "Scramble for Africa". As Poland remained partitioned by Russia, Germany, and Austria, Polish nationalists could not participate in the new form of colonialism based on direct state annexations. Instead, some of them believed that travelling to the so-called "Dark Continent" would lead to scientific and commercial gains for the Polish lands and raise the status of Poles to one of the full-fledged European nations deserving an independent state. In the years 1882–1886, for example, a Pole named Stefan Szolc-Rogozński and his two companions travelled to Cameroon, where they created a Polish station on Mondoleh Island. They claimed to promote fair trade with the indigenous population as well as benign settlement, in line with their proclaimed Romantic compassion for other oppressed nations. Ironically, however, Szolc-Rogozński's "colonies" in today's Cameroon were soon surrendered to the German Reich, the same power that occupied Polish territory back in Europe. Brutal German colonialism, the Poles argued, was the antithesis of their own endeavour in Africa.⁶

⁴ P. Gasztold, *Lost Illusions: The Limits of Communist Poland's Involvement in Cold War Africa* [in:] N. Telepneva, Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Warsaw Pact Intervention in the Third World: Aid and Influence in the Cold War*, London/New York 2018, pp. 197–220.

⁵ This section of the article is based on my book: P. Puchalski, *Poland in a Colonial World Order: Adjustments and Aspirations, 1918–1939*, London/New York 2022, but I cite additional sources to draw attention to the works of other scholars. Another important reference is J. Tomaszewski, Z. Landau, *Polska w Europie i świecie 1918–1939*, Warsaw 2005.

⁶ Concerning Szolc-Rogozński's endeavours, see T. Bohajedyn, "Sen o kolonii, czyli polsko-niemiecka rywalizacja w Kamerunie 1884–1885", *Elewator: kwartalnik literacko-kulturalny* 2016, 4, pp. 58–62; J. Knopek, "Stosunki polsko-kameruńskie: geneza, struktury, funkcjonowanie", *Wrocławskie Studia Politologiczne* 2013, 14, pp. 20–42; M. Rhode, "Zivilisierungsmissionen und Wissenschaft. Polen kolonial?", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 2013, 39/1, pp. 5–34. Regarding the influence of Western colonialism on partitioned Poland, see J. Daheur, "They Handle Negroes Just Like Us: German Colonialism in Cameroon in the Eyes of Poles (1885–1914)", *European Review* 2018, 26/3, pp. 492–502; M. Cieslak, "Between State and Empire, Or How Western European Imperialism in Africa Redefined the Polish Nation", *European History Quarterly* 2022, 52/3, pp. 440–460; L.A.U. Valerio, *Colonial Fanta-*

The blossoming of Poland's contacts with Africa came during the interwar period, as the now-independent country made a series of attempts to benefit from what was essentially a colonial world order sanctioned in international law. At first, the myth of Polish goodwill toward Africans was discarded as elites in Warsaw pursued unabashed colonial aspirations, which stemmed from Poland's post-imperial status: the country's industry and commerce were partly undercut by Western companies. Starting in the late 1920s, the Polish state and its proxies, such as the Maritime and Colonial League (*Liga Morska i Kolonialna*), established small plantations and trade outposts to create direct and more profitable commercial connections between Poland and Africa. At the time of the Great Depression, the hope was that cheaper "colonial raw materials" such as rubber, fibers, and cacao would facilitate industrial growth and reduce the number of "dwarf farms" in the countryside.⁷ It is worthwhile pointing out that the Polish colonial lobby did not consist of a group of madmen desiring to conquer a slice of a world that had already been split between great powers. Instead, colonial pundits such as Kazimierz Głuchowski and Gustaw Orlicz-Dreszer, mostly Józef Piłsudski's allies, understood that a new Wilsonian mandate system created opportunities for non-colonial powers to participate in international colonialism.

The first Polish attempt to carry out a "colonial program" of limited settlement for commercial purposes occurred in Angola, where a small group of right-wing émigré planters sought to cooperate with Portuguese colonialists for economic gain. Despite initially welcoming wealthier settlers, Salazar's regime became worried about foreign (especially German) influence in its domains, and the new Portuguese colonial statute of 1933 barred any further growth of Polish settlement around the mission of Quipeio.⁸ As the idea of realising Polish colonial ambitions via Portuguese colonialism (and racism) failed, the Maritime and Colonial League welcomed another opportunity, with tacit support from the government in Warsaw. In 1934, the independent state of Liberia faced a dual challenge from the United States and the British Empire, failing to pay back large loans to the US-based Firestone rubber corporation and allowing its military campaign against the indigenous Kru tribal group to spill into Sierra Leone. As these two great powers used their influence in the League of Nations to threaten to turn Liberia into an international mandate, the Liberian government asked its Polish counterpart for help. In consequence, the Maritime and Colonial League signed a "treaty of friendship" with Liberia, which granted Poland special trade and farming privileges, while its secret protocol talked about airbases, gold mines, and military recruitment.⁹ In time, while claiming to protect it,

sies, *Imperial Realities: Race Science and the Making of Polishness on the Fringes of the German Empire, 1840–1920*, Athens 2019.

⁷ See T. Białas, *Liga Morska i Kolonialna 1930–1939*, Gdańsk 1983; T. Hunczak, "Polish Colonial Ambitions in the Inter-War Period", *Slavic Review* 1967, 26/4, pp. 648–656; M.A. Kowalski, *Dyskurs kolonialny w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Warsaw 2010.

⁸ See D. Szczechowska-Frączyk, "Polscy osadnicy w Angoli w okresie międzywojennym", *Afryka* 2002, 15, 65–82. The reluctance of these émigrés, skeptical of Piłsudski's reforms in Poland, to work with the Maritime and Colonial League also contributed to the precarious political situation of the settlement.

⁹ See W. Lizak, "Polsko-liberyjskie kontakty w okresie międzywojennym" [in:] *Bilad as-Sudan: varia*, ed. by W. Cisło, J. Różański, M. Ząbek, Pelplin 2017, 125–141; M. Skulimowska, "Poland's Colonial Aspirations and the Question of a Mandate over Liberia, 1933–1939", *The Historical Journal* 2022, 65/3, pp. 730–749.

Polish planters and experts became intelligence agents attempting to assume control of Liberia, struggling against the British and Americans and ultimately being forced out. This was the first and only Polish colonial project that was carried out independently.

By the fall of 1936, the Polish foreign minister Józef Beck decided that “helping” states in Africa to remain independent was not realistic or practical: Warsaw mostly brushed off Haile Selassie’s desperate pleas to get Polish technical and economic assistance to Ethiopia as it was being attacked by Italy.¹⁰ Instead, Beck believed that Mussolini’s undermining of the colonial status quo could force the Western powers to introduce reforms to preempt future wars for resources. Proclaiming the Polish interest in colonial affairs, but not in specific territories, Beck’s diplomats at the League of Nations in Geneva began to propose original schemes that would allow non-colonial powers to obtain “colonial raw materials” namely: breaking up currency blocs, allowing barter trade, and introducing an international currency. Defending their own resources and worried about creating a historical precedent, neither Britain nor France was interested in European “solidarity” in Africa, however.¹¹ Nonetheless, Warsaw continued to stress its colonial aspirations in international relations as a way of deflecting British efforts to appease Nazi Germany in Eastern Europe, luring all the parties into colonial appeasement instead. Furthermore, Beck was also interested in reaching an agreement with international Jewish institutions and with great powers such as France to orchestrate a steady emigration of Jews from Poland, with northern Madagascar considered a potential supplement for Palestine.¹² The outbreak of World War II, however, put an end to these international projects, brought a slow decline to Polish commercial endeavours in southern Africa, and turned Poland itself into a Nazi German colonial reservoir. During the global conflict, thousands of Polish deportees rescued from the Soviet Union found refuge in British East Africa, but most of them could not remain there after 1948.¹³

RETURNING TO AFRICA AFTER THE WAR

While some scholars point to some local factors that allowed its establishment,¹⁴ Poland’s postwar communist system was introduced forcibly, with Moscow-sponsored puppets bringing it on Soviet tanks to the east and west of the Curzon line. On 22 July 1944, the Polish Committee of National Liberation announced itself as a quasi-government to be installed in Lublin, outcompeting the Polish government-in-exile established legally at the end of September 1939. By July 1945, most Western powers rescinded their recogni-

¹⁰ See D.K. Gemechu, “Stosunki polsko-etiopskie. Zarys problematyki”, *Forum Politologiczne* 2006, 3, Kontakty polsko-afrykańskie. Przeszłość, teraźniejszość, przyszłość, pp. 173–87.

¹¹ See Z. Bujkiewicz, *Aspiracje kolonialne w polityce zagranicznej Polski*, Zielona Góra 1998.

¹² See M. Brechtken, “Madagaskar für die Juden”: antisemitische Idee und politische Praxis 1885–1945, Munich 1998; M. Jarnecki, “Madagaskar w polskich koncepcjach i planach kolonialnych”, *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 2006, 28, pp. 89–101.

¹³ See J. Lingelbach, *On the Edges of Whiteness: Polish Refugees in British Colonial Africa during and after the Second World War*, New York 2020.

¹⁴ See K. Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949–56*, Ithaca 2013.

tion of the exile government, accepting the *fait accompli* of communist power in Poland. In June 1946, a falsified referendum concerning the main tenets of communist reform was conducted; a rigged election followed half a year later, forcing the former prime minister of the government-in-exile, Stanisław Mikołajczyk, to flee the country as one of the last democratic politicians. At least until 1953, Stalinist terror reigned in Poland: arrests, torture, and executions of “enemies of the state”, including former anti-Nazi fighters, were carried out; heavy industry was forcibly developed at the cost of farmers and living conditions; and the economic relations with the Soviet Union were arranged in a semi-colonial manner. While initially open to prewar diplomats, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw was gradually purged of more free-thinking officials and reduced to an eager enforcer of orders coming from Moscow, especially under Minister Stanisław Skrzyszewski.¹⁵

Still, despite its grim internal situation and increasing dependence on the Soviet Union, communist Poland participated in global affairs. It was one of the founding members of the United Nations – the Provisional Government of National Unity signed the Charter of the United Nations on 15 October 1945 – including its many agencies and institutions such as the Trusteeship Council, which took place of the defunct Permanent Mandates Commission. One of the first colonial issues dealt with by the international community was the status of the Italian territories in Africa liberated by the Allies: Libya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia. The Allies agreed that, except for Ethiopia, these countries would be turned into some forms of trusteeships and soon granted self-rule, but the question remained whether the Italians would participate in their temporary administration. Rome relinquished its claims to Libya in 1947 but attempted to retain influence in the Horn of Africa. Addis Ababa, on the other hand, was opposed to the return of Italian authorities to the neighbouring territories, but this was not enough to stop the reinstatement of Somaliland in the form of an Italian trusteeship.¹⁶

According to Marxist-Leninist ideology, imperialism was the last stage of capitalism. The Eastern Bloc was therefore obliged to support the anti-colonial struggle (*ruch narodowyzwoleniczy* in Polish) as a struggle of the proletariat-in-the-making against global capital, although pure opportunism and great-power politics played an equally important role therein. In line with this ideology and Moscow's interests, Poland tried to reinforce the understanding of trusteeship as a temporary condition meant to prepare a territory for independence, underlining that trusteeship cannot become another mandate system whereby colonial powers turned international protectorates into “appendices of their empires”. The Polish delegation to the UN argued, therefore, for the largest possible competences to be granted to the Trusteeship Council.¹⁷ According to a Polish memorandum drafted in 1946, due to its lack of colonial past, Warsaw's position concerning

¹⁵ J. Tebinka, *Uzależnienie czy suwerenność? Odwilż październikowa w dyplomacji Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej 1956–1961*, Warsaw 2010, pp. 14–20.

¹⁶ Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych (hereafter: AMSZ), Samodzielny Wydział Wschodni w latach 1949–1954, Z-11 W-10 T-161, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia to the United Nations Secretary General Trygve Lie, 31 December 1949.

¹⁷ AMSZ, Biuro Prac Kongresowych z lat 1945–1956, Z-18 W-37 T-568, Undated notes based on an excerpt from the political report of the Polish Legation in Ottawa for the period of 7 August to 3 September 1947.

Italy's former colonies was limited to two aims: to secure the most durable solution possible in terms of trusteeship and to ensure the quickest possible "emancipation" of the local population.¹⁸ While certainly ideological, the Polish document noted that another benefit of such an approach was to prepare the ground for increased economic contact with independent states in the region, thanks to which Poland could exchange finished products such as clothing for raw materials such as cotton. In this way, the memorandum echoed the prewar calls for "colonial" economic relations with Africa.

The Polish memorandum suggested a compromise solution to the question of trusteeship in East Africa, pointing out that excluding those most familiar with local ethnic relations, namely the Italians, from international administration would disrupt the delicate balance of power and lead to indigenous dissatisfaction.¹⁹ This stance was possibly influenced by geopolitical considerations, however: Moscow hoped that Italian communists would gain power in Rome. In any case, by maintaining this position, Warsaw angered Addis Ababa, with which it was resuming diplomatic relations at the time. In May 1948, Zygmunt Kuligowski, the Polish envoy in Cairo, informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about a meeting with his Ethiopian colleague, Tafessa Habt Mikael. It was a tense encounter, as Mikael found it startling that Poland agreed to the idea of trusteeship in territories such as Somaliland.²⁰ In a similar manner, the Polish opposition to the direct absorption of Eritrea by Ethiopia at the turn of the decade caused bilateral relations with Addis Ababa to cool, despite Warsaw's belief that Ethiopia should be allowed to participate in the international administration of its neighbour's territory in order to acquire access to the sea. At the same time, Poland followed the line dictated by Moscow in supporting Ethiopia against the Somalis in their territorial struggle for Ogaden, despite certain doubts about this conflict.²¹ As the British and Italian trusteeship in Somaliland came to an end in 1960, the Polish embassy in Rome listened to suggestions from the Russians, according to whom Somali nationalists were poisoning relations with Ethiopia by campaigning for a Greater Somalia.²²

Besides the former Italian territories, Polish diplomats were also interested in the fate of Egypt and Sudan, although they harboured few illusions about the prospects of British influence being reduced in the former country or British troops being withdrawn from the latter.²³ Still, the Polish delegation to the UN Security Council put forward a proposition for talks to resume between Britain and Egypt regarding Britain's military departure from Sudan. In recognition of this fact, in September 1947 a member of the Sudanese Independence Party in Egypt appealed to Warsaw to go a step further and support Sudan's independence, claiming that his country had attained "political maturity" and that Poland's

¹⁸ AMSZ, Biuro Prac Kongresowych z lat 1945–1956, Z-18 W-37 T-569, Polish government position on the question of former Italian colonies, 1946.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ AMSZ, Departament Polityczny 1945–1948, Z-6 W-96 T-1509, Zygmunt Kuligowski to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 26 May 1948.

²¹ AMSZ, Biuro Prac Kongresowych z lat 1945–1956, Z-18 W-37 T-569, Polish government position on the question of former Italian colonies, 1946.

²² AMSZ, Departament II za lata 1949–1960 (Europa Zachodnia – bez RFN), Z-8 W-85 T-1192, Polish embassy in Rome to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 12 July 1960.

²³ AMSZ, Departament Polityczny 1945–1948, Z-6 W-100 T-1572, "Egipt-Sudan", 25 July 1946.

“historical courage” should shape its support for his country.²⁴ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not respond, however, to such calls from the Sudanese or from other African nationalists with any practical measures, as the communist bloc still had little military or economic influence in Africa, where the Western powers were rebuilding their empires at the time. Poland’s inability to act despite the Africans’ references to its alleged historic mission were reminiscent of its prewar situation.

Despite the disappearance of more grandiose ambitions, the Polish diplomatic apparatus in the immediate postwar period featured officials directly responsible for carrying out colonial policies in the 1930s. One of them was Janusz Makarczyk, the architect and signatory of the “treaty of friendship” with Liberia from 1934. Now at the Polish Legation in Cairo, Makarczyk attempted to resume Poland’s special relationship with the “Black Republic”. An opportunity for this came in 1947, when the Polish government was sent an invitation to attend the centennial anniversary of Liberia’s independence. In a report submitted to the foreign ministry, Makarczyk argued, somewhat correctly, that in 1934, Beck had delegated the Maritime and Colonial League to respond to Liberia’s request for help “in accordance with colonial practice.” According to Makarczyk, Beck’s course of action was reminiscent of the way Bismarck had asked the Woerman corporation to negotiate for Cameroon in the 1880s. Still, Makarczyk praised the effects of his erstwhile mission, thanks to which Poland only paid 60% of the price of Liberian coffee back in 1934.²⁵ He recommended using the opportunity of the centennial in Monrovia for drafting a new treaty – but based on the old agreement – in order to resume tariff-free trade with Liberia.²⁶ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, deferred the matter to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, which was supposed to assess whether it was interested in bypassing foreign intermediaries and bartering Polish products for “tropical goods” such as coffee, cacao and rubber.²⁷ The last document from the acts related to the matter is the latter ministry’s request for a copy of the 1934 treaty.²⁸ The task of resuming relations with Liberia seemed to be pigeonholed and only re-emerged in the late 1950s, but the episode pointed to an unusual continuity at the foreign ministry. It should also be noted that Makarczyk’s critical attitude towards Beck and the interwar “colonial” project in Liberia was an act of self-censorship by an “old” diplomat functioning in an increasingly totalitarian state in the late 1940s.

Liberia was not the only independent state in Africa that had requested Poland’s assistance during the interwar period. Ethiopia was the other, and Makarczyk was also engaged in rebuilding relations with Addis Ababa, writing to the foreign ministry in February 1946 that his Ethiopian colleagues proposed reaching a preliminary agreement to exchange

²⁴ *Ibidem*, A. Guma’a to the Polish Ambassador in Egypt, 10 September 1947.

²⁵ AMSZ, Departament Polityczny 1945–1948, Z-6 W-98 T-1542, J. Makarczyk, “W sprawie Liberii”, 22 May 1947. Note that Makarczyk’s claim that Beck “sabotaged” his treaty with Liberia to please the Americans and redirected his efforts to Madagascar to annoy the French was false but in line with Poland’s new communist ideology. Makarczyk was likewise wrong to believe that the Polish government-in-exile in London did not know the content of the treaty, although it is difficult to assess his claim that Nazi Germany took possession of the original copies.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, J. Makarczyk to T. Żebrowski, 11 June 1947.

²⁷ AMSZ, Departament Polityczny 1945–1948, Z-6 W-98 T-1542, Żebrowski to E. Szyr, 17 June 1947.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, J. Nowicki to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 July 1947.

envoys.²⁹ He later highlighted that Ethiopia had not ceased to recognize an independent Polish government during World War II; therefore, it would be enough to grant the Polish Legation in Cairo credentials in Ethiopia and the Ethiopian diplomatic post in Moscow credentials in Poland.³⁰ This solution was accepted, with Zygmunt Kuligowski filing his credentials in November 1947. In a cover letter to Haile Selassie, the Polish envoy underlined that Poland and Ethiopia had a common experience of suffering under “fascists” during World War II.³¹ Makarczyk wondered, however, whether an Ethiopian diplomat in Warsaw would not be essential for the future of Poland’s economic penetration if his country were to compete with Western Europe, whose commercial networks benefited from direct contacts with Addis Ababa.³² On 9 June 1947, he pointed out that while upset about Beck’s fence-straddling from the time of the Italian invasion, “the Emperor would be glad to see specialists and experts from Poland (not wartime émigrés)” due to his fear of “specialists from the great powers.”³³ His statement was a suggestion that Poland appeared less dangerous to Ethiopia than did Britain and the Soviet Union, which were also mentioned in the letter; this exactly mirrored Ethiopia’s perception of Poland from the interwar period. Due to its internal focus under Stalinism, however, the Polish government did not develop closer connections in Africa in the immediate postwar period.

RESUMING AMBITIOUS POLICIES DURING THE “THAW”

After Stalin’s death in 1953, one of the first stimuli that encouraged the Polish People’s Republic to engage with the non-European world was the 5th World Festival of Youth and Students, which took place in Warsaw in 1955. As people in exotic costumes suddenly appeared on the streets of the capital, their otherness and diversity constituted a cognitive shock for Polish society and politicians, and would have a significant impact on the cultural and political perception of Africa in the near future.³⁴ In the following year, a series of significant political changes occurred in Poland, starting with the death of the first secretary, Bolesław Bierut, in late February, in the immediate aftermath of Nikita Khrushchev’s famous “secret” speech. In October, amid mass demonstrations and tense negotiations with a delegation from Moscow, the communist leadership in the country was passed to Władysław Gomułka, a reformist recently released from prison. Gomułka was a supporter of the “Polish way to socialism”, which in practice meant a less dogmatic approach to farming, less state terror, a more agreeable position on the Catholic Church

²⁹ AMSZ, Departament Polityczny 1945–1948, Z-6 W-96 T-1508, Makarczyk to Z. Modzelewski, 20 February 1946.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, Makarczyk to A. Gubrynowicz, 4 December 1946.

³¹ AMSZ, Protokół Dyplomatyczny, akta za lata 1945–1963, Z-16 W-16 T-255, Z. Kuligowski to Haile Selassie, November 1947.

³² *Ibidem*, Makarczyk to Kuligowski, 6 December 1946.

³³ AMSZ, Departament Polityczny 1945–1948, Z-6 W-96 T-1509, Makarczyk to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 June 1947.

³⁴ See M. Gillabert, “Varsovie 1955 et la Guerre froide globale: L’internationalisation de l’Europe centrale au prisme du 5e Festival mondial de la jeunesse et des étudiants”, *Monde(s)*, 2020, 18/2, pp. 51–72.

(initially), less censorship in culture, more consumer goods produced, and a modicum of independence from the Soviet Union. This last change was carried out in the realm of foreign policy, with the new foreign minister, Adam Rapacki, proposing his plan for nuclear disarmament in Central Europe most likely *before* asking for a green light from Moscow. While ultimately embraced by the Soviet “big brother”, the Rapacki Plan aimed to protect Poland from nuclear attacks. It was also a component of Warsaw’s greater strategy of undermining the West German state and gaining the international recognition of its postwar western border on the Oder and Neisse Rivers.³⁵ We will notice that just as during the interbellum, the German factor played a role in Poland’s actions in Africa.

Most importantly, the Polish “thaw” coincided with the acceleration of decolonial processes in Africa, which were closely tracked by the communist states. In turn, the newly independent states in Africa were interested in establishing contacts with the communist bloc to strengthen their international standing and decrease their dependence on the former metropolises. Rapacki noticed the ideological significance of the processes taking place in Africa early in his tenure as foreign minister. He underlined, however – in an internal memorandum from 18 September 1956 – that Poland’s entire state apparatus should participate in increasing not only political but also economic relations with Africa: in this respect, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs needed to cooperate with the Polish Academy of Science, other scientific institutes, institutions of higher learning, etc. Rapacki recommended stressing the cultural factor, which entailed disseminating pro-Polish propaganda to gain Africans’ trust in products made in Poland, as well as promoting bilateral technical internships, also for networking purposes. Lastly, Rapacki pointed out the need to address deficiencies on the Polish side; namely, the need to tailor product packaging and machinery specifications to the tropical climate and conditions and to increase people’s knowledge of Africa’s cultures and languages.³⁶

Another diplomat pointing to the non-ideological benefits stemming from Poland’s engagement in decolonial Africa was Zygfryd Wolniak, a former Polish member of the International Control Commission in Cambodia. By 1960, as noted by Wolniak, the decision-makers in Moscow had stated: “The fall of the system of colonial slavery under the pressure of the national-liberation struggle is the second most important historical phenomenon after the establishment of the global system of socialism.” In his note, however, Wolniak also cited “Polish arguments” for supporting the newly independent nations in Africa and named some economic benefits. He pointed to Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the Congo, and the Union of South Africa as the most promising countries in terms of trade. Regarding technical training, Wolniak suggested using Poland’s gold contributions to the United Nations to create a training centre for Africans in Poland, especially in the medical field, from which Polish experts could also be delegated to Africa.³⁷ While critiquing the “imperialist West” for

³⁵ J. Tebinka, *Uzależnienie czy suwerenność?...*, pp. 44–80.

³⁶ AMSZ, Departament V z lat 1956–1960, Z-12 W-28 T-667, Rapacki’s remarks on a memorandum by the Polish Institute of Foreign Affairs, 18 September 1956.

³⁷ AMSZ, Departament V z lat 1956–1960, Z-12 W-46 T-1136, Z. Wolniak, “Pilna notatka dot. aktualnych spraw na terenie Afryki Czarnej”, 21 December 1960.

treating Africa as its last bastion, the author of another memorandum underscored the continent's share of the world's production of precious raw materials: 98% of diamonds, 81% of cobalt, 59% of gold, 42% of antimony, and so on. It was clear that such economic treasures were as important as ideology in persuading the Eastern Bloc states to follow Moscow's line in Africa.³⁸

The first states in Africa with which Poland established diplomatic relations included Ghana and Guinea (1959), as these countries were some of the first to become independent, and their leaders, Kwame Nkrumah and Ahmed Sekou Touré, were sympathetic to the socialist economic model. In his report from an official trip to Ghana and Guinea in March 1959, diplomat Witold Rodziński noted that nearly all countries in Africa, including those ruled by "bourgeois-nationalist circles", were interested in close cooperation with Poland, if only due to the desire to balance between the West and the East. This created many opportunities for Warsaw, but Poland lagged behind not only the Western powers but also other communist states in terms of connections to Africa. This was due to the shortage of competent staff and Africa-related research projects carried out by Polish institutions.³⁹ Another reason was Warsaw's unwillingness to assist African countries without proper return: the foreign ministry was aware, for example, that Moscow not only sponsored a dam and electric plant in Guinea in exchange for pineapples and bananas, but that it then purchased them at prices 30% higher than the market rate.⁴⁰ In fact, the Polish government was treading carefully to eschew such financially implausible agreements. In 1960, a delegation of indigenous labour union activists from Northern Rhodesia came to Poland to seek material and technical assistance against "English colonists". The Polish officials promised to donate scholarships to black students but deflected questions about military assistance.⁴¹ Poland was also contacted by the National Democratic Party of Southern Rhodesia, which demanded the enfranchisement of the black population, asking the Polish communists for legal and financial assistance for its members facing trials.⁴² This plea also seemed to remain unanswered.

The "Year of Africa" (1960), which featured the independence of seventeen nations and culminated in the UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, was a watershed moment and a stimulus for a more coordinated engagement by the Eastern Bloc. In February 1961, the Polish foreign ministry officials responsible for Africa talked to their Soviet counterparts, named Shvedov and Brekin, about the appropriate line that communist states should take. During their recent trip to the continent with Leonid Brezhnev, Shvedov and Brekin had noticed that Poland enjoyed a remarkably good reputation in Africa, for instance in Madagascar. Though all Eastern Bloc countries were "late" to the game, Poland's engagement was particularly "timid". Moscow recommended, therefore, a greater coordination of the actions of the communist states. In particular,

³⁸ *Ibidem*, "Afryka Czarna – o jej znaczeniu, sytuacji gospodarczej i o wnioskach dla polityki PRL", 1960.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, W. Rodziński's report from a trip to Africa, 13 March 1959.

⁴⁰ J. Tebinka, *Uzależnienie czy suwerenność?* p. 257.

⁴¹ AMSZ, Departament V z lat 1956–1960, Z-12 W-43 T-1066, Note on the stay of a two-person delegation of labor unionists from Northern Rhodesia, December 1959 – January 1960.

⁴² *Ibidem*, P.M. Mushonga to the Polish embassy in London, November 1960.

common trade clearing rules should be established and specific fields of interest assigned to each state. Hydroelectric technology was deemed appropriate for Czechoslovakia, while cargo shipping was considered the strong attribute of Poland. Furthermore, the Soviet Union and its satellite states needed to determine their needs for raw materials to be found in Africa, such as iron ore.⁴³ Perhaps in response to such pressure from Moscow, one year later, in February 1962, the Polish government allowed the creation of the Polish-African Friendship Society (PAFS), a social institution based in Warsaw.⁴⁴

Notwithstanding the recommendations by the Soviets, the scope of the PAFS's actions was not so much economic as it was technical and propagandistic. In 1963, for instance, the PAFS helped to launch a course for a total of 21 civilian air pilots and technicians from Angola, Togo, and Algeria. It was reported that the Polish side had to supply all that was needed, as the Angolese arriving in Poland barely had any clothing or toiletries. In addition, the PAFS donated 600 technical books in Western languages to the university library in Algiers. In 1964, demonstrations were staged in different Polish cities to support the anti-colonial struggle in Angola and beyond. In Łódź, the Centre for the Study of the Polish Language was created to teach students from Africa. In Karpacz, among other resort towns, a summer camp was organized for 30 of them, while Chopin concerts took place in Żelazowa Wola. In a departure from internationalist dogma, the Polish communist government also allowed its puppet Catholic organization PAX to celebrate Christian holidays for Africans. Furthermore, the PAFS helped to open the Club of New Africa in Łódź, which became a meeting place for Poles and Africans to discuss books and entertainment. As the Africans left Poland, they were always gifted products “made in Poland”: such as pharmaceuticals, school supplies, and books.⁴⁵ Another important propaganda channel was film. In June 1962, after his trip to Prague, a high official and future president of Dahomey, Sourou-Migan Apithy, came to Poland. Apithy was encouraged to tour Warsaw, Szczecin and Poznań for trade-related and political reasons: his stay was filmed to be shown to the African audience.⁴⁶

In the realm of propaganda, the PAFS also contacted its African protégés to coordinate responses to press articles that appeared in Africa and attacked the totalitarian system in Poland. On 10 January 1963, for example, one Dick Masuku wrote a letter to the editorial board of Kenya's *East African Standard*, arguing that Poland was not a “colony of Moscow”. In the letter, Masuku pointed to the Rapacki Plan and wrote about Poland being “liberated” from Nazi Germans by the Red Army, but without mentioning the latter's atrocities. He suggested that accusing Poland of “Nazi methods” of censorship etc. was shameful, as the destruction brought upon by “colonial-capitalist exploitation” was

⁴³ AMSZ, Departament V (po 1960 r.), Z-24/69 W-1, Note from the February 28, 1961 conversation with directors of the African and Second Departments at the Soviet foreign ministry, Shvedov and Brekin, 4 March 1961.

⁴⁴ AMSZ, Departament V (po 1960 r.), Z-31/66 W-1 T-2, Attachment to the letter from L. Wolniewicz to R. Spasowski from 29 May 1962.

⁴⁵ AMSZ, Departament V (po 1960 r.), Z-24/69 W-1, Report by the Secretariat of the Executive Board of the Polish-African Friendship Society for the period from 30 June 1963 to 15 July 1964.

⁴⁶ AMSZ, Protokół Dyplomatyczny, akta za lata 1945–1963, Z-16 W-14 T-217, “Ramowy program”, 4 May 1962.

a “common factor between Africa and Poland”.⁴⁷ In this way, both Poles and Africans were depicted as former colonial objects. In this regard, Polish communist propaganda was reinforced by the Acting Secretary-General of the United Nations. In August 1962, in a speech at the University of Warsaw, U Thant praised Poland for welcoming African and Asian students and suggested that “in some respects the position of Asia and Africa is similar to Europe’s immediately after World War II”.⁴⁸ Instrumental for this Polish propaganda was also Ryszard Kapuściński, a travelling writer supported by the communist party, later known in the West for his literary reports from Ethiopia, Angola and other African countries.⁴⁹

In addition to drawing attention to the common Polish-African experience of colonialism, the depiction of the West German republic as an essentially colonialist nation carried the additional benefit of gaining the Africans’ recognition of Poland’s western border, although the former’s economic prowess initially deterred all African leaders but Kwame Nkrumah.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the Polish communists worried about the influence of the West German Social Democrats in Africa. On 4 January 1963, for example, a report was filed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) under Herbert A. Tulatz aiming to create “bases” in Nigeria and Madagascar, from where its influence would spread further into the interior of Africa.⁵¹ However, as Warsaw openly admitted, Poland could not compete with the United States or West Germany in terms of the technology transferred to the continent alongside Western corporatist models. Therefore, the creation of a symbolic Centre for Knowledge and Expertise in Ghana, for instance, was meant as merely a propagandistic undertaking for Poland.⁵²

In the early 1960s, the Polish government also began to support anti-colonial factions in Africa, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs composing regular memos on such factions. In April 1964, the ministry reported on the MPLA and UPA in Angola, FRELIMO in Mozambique, and others recommending Ghanese “consciencism” (Nkrumaism) as the appropriate instrument leading Africa toward liberation through international integration and communist rebellion.⁵³ In this spirit, Warsaw considered the MPLA one of the best managed independence groups in Africa, due to the presence of “assimilated” Angolese such as Roberto Holden, trained in “conspiracy methods”, as opposed to the

⁴⁷ AMSZ, Departament V (po 1960 r.), Z-31/66 W-1 T-2, D. Masuku to the *East African Standard*, 10 January 1963.

⁴⁸ United Nations Archives, Secretary-General U-Thant (1961–1971), S-0883-0002-07, Address by the Acting Secretary-General U Thant, on Subject of “Progress towards Peace”, Given at the University of Warsaw, 31 August 1962.

⁴⁹ See A. Domosławski, *Kapuściński non-fiction*, Warsaw 2017; A.F. Kola, *Socjalistyczny postkolonializm: rekon-solidacja pamięci*, Toruń 2018, pp. 33–34.

⁵⁰ J. Tebinka, *Uzależnienie czy suwerenność?...*, p. 262.

⁵¹ AMSZ, Departament V (po 1960 r.), Z 19/64 W-1 T-1-2, Report on the action by the DGB (West German labor unions) in African countries, 4 January 1961.

⁵² AMSZ, Departament V (po 1960 r.), Z 31/66 W-1 T-1, T. Kwaśniewski, “Załącznik 1. Uzasadnienie i ramowy projekt ‘Ośrodka Wiedzy i Techniki.’” 24 February 1962.

⁵³ AMSZ, Departament V (po 1960 r.), Z-24/69 W-1, Note on the national liberation movements in Africa, 29 April 1964.

“cacique” mentality of the Congolese⁵⁴. In addition to formal colonialism, the Polish communists also helped the Africans to fight neocolonialism. As Dennis Phombeah, a Tanganyikan national figure, told a Polish foreign ministry official, the independence granted by all the colonial powers but Portugal was partly a ruse to maintain their economic influence; cooperation with the communist states in Eastern Europe created an opportunity for Africa to liberate itself from such neocolonialism.⁵⁵ Discerning an opportunity for its member states to become truly independent of their former metropolises, the Polish government supported the Ghanese-inspired Organisation of African Unity established in May 1963, although Warsaw was disappointed with its inability to contain the Ethiopian-Somalian conflict. While open to integration along socialist lines, Warsaw was opposed to most federalist attempts in East Africa, especially the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, considering it a British effort to contain radicalism in the latter country.⁵⁶

Warsaw also supported the economic integration of Africa if it could proceed along socialist lines. The Polish government planned to contribute to the African Development Bank and to launch cooperation between the Centre for the Study of the Economies of Developing Countries in Warsaw and the Institute of Planning and Economic Development in Dakar; a cooperation that would feature guest lectures by Polish professors as well as Polish scholarships.⁵⁷ Discarding ideological tensions, the PAFS also did not refrain from maintaining contacts with non-communist Poles resident in Africa. Its leadership considered a Polish miner from Rhodesia, named Tadeusz Bieniawski, a useful economic asset, due to his long stay in the country, although his and other Polish settlers’ condescending “colonial” attitude toward Africans was noted.⁵⁸ Finally, the Polish communists decided to engage Polish state enterprises with Africa, with the Polish industrial exports firm CEKOP setting up industrial sugar refineries in Ghana and Tanganyika and sending machinery and technicians to eastern Nigeria. By 1964, however, the foreign ministry was not fully satisfied with the progress of Polish-African economic contacts. It was then deemed necessary to focus on building relations mostly with the countries actually able to pay for Polish imports (Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Rhodesia). In addition, it was considered important to increase the export of products such as pharmaceuticals and tools, to refrain from sending single specialists or technicians but rather teams, and to create a consulting board for all Eastern Bloc countries engaged in Africa.⁵⁹

One of the most important factors that shaped Poland’s policies in Africa at the time was the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. Already between

⁵⁴ AMSZ, Departament V (po 1960 r.), Z 31/66 W-1 T-1, B. Wasilewski, “Angola”, n.d.

⁵⁵ AMSZ, Departament V (po 1960 r.), Z 19/64 W-1 T-1-2, W. Neneman’s note on his conversation with D. Phombeah, 28 December 1960.

⁵⁶ AMSZ, Departament V (po 1960 r.), Z-24/69 W-1, Note on Poland’s policies toward the African continent, 13 June 1964.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ AMSZ, Departament V (po 1960 r.), Z-31/66 W-1 T-2, Note from the meeting with T. Beniaewski, deputy chairman of the Union of Poles in Northern Rhodesia, July 1962.

⁵⁹ AMSZ, Departament V (po 1960 r.), Z-24/69 W-1, Conclusions regarding the further activities of the Polish People’s Republic on the African continent, 13 June 1964.

1949 and 1954, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had collected reports on US plans to develop Africa in terms of electricity, agriculture, and industry, citing articles published in the Soviet Union that suggested that such US actions constituted colonialism.⁶⁰ The United States became increasingly more engaged in Africa in the late 1950s, after the Suez crisis, in part trying to compensate for the embarrassing behaviour of British and French leaders. As Secretary of State David Dean Rusk once told his Tunisian counterpart, the “United States commitment to freedom is universal”, which explained its “instinctive reaction to colonialism and to developments in Eastern Europe since World War II”.⁶¹ The US engagement was also opportunistic, however. As early as 1957, the Polish embassy in Paris quoted French articles to report that Washington put forward projects to create an alliance of independent states in the Maghreb (Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco) and in sub-Saharan Africa (Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia), which would help the Americans to strengthen their military bases and acquire surplus markets and sources of oil.⁶² In its turn, the US State Department also kept a watchful eye on the Eastern Bloc “penetration” of Africa, reporting, for instance, on East German trade deals in Ghana.⁶³

The defining moment for the United States and its Western allies in Africa was the Congolese crisis, with the CIA and the Belgians becoming co-responsible for the murder of Patrice Lumumba.⁶⁴ Poland did not contribute troops to the UN peacekeeping mission in the Congo, towards which it was critical, but it did send surgeons and nurses through the Red Cross.⁶⁵ At the same time, an international scandal erupted in mid-July 1960, after the Belgians released a claim that a Polish ship filled with munitions was sighted at Congolese ports.⁶⁶ Although one scholar of the topic, Maria Pasztor, deems this occurrence to be unlikely, on 17 July a British diplomat relayed reports that a ship called Stettin (Szczecin) was approaching Matadi. In connection with these reports, the UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld asked Lumumba to allow the international forces to withhold the cargo of the alleged Polish ship.⁶⁷ At the same time, the Polish ambassador at the United Nations, Bohdan Lewandowski, was a steadfast supporter of Congo’s territorial integrity, an opponent of Belgium’s sinister role in the secession of Katanga under Tschombé, and a critic of Hammarskjöld’s later fence-straddling. The Congolese crisis coincided with

⁶⁰ See documents in AMSZ, Samodzielny Wydział Wschodni w latach 1949–1954, Z-11 W-42 T-627.

⁶¹ The National Archives (United States) [hereafter: TNA (US)], RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, Executive Secretariat, Conference Files 1949–1963, CF 2152, Memorandum of Conversation between Rusk and Mongi Slim, 25 September 1962.

⁶² See AMSZ, Departament II za lata 1949–1960 (Europa Zachodnia – bez RFN), Z-8 W-59 T-815, Polish embassy in Paris to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 May 1957.

⁶³ See TNA (US), RG 59, Central Decimal Files, 645J.61/11-457.

⁶⁴ See L. de Witte, *The Assassination of Lumumba*, London/New York 2001.

⁶⁵ United Nations Archives, United Nations Office for Special Political Affairs (1955–1991), S-0209-0014-12, Polish Permanent Delegation to the United Nations to the Secretary-General, 10 August 1960.

⁶⁶ See M. Pasztor, “Polsko-belgijska “wojna” o Kongo (1960–1963)”, *Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i Materiały* 2019, 17, 135–60. In 1959, Polish ships had carried Czechoslovak firearms to Guinea. See TNA (US), RG 59, Central Decimal Files, 770B.5-MSP/5-859.

⁶⁷ The National Archives (United Kingdom), FO 371/146770, Telegram No. 508 from New York to Foreign Office, 17 July 1960.

Lewandowski's participation in the proceedings of the Security Council, of which Poland was then a non-permanent member. According to another scholar of the topic, his motions at the Council fulfilled both the interests of the Soviet Union and his own moral convictions.⁶⁸

By 1962, the Polish communists regarded Africa as split into two camps, which corresponded to geopolitical alignments: the "Casablanca" group (the United Arab Republic, Morocco, Guinea, Ghana, and Mali), which promoted "a positive neutrality and the active struggle against colonialism and neocolonialism", and the "Monrovia" group (Liberia, Congo-Brazzaville), which remained indebted to the United States and France. Furthermore, Warsaw predicted a dangerous precedent in the economic union of the "Monrovia" group with the European Economic Community, especially given Britain's expected entry.⁶⁹ The Polish government's renewed attempt to establish relations with Liberia can be interpreted as testing the possibility of opening the "Monrovia" group up to communist influence. In October 1959, T.L. Gibson, a Liberian senator, met with diplomat Witold Rodziński while attending an international conference in Warsaw and suggested the participation of a Polish delegation in President Tubman's second-term celebrations as well as a "scientific-technical cooperation", including sending Polish physicians to Liberia.⁷⁰ In response, the Polish foreign ministry sent Aleksander Krajewski, the ambassador to the United Arab Republic.⁷¹ Krajewski reported from the trip that US influence in Liberia was still significant, and that a campaign to encourage women to work on rubber plantations was not progressive but rather echoed earlier instances of forced labour resembling slavery. Moreover, "the glamour, which the president, the government and all the Liberian bourgeoisie adore, contrasts with the enormous poverty of the population." In his turn, President Tubman did not express much desire to initiate diplomatic relations with Poland, but many Liberians reminded Krajewski that Poland had defended Liberia at the League of Nations in 1934, for which they remained grateful.⁷² Still, Liberian officials green-lighted the creation of an office of a Polish "trade counsellor" in Monrovia, all the while worried about the possible US reaction.⁷³

In fact, in the early 1960s, the United States was aware of Poland's rising status in Africa, with articles appearing on this topic in the Western press. This did not remain unnoticed by the Polish foreign ministry. It is worth quoting a whole passage from the 11 April 1963 issue of *The Economist*, as it presents an interesting Western perception of Polish actions in Africa: "In general, neither the Russians nor the east Germans have gotten on conspicuously well with the Africans; the Czechs, though more successful,

⁶⁸ See B. Kratiuk, "Polskie zaangażowanie w Afryce. Ambasador Lewandowski w ONZ a sprawa Konga", *Sto-sunki Międzynarodowe – International Relations* 2016, 52/2, pp. 367–382.

⁶⁹ AMSZ, Departament V (po 1960 r.), Z 31/66 W-1 T-1, "Zadania Polski w Afryce", 24 February 1962.

⁷⁰ AMSZ, Departament V z lat 1956–1960, Z-12 W-42 T-1022, 19 October 1959, W. Rodziński's note from a conversation with L. Gibson.

⁷¹ AMSZ, Protokół Dyplomatyczny, akta za lata 1945–1963, Z-16 W-30 T-507, Poland's State Council to W. Tolbert, 20 December 1959.

⁷² AMSZ, Departament V z lat 1956–1960, Z-12 W-42 T-1027, A. Krajewski's report from his delegation to Monrovia, 17 January 1960.

⁷³ AMSZ, Protokół Dyplomatyczny, akta za lata 1945–1963, Z-16 W-30 T-509, Krajewski to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 January 1960.

have come to be regarded as commercial travellers, well equipped to push trade deals, but not to make propaganda acceptable. For various reasons, the Poles are more acceptable to Africans than other east Europeans. For instance: (a) they seem to be quite free of colour prejudice; and (b) their approach to communist doctrine is, in many ways, undogmatic; indeed the majority of Poles now in Africa on permanent or temporary missions are non-communists (a circumstance that makes it easier to 'sell' the Polish brand of communism to Africans, but limits their effectiveness as purveyors of the doctrine as Moscow would like it to be presented)".⁷⁴

The article then continued to report on some Polish successes in Africa, including Prof. Kazimierz Michałowski's archaeological mission to Egypt, the creation of a tropical medicine centre in Szczecin, or the presence of 25 Polish lecturers at the University of Kumasi in Ghana. Perhaps Westerners inflated the Polish role in Africa for their own propagandistic purposes, however. For during a meeting with an official of the PAFS in August 1962, Ghana's ambassador in Warsaw remarked undiplomatically that Poles were "ignoramuses" in African affairs, and that their only source of knowledge was *In Desert and Wilderness*, the famous youth novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz.⁷⁵ Without further research, this story remains anecdotal at best, but it still suggests that, as in many other aspects of its discourse and actions, Poland's troubled efforts to master knowledge about Africa in the 1960s resembled those from the interwar period.

CONCLUSION

This article is intended to be an introduction to the topic and features sources that are predominantly diplomatic and political in nature. Documents related to the economic, social and cultural dimensions of the topic, some of which can be found at the Central Archive of Modern Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych) in Warsaw – not to mention the Polish state press and numerous publications searchable in Polish libraries – would add more nuance to our understanding of communist Poland's role in decolonial Africa during this period. Furthermore, as less scholarly attention has been paid to Poland's relations with Angola, Mozambique, and the former British colonies in East Africa, the diplomatic papers of these countries also need to be consulted before a fuller picture can emerge. On the cultural end, interviews with still-living historical actors, both Polish and African, could illuminate the experience of decolonisation from different perspectives. Lastly, while this article ends in the year 1964, which roughly marked the end of the "thaw" in the Eastern Bloc, the Polish communist engagement in decolonial Africa did not terminate then, but continued into the 1970s and 1980s. Still, certain conclusions can be drawn based on the periods under analysis.

⁷⁴ "Poland's African Drive", *The Economist*, 11 April 1963.

⁷⁵ AMSZ, Departament V (po 1960 r.), Z-31/66 W-1 T-2, Note from the meeting with the Ambassador of Ghana, Ako Nai, August 1962.

Firstly, personal and ideological continuities in the Polish approach toward Africa can be noticed from the interwar to the postwar period, as officials planned an economic penetration of the continent by using Poland's reputation of a non-colonial power. Secondly, the German factor was important, as colonial appeasement loomed in the late 1930s, and as Africa again became an arena of Polish-West German competition in the 1960s. Furthermore, just as Polish policies were limited by the established colonial empires during the interwar period, decades later communist Poland was obliged to listen to the Soviet Union. However, in one of those rare instances, Polish state interests in Africa were aligned with those of its "big brother", although at the same time the Soviet Union treated Poland itself as a sort of an economic colonial reservoir. In fact, during the "thaw" Warsaw seemed able to resist quite well Moscow's suggestions to engage in unprofitable investment projects in countries such as Guinea, instead choosing modest economic and propagandistic aims. This approach, however, also contributed to the low presence of Poland in the history of contemporary Africa, which continues to this day.

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Directed by Moscow? Communist Poland’s Policies in Decolonial Africa, 1918/1945–1964

The article examines the historical breaks and continuities in the Polish state’s policies toward (de)colonial Africa, underlining the persistence of the economic and cultural factors therein. It is argued that during the period after World War II, Warsaw managed to exercise considerable autonomy in its approach to independent states and rebellious colonies on the continent, despite ideological and political pressure from Moscow. In this manner, the article reconsiders the role of the Polish (People’s) Republic in the international socialist project in the Global South and recommends further research, both on the period of 1945–1964 and later years.

KEYWORDS

Poland, Africa, decolonization, diplomacy, communism, Global South

Wyreżyserowana przez Moskwę? Polityka komunistycznej Polski w Afryce okresu dekolonizacji, 1918/1945–1964

W artykule dokonano analizy historycznych przerw i ciągłości w polityce państwa polskiego wobec Afryki, podkreślając utrzymywanie się w niej czynników ekonomicznych i kulturowych. Twierdzi się, że w okresie po II wojnie światowej Warszawa zdołała wypracować znaczną autonomię w podejściu do niepodległych państw i zbuntowanych kolonii na kontynencie, pomimo nacisków ideologicznych i politycznych ze strony Moskwy. W artykule rozważa się zatem rolę RP/PRL w międzynarodowym projekcie socjalistycznym na Globalnym Południu i zaleca dalsze badania, zarówno w odniesieniu do okresu 1945–1964, jak i do lat późniejszych.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

Polska, Afryka, dekolonizacja, dyplomacja, komunizm, Globalne Południe

PIOTR PUCHALSKI – PhD, Assistant Professor of Modern History at the Pedagogical University of Kraków (Poland), where he offers courses in the history of Poland, colonial empires, international relations, and contemporary tourism. He has previously published in the *Historical Journal* and the *Journal of Modern European History*. His first book is *Poland in a Colonial World Order: Adjustments and Aspirations, 1918–1939* (Routledge, 2022), and he has also contributed to the edited volume *The World Beyond the West: Perspectives from Eastern Europe* (Berghahn Books, 2022). His next project deals with Poland's post-1939 colonial entanglements.

PIOTR PUCHALSKI – doktor nauk humanistycznych, adiunkt w Instytucie Historii i Archiwistyki Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego im. KEN w Krakowie, gdzie prowadzi zajęcia z najnowszej historii Polski, imperiów kolonialnych, stosunków międzynarodowych i współczesnej turystyki. Publikował artykuły naukowe w *Historical Journal* i *Journal of Modern European History*. Jego pierwsza książka to *Poland in a Colonial World Order: Adjustments and Aspirations, 1918–1939* (Routledge, 2022); jest także współautorem tomu zbiorowego *The World Beyond the West: Perspectives from Eastern Europe* (Berghahn Books, 2022). Jego obecny projekt badawczy dotyczy relacji Polski ze światem kolonialnym po 1939 r.