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Poland's Colonial Aspirations and the Question of a Mandate over Liberia, 1933–1939

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Abstract

This article examines Poland's political and economic involvement in Liberia in the 1930s in an attempt to address the question of how countries that were not classical colonial powers were engaging in colonialism. Interwar Poland was a newly established country struggling to achieve political stability and economic growth. Looking for a solution to the economic difficulties, Poland started to show an interest in obtaining colonies in Africa. This interest developed into the colonial movement. Poland attempted to establish a long-lasting economic and political presence in Liberia in the 1930s. This attempt failed; however, Polish involvement in Liberia demonstrates the effect that the idea of colonialism had on Polish society and the Polish government.

Colonialism is not limited to any particular era. It has long-lasting implications for a variety of actors. The debate among historians studying colonial empires embraces the diversity of colonial interactions. For many decades, historians such as John Gallagher, Ronald Robinson, P. J. Cain, and A. G. Hopkins described colonial empires almost exclusively from a European perspective of a metropole. This approach became a subject of critique from authors such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha in their search for the voice of the colonized, focusing on local and regional levels within the colonies. More recently, Volker Barth and Roland Cvetkovski, underlining the complexity of colonial rule, pointed out the emerging of 'new imperial history'.¹ While Barth and Cvetkovski look at the inter-imperial interaction in terms of co-operation and transfer of knowledge and practices, Barbara Lüthi, Francesca Falk, and Patricia Purtschert signify yet another trajectory to the debate by asking how countries that were close to metropolises without having been classical colonial powers engaged with colonialism, how they

¹ Volker Barth and Roland Cvetkovski, 'Introduction – encounters of empire: methodological approaches', in Volker Barth and Roland Cvetkovski, eds., *Imperial co-operation and transfer, 1870–1930: empires and encounters* (London, 2015), pp. 6–8.

managed to benefit from it, and in what ways their involvement in colonialism differed from that of the colonial powers.² This article, while looking at Poland's engagement in Liberia in the 1930s, attempts to address these questions while pointing to the effect that the development of imperialism during the interwar period (1918–39) had on countries not directly involved in the colonial empires. The interwar period saw a growing interest in colonialism within Polish society and political circles. The colonial discourse developed, engaging both the elites and broader parts of the society, focused on the possibility of Poland obtaining colonies. The discourse resulted in the establishment of various organizations engaged in the issue, among which the Maritime and Colonial League received the most attention in Polish historiography due to its size and ties to the Polish government. The article will draw from archival sources, mainly diplomatic correspondence, from the National Archives and the Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw (Archiwum Akt Nowych, AAN), memoirs, and contemporary press releases to discuss the development of the colonial movement in Poland and its interest in Africa, the circumstances of the League of Nations' involvement leading to establishing Polish–Liberian relations, and the modes of Polish involvement, including political consultations, the presence of Polish advisers to the Liberian government, the presence of a Polish consul in Monrovia, attempts to establish commerce between the two countries, and the land lease for Polish nationals.

I

John Darwin suggested that it used to be argued that the end was in sight for Europe's overseas empires after 1918. With their moral credentials shattered, their wealth and manpower depleted, and their rule under siege by discontented colonial subjects, they could hardly resist the new global doctrine of national self-determination.³ The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia gave inspiration to anti-colonial struggles on the one hand and made Western statesmen aware of the importance of offering a greater voice to colonial peoples on the other. Matters were complicated further by the United States' President Woodrow Wilson's forceful promotion of the concept of self-determination.⁴ However, as Bruce Fetter points out, during the interwar years no European power ever proposed abandoning title to a territory.⁵ The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 introduced the mandate system as a new principle of governance applied to the territories formerly annexed to the German and the Ottoman empires. In theory, the mandatory power, rather than being sovereign in international law, was the trustee of the nationality in the formation, and under the supervision, of the League of Nations. Yet, in

² Barbara Lüthi, Francesca Falk, and Patricia Purtschert, 'Colonialism without colonies: examining blank spaces in colonial studies', *National Identities*, 18 (2016), pp. 1–9.

³ John Darwin, 'Nationalism and imperialism, c. 1880–1940', in John Breuilly, ed., *The Oxford handbook of the history of nationalism* (Oxford, 2013), p. 355.

⁴ Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, sovereignty and the making of international law* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 139.

⁵ Bruce Fetter, *Colonial rule in Africa: readings from primary sources* (Madison, WI, 1979), p. 107.

practice, France, Britain, and others ruled the acquired territories in much the same way as their other colonies.⁶ As demands for self-government and increased political freedoms grew, imperial powers became acutely aware of the economic importance of their colonial territories. The catalyst was the sudden implosion of the global economy in 1929–31. Free trade was abandoned in 1932 and was replaced by tariffs on manufactured imports and by a system of imperial preference supported by quotas and other bilateral arrangements with empire and foreign countries.⁷ As trade contracted, economic survival seemed to depend upon the control of the zone from which imports were drawn and to which they were sent.⁸ The commercial well-being of a European state and its national economy were perceived as being connected intimately with its overseas possessions and its ability to protect and expand in overseas markets.⁹ It made Germany's complaints of being unfairly deprived of raw materials and markets more strident and believable.¹⁰

In Eastern Europe, the First World War and post-war settlement brought to an end the imperial order, replacing it with the 'successor states', as the new or reconstituted countries of the area came to be collectively known, that formed an integral part of the post-war liberal-constitutional order across the continent and of the international system guaranteed by the League of Nations.¹¹ The Second Republic of Poland (1918–39) was the largest and most populous and was considered one of the main political powers in the region.¹²

The Second Republic of Poland was a country comprising lands that had previously been parts of the Russian, German, and Austria-Hungarian empires whose economy had been destroyed and population depleted by the war and which had no established borders.¹³ As Norman Davies pointed out, in 1918 few people in Russia, Germany, or Allied countries believed that Poland would sustain independent existence even if the opportunity presented itself.¹⁴ And yet, on 11 November 1918, when the German army was disarmed in Warsaw, a new sovereign state came into being, with Józef Piłsudski as its leader. The struggle for frontiers, including the Polish-Soviet war of 1919–

⁶ Jane Burbank, *Empires in world history: power and politics of difference* (Princeton, NJ, 2010), p. 386.

⁷ On economic imperialism, see P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British imperialism, 1688–2000* (Harlow, 2002).

⁸ Darwin, 'Nationalism and imperialism', p. 356.

⁹ Anghie, *Imperialism, sovereignty*, p. 142.

¹⁰ Susan Pedersen points out that at that time in Germany there was no such thing as colonial policy in itself and the colonial propaganda was aimed at disrupting the Anglo-French entente, forging an Anglo-German alliance and winning Britain's implicit consent to Germany's expansion eastwards. Susan Pedersen, *The guardians: the League of Nations and the crisis of empire* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 356–7.

¹¹ R. J. Evans, 'The successor states', in Robert Gerwarth, ed., *Twisted paths: Europe, 1914–1945* (Oxford, 2007), p. 210.

¹² E. Garrison Walters, *The other Europe: Eastern Europe to 1945* (New York, NY, 1988), p. 171.

¹³ Prussian rule over the territories annexed to Poland can be considered colonial in several aspects. Róisín Healy, 'From commonwealth to colony? Poland under Prussia', in Róisín Healy and Enrico Dal Lago, eds., *The shadow of colonialism on Europe's modern past* (Basingstoke, 2014), pp. 120–1.

¹⁴ Norman Davies, *White eagle, red star: the Polish-Soviet war 1919–1920 and 'The miracle on the Vistula'* (London, 2011), p. 20.

21, had lasted for over four years and ended in March 1923 with the Allied countries' recognition of Poland's eastern border. The constitution adopted in March 1921, as Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki remarked, symbolized the consolidation of the Second Republic but also introduced what was to prove an unwieldy parliamentary government.¹⁵ The rivalry between political parties and the lack of consensus in dealing with the continued economic difficulties resulted in a growing sense of disillusionment with the political order, resulting in the coup of May 1926. The regime introduced as a consequence by Piłsudski was a secular authoritarian system of government of a non-fascist type. The government did try to mobilize mass support for the regime, but large areas of national life remained outside its direct control: opposition political parties, many trade unions, a host of social, cultural, and sporting organizations, and much of the economy and press (although these were subject to limited censorship), as well as religious and charitable organizations.¹⁶

The 1930s in Poland was a time of development of a social movement supporting the idea of Poland becoming a colonial power. It started to form c. 1928 and reached its peak in 1938–9. The major role in the movement was played by the Maritime and Colonial League, a mass organization that, although formally independent, was tied in its operations to the Polish government. The activists of the League argued that foreign colonial territories would provide a solution to Poland's economic and demographic problems related to the overpopulation of the countryside, unemployment in the cities due to the slow pace of the industrial development, and emigration. Colonies, in their view, would serve as an outlet for migration from Poland and a source of raw materials for the Polish industry.¹⁷ The League took an active role in colonial discourse in Poland on both popular and elite levels, resulting in the rapid growth of the number of League members from 28,000 in 1930 to 992,000 in 1939.¹⁸ Among the League's management on the central and regional levels were members of the Polish parliament, government officials, including those from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, high-ranking military officers, local authority officials, and academics. As for the general membership of the organization, the information from reports published by the League between 1930 and 1939 indicates that the majority of the League's members were members of the middle class; however, there is a lack of official statistics.¹⁹

The African continent played an important role in the Maritime and Colonial League's plans. The League was not oblivious to the fact that the time for colonial conquests of Africa had passed and it limited Poland's options in regard to any colonial policy Poland could develop. The argument has been

¹⁵ Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki, *A concise history of Poland* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 204.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 216–17.

¹⁷ See Kazimierz Gluchowski, 'Koncentrować czy rozpraszać?', *Morze*, 12 (1928), pp. 25–6; Gustaw Załęcki, 'O istocie przedsięwzięcia kolonialnych', *Morze*, 1 (1929), pp. 29–31; *Program kolonialny Ligi Morskiej i Rzecznej* (Warsaw, 1930); Stanisław Pawłowski, *Domagajmy się kolonii zamorskich dla Polski* (Warsaw, 1936); Wiktor Rosiński, *O zamorski program gospodarczy Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw, 1931).

¹⁸ Tadeusz Białas, *Liga Morska i Kolonialna, 1930–1939* (Gdańsk, 1983), pp. 40–1.

¹⁹ Milena Skulimowska, 'Polish colonial aspirations in Africa: the Maritime and Colonial League in Angola and Liberia, c. 1920–1939' (D.Phil. thesis, University of Kent, 2019), pp. 89–95.

made that during the nineteenth century, when Poland was under partition divided between Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary, the Polish nation could not effectively represent itself in the matter of international politics and was deprived of the opportunity to participate in the conquest of Africa. However, because Poles were participating in the conquest and administration of German colonies in Africa, Poland had a right to part of the colonies formerly belonging to the German empire.²⁰ Grażyna Borkowska indicated that in the early 1930s the Polish Maritime and Colonial League was supportive of the German claims for the return of their former colonies, seeing it as a hope for changes in the colonial system.²¹ But Africa was also seen by the Maritime and Colonial League as key to the economic development of Europe. To be able to compete successfully in the future with the markets of North America and Asia, Europe needed resources that Africa would provide, but to secure African markets Europeans had systematically to colonize the continent.²² The Maritime and Colonial League, hoping to increase Poland's economic presence in Africa, turned its attention to the possibility of political and economic involvement in Liberia, which presented itself between 1933 and 1934.

II

The early 1930s in Liberia was a time of struggle to protect the country's independence as the League of Nations increasingly interfered with its internal affairs, and the interests of the Firestone Company backed by the United States grew. The Republic of Liberia was founded through the efforts of the American Colonization Society (ACS) aided by the government of the United States.²³ The ACS was formed in 1816 initially as an organization to resettle in Africa freed slaves of African heritage.²⁴ The ACS raised funds for establishing a settlement in Africa and, in 1822, the first sponsored settlers landed on the coast of Liberia.²⁵ In 1847, the ACS granted its colony independence and it formally took the name Liberia. By 1900, there were about 15,000

²⁰ Kazimierz Gluchowski, 'Akcja kolonialna LMiR', *Morze*, 12 (1928), pp. 27–9.

²¹ This approach changed only after 1934 when Germany started to question Poland's right to access to the Baltic Sea. Grażyna Borkowska, 'Polish colonial experience', *Teksty Drugie*, 4 (2007), pp. 17–20.

²² Leon Radzikowski, 'Eur – Afryka', *Morze*, 4 (1931), pp. 22–4.

²³ J. H. Mower, 'The Republic of Liberia', *Journal of Negro History*, 32 (1947), p. 265.

²⁴ Allan Yarema, *The American Colonization Society: an avenue to freedom?* (Lanham, MD, 2006), p. 15. Eric Burin divides the interpretations of the ACS's motives offered by historians studying the subject into two categories: those that criticize the ACS as a pro-slavery organization (e.g. Amos J. Beyan, Antonio McDaniel, Lamin Sanneh) and those that portray it as part of the anti-slavery movement, emphasizing the humanitarian motives of its members and supporters (e.g. William Freehling, Peter S. Onuf, Douglas R. Egerton). Burin places his interpretation in the latter. Eric Burin, *Slavery and the peculiar solution: a history of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville, FL, 2008), p. 2.

²⁵ For a critique of the 'settler-native' dichotomy, see Tryon P. Woods, 'Marronage, here and there: Liberia, enslavement's conversion, and the settler-not', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 96 (2019), pp. 38–59.

African-American immigrants and over 300 repatriated Africans from the West Indies settled on the Liberian coast.²⁶

By the early 1920s, the Americo-Liberian elite had secured a firm grip on political and economic power in Liberia. Liberia's politics had been led since 1870 by the True Whig Party (TWP).²⁷ Raymond L. Buell writes about presidential dictatorship centred around the TWP. The Party was able to continue in power, according to Buell, largely because of its control over the election machinery and because of popular apathy.²⁸

Americo-Liberians retained a strong sentimental attachment to America, which they regarded as their native land.²⁹ Suzanne Kathleen McCoskey noted that the coastal settlers showed no interest in integrating with the tribal groups.³⁰ However, according to Tryon P. Woods, the integration between 'settlers' and 'natives' did not occur for the entire nineteenth century due to the fact that the wealth acquired through the slave trade allowed 'natives' to resist subordination to the Liberian state.³¹ The system of indirect rule was adopted as from 1904, by which the hinterland was divided into districts administered by district commissioners, most of whom were Americo-Liberians, in co-operation with African chiefs.³²

The exploration into the interior of Liberia had shown that a significant amount of trade was being carried out between the people of the hinterland and the European colonies of Sierra Leone and Guinea.³³ Determined to channel commerce through their own coastal settlements, the Americo-Liberians denied European traders direct access to the country's interior.³⁴ By the middle of the nineteenth century, they had managed to build up a considerable export trade in coffee, cane sugar, molasses, palm kernels, palm oil, cocoa, camwood, etc. But the lower costs of transport by means of steamships, in combination with falling prices of the products

²⁶ William E. Allen pointed out that the Africans repatriated to Liberia originated from different parts of Africa. William E. Allen, 'Liberia and the Atlantic world in the nineteenth century: convergence and effects', *History in Africa*, 37 (2010), pp. 23–4.

²⁷ Morten Bøås, 'Liberia and Sierra Leone: dead ringers? The logic of neopatrimonial rule', *Third World Quarterly*, 22 (2001), p. 702.

²⁸ Raymond L. Buell, 'The Liberian paradox', *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 7 (1931), p. 167.

²⁹ M. B. Akpan, 'Black imperialism: Americo-Liberian rule over the African peoples of Liberia, 1841–1964', *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 7 (1973), pp. 219, 225.

³⁰ Suzanne Kathleen McCoskey, 'Foreign direct investment and entrepreneurial capture in pre-conflict Liberia', *Journal of Small Business & Entrepreneurship*, 24 (2011), p. 199.

³¹ Woods, 'Marronage, here and there', p. 53.

³² Akpan, 'Black imperialism', p. 229. The indirect rule was a system of governance under which an imperial power made use of the indigenous political institutions of a conquered territory for its administration. For the indirect rule in Africa, see Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and subject: contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (Princeton, NJ, 2018).

³³ Harrison Akingbade, 'The pacification of the Liberian hinterland', *Journal of Negro History*, 79 (1994), pp. 278–9.

³⁴ William R. Stanley, 'Background to the Liberia and Sierra Leone implosions', *GeoJournal*, 61 (2005), p. 72.

due to competition, proved too much for the Liberian traders and planters and ended their prosperity.³⁵

Around 1906, after decades of financial crises and ruinous British bank loans, the Liberian government was essentially bankrupt. In 1912, the United States arranged an international loan; this resulted in the four Western powers – the United States, Great Britain, France, and Germany – controlling the Liberian government revenues for the next fourteen years.³⁶ Charles Wesley pointed to the refunding loan of 1,700,000 US dollars obtained in 1912 as the beginning of the period of a close economic relationship with the United States.³⁷ The refunding loan allowed Liberia to repay its earlier debts, but financial mismanagement continued to create financial difficulties. The situation worsened with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. When Liberia joined the Allied cause and severed its relations with Germany, which had been a major trading partner, its economy suffered greatly.³⁸ By 1924, when the Firestone Company first sent a commission to study the suitability of the country for rubber production, Liberia was struggling both politically and economically and looking toward the United States for help.³⁹ Firestone gave the Liberian government a loan of 5,000,000 US dollars. The loan agreement was approved in December 1926 and went into effect on 1 July 1927 under the Finance Corporation of America, rather than the Firestone name itself. At the same time, the company gained a concession giving them almost unlimited control over an area equal to 4 per cent of Liberian land.⁴⁰ There has never been anything like a consistent and positive policy on United States' exploitation of Liberia, yet the results of Firestone's dominant position in the country have been remarkably similar. The United States was willing to let Liberia have a free political hand as long as it did not interfere with American investments. The Firestone Company went about their business of raising rubber and was little concerned with Liberian politics.⁴¹ The result was that the Firestone concern acquired a valuable concession, while a financial adviser and other American officials supervised the Liberian finances so as to safeguard the loan service and the Firestone interests.

The argument has been made that the Liberian elites at the time knew perfectly well what they were doing by choosing this course of action. They accepted the terms partly because they wanted the infusion that they thought Firestone investments would give them, and partly because they needed the strong diplomatic support of the American government against the signs of aggression by their more powerful neighbours.⁴² The proximity of French

³⁵ R. A. De Lynden, 'Liberia', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 58 (1942), p. 93.

³⁶ F. Sherman, *Liberia: the land, its people, history and culture* (Dar es Salaam, 2011), pp. 52–7.

³⁷ Charles Wesley, 'Liberia begins its second century', *Negro History Bulletin*, 12 (1948), p. 56.

³⁸ Leigh A. Gardner, 'The rise and fall of sterling in Liberia, 1847–1943', *Economic History Review*, *Special Issue: The Renaissance of African Economic History*, 67 (2014), p. 1100.

³⁹ McCoskey, 'Foreign direct investment', p. 199.

⁴⁰ Adell Patton, Jr, 'Civil rights in America's African diaspora: Firestone rubber and segregation in Liberia', *Canadian Journal of African Studies / La Revue Canadienne des Etudes Africaines*, 49 (2015), p. 322.

⁴¹ Mower, 'The Republic of Liberia', p. 282.

⁴² McCoskey, 'Foreign direct investment', p. 199.

and English colonies, whose agents sowed discontent among the ethnic groups near their border, also contributed to tribal rebellions in the hinterland, which took place between 1910 and 1931.⁴³ The fear of Liberia's leaders for its sovereignty drove them increasingly under the umbrella of the United States government, which, they trusted, had no territorial ambitions in Liberia.⁴⁴

III

What seemed to initiate closer relations between Liberia and Poland in the 1930s was the investigation carried out by the League of Nations into an allegation of forced labour brought against Liberia as Poland was one of the countries involved in the League of Nations Liberian Committee overseeing this matter. The League of Nations investigation raised questions in some minds about Africans' capacity for self-rule. Liberia's defenders were quick to accuse the inquiry, which arose from the American note of protest of 8 June 1929, of being nothing more than a reaction to the interest of Firestone demanding that Liberian labour should be exploited in Liberia.⁴⁵

The investigation conducted by the Inquiry Commission sent to Liberia in 1930 by the League of Nations showed the use of forced and unpaid labour for private Americo-Liberian farms and plantations, including those of President Charles D. B. King himself and some members of his cabinet, and found certain abuses among which was an organized system to supply labour for the Spanish Fernando Po plantations.⁴⁶ The Firestone Company was found not to be consciously hiring slave labour, but much forced recruiting was done by the government to supply workers for the Firestone plantations.⁴⁷ The commission prepared recommendations outlining the necessity of the abolition of domestic slavery, cessation of the shipment of workers to Fernando Po, reorganization of the administration of the interior, and removal of the existing province commissioners and their replacement with Americans or Europeans.⁴⁸

To many Liberians, the League of Nations' recommendations, including the presence of foreign customs officials, threatened foreign domination. When King implied that the recommendations might be implemented, he was forced to resign in December 1930, leaving the presidency to Secretary of State Edwin Barclay.⁴⁹ Despite the promise of internal reform, the United States refused to recognize President Barclay and united with the British and German legations

⁴³ Wesley, 'Liberia begins its second century', p. 57.

⁴⁴ M. B. Akpan, 'Liberia and the Universal Negro Improvement Association: the background to the abortion of Garvey's Scheme for African Colonization', *Journal of African History*, 14 (1973), p. 114.

⁴⁵ I. K. Sundiata, 'Liberia and Fernando Po, 1880–1930', *Journal of African History*, 15 (1974), pp. 98–100, 110.

⁴⁶ Akpan, 'Black imperialism', p. 234.

⁴⁷ Mower, 'The Republic of Liberia', pp. 291–2.

⁴⁸ M. D. Mackenzie, 'Liberia and the League of Nations', *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 33 (1934), pp. 375–6.

⁴⁹ Ronald W. Davis, 'The Liberian struggle for authority on the Kru Coast', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 8 (1975), pp. 248–50.

on 21 January 1931 to present notes to the government of Liberia demanding that it ask the Council of the League of Nations to appoint an International Governing Commission to take over Liberia. In February 1931, Liberia asked for assistance from the League, and a Liberian Committee was formed.⁵⁰ The committee was faced with two problems. The first was to develop a programme of assistance for Liberia, and the second was to secure a modification of the 1926 Firestone loan agreement to ease the Liberian financial situation.

The committee appointed three experts in administration, finance, and medicine to examine the situation locally and to make practical recommendations for reforms and assistance. Their report, completed during the summer of 1931, recommended, in particular, a system of far-reaching administrative and financial assistance to Liberia, under the League of Nations' auspices, to be carried out through advisers appointed by the League, and amounting virtually to temporary control of Liberia by the League.⁵¹ For the three years following the plan of assistance prepared by the Expert Commission in 1931, the Liberian Committee, the Republic of Liberia, and the Finance Corporation of America consulted one another in an attempt to reach a satisfactory conclusion. Eventually, the League of Nations officially withdrew its assistance in May 1934. The prolonged negotiations and inability to reach an agreement, however, aroused talks of possible measures of intervention. In January 1933, a suggestion was made by the British Dominion Office that in case of possible failure of renegotiations of the loan repayment with Firestone, Liberia should voluntarily withdraw from membership of the League of Nations and allow the League to grant a mandate for the country to a great power. This solution was acceptable to the mandatory powers but it also 'had the general advantage that if the Mandate were given to a country which does not possess one, it would appease those Powers such as Germany and Italy who, not possessing mandates themselves, are quick to seize any opportunity of criticising the system'.⁵² Granting the mandate over Liberia to Italy or Germany was considered by the British Foreign Office to be the most practical solution; however, it was anticipated that it could complicate international relations in Europe.⁵³

Anthony Eden, British minister for League of Nations affairs, during the session of the League of Nations Council on 18 May 1934, vaguely suggested that the United States, in co-operation with Great Britain, should step in to manage the Liberian affairs and help solve problems this country was struggling with.⁵⁴ Responding to British concerns, Cordell Hull, United States secretary of state, in August 1934 sent his assistant, Harry A. McBride, to visit Liberia and report 'not only as to the situation he finds there as a result of the rejection of the League plan but also as to the real desire of Liberians of all classes for

⁵⁰ Mower, 'Republic of Liberia', p. 292.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Boyd Shannon, 9 Jan. 1933, The National Archives (TNA), DO 35 167/6, pp. 1–8.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, *Liberia (1934): No. 1. Papers concerning affairs in Liberia, December 1930 – May 1934* (Cmd 4614, 1934), pp. 45–6.

disinterested assistance'.⁵⁵ The United States government was not willing to burden itself with Liberian administration. The United States *chargé d'affaires* in Monrovia was encouraging the idea of the division of the country between France and Great Britain. His policy was to abate the involvement of the United States in Liberian affairs even if it meant jettisoning the Firestone business.⁵⁶ At the same time, Germany did not hide its interest in Liberia, which McBride interpreted as a manifestation of the Reich's colonial policy.⁵⁷

IV

Liberia, however, persisted in protecting its independence by devising its own plan of assistance. Fully aware that to survive they would have to be recognized by the United States, the Liberian government announced an extensive programme of administrative reforms. At the time of the final withdrawal of the League's assistance plans, the Liberian representative stated that his country was determined to secure the advice of foreign specialists.⁵⁸ On 28 April 1934, the agreement was signed by Liberian Secretary of State Clarence Lorenzo Simpson and Janusz Makarczyk as representative of the Polish Maritime and Colonial League. The Maritime and Colonial League agreed to provide expert assistance by delegating specialists to work for the Liberian government. The costs of their travel and their salaries would be fully covered by the Liberian government. In return, the Liberian government committed itself to prioritizing Polish producers in the case of establishing state monopolies for salt, matches, petrol, industrial oils, and sugar. The Liberian government also agreed to lease land for fifty years to fifty Polish nationals. Additionally, both sides of the agreement were hoping for the signing of a Treaty of Friendship between Poland and Liberia in the future.⁵⁹

Janusz Makarczyk in his memoirs gives his account of the events surrounding signing the agreement with Liberia in April 1934. He provides information on the existence of a secret clause to the agreement, which further specified the conditions of Liberian–Polish co-operation. According to Makarczyk, the actual purpose of the leased land was the establishment of points of commercial exchange rather than plantations, where Polish nationals could sell Polish goods and buy local produce. Makarczyk explains that it was forbidden by law for Europeans to open stores in Liberia. By lifting this law for Poland, they would be faced with the necessity of doing the same for the English and French and the Liberian government did not want that.⁶⁰ The secret clause

⁵⁵ Cordell Hull to F. D. G. Osbourne, 21 July 1934, TNA, FO 371/18042, pp. 102–3. McBride stayed in Liberia from 19 August to 4 September 1934. Yapp, 4 Sept. 1934, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/18042, pp. 223–8.

⁵⁶ Yapp to Peterson, 26 June 1934, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/18042, p. 77.

⁵⁷ Wallinger, 7 Aug. 1934, TNA, FO 371/18042, pp. 97–8.

⁵⁸ Mower, 'The Republic of Liberia', p. 295.

⁵⁹ Copy of the agreement (not dated), Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN), Konsulat RP w Monrowii 5, pp. 10–18.

⁶⁰ Perhaps this is what Makarczyk was told by his Liberian counterparts, but European trading outposts existed in the coastal area. Liebenov points out that the elite tended to discourage

also gave Poland a duty-free zone in the harbour and the right to organize independent shipping along the Liberian coastal routes. Additionally, it included political and military provisions. Poland gained the prerogative to interfere in Liberian foreign policy. The Liberian government agreed to consult with Poland on all its actions within the League of Nations and all international agreements between Liberia and any foreign country. Poland also gained the right to recruit up to 100,000 Liberians to serve in the Polish auxiliary army. It also made Poland responsible for the modernization of Liberian border troops. Makarczyk summarized the agreement as being quite simple. The main point was that Poland would sell to Liberia industrial commodities for wholesale prices and Liberia would sell rubber, cocoa, coffee, and oilseeds. Liberia would allow Polish citizens to open these shops and Poland would provide experts.⁶¹

Tadeusz Białas, the author of a monograph on the Polish Maritime and Colonial League, doubted the existence of the secret part of the agreement based on the fact that the surviving copy, kept in the Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw, does not include it.⁶² It does not, however, necessarily prove Makarczyk's relation unreliable. There is evidence that Liberian representatives attempted to consult with Poland before the League of Nations Assembly in September 1934. The material available in the Polish archives does not prove, however, that it happened as a result of the secret clause to the agreement from April 1934. The archival evidence also proves that Polish settlers who acquired the land lease, apart from agriculture, engaged in establishing trade of Polish goods in the Liberian hinterland. Jan Hirschler, a zoologist from the University of Lviv, who visited Liberia between November 1935 and January 1936, reported that during his stay in Liberia he was told by Poles residing there that there had been some plans regarding military co-operation between Poland and Liberia. He heard rumours that young Liberians would have the opportunity to attend military schools in Poland. Hirschler himself admitted, however, that he had no information as to whether this happened.⁶³

The agreement between Liberia and the Maritime and Colonial League, although favourable for Poland, was seen by the Polish government as a disappointment. Makarczyk reports signs of resentment coming from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, particularly from Wiktor Drymmer, head of the Consular Department in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Drymmer himself, in his memoirs, claims that he had no knowledge of the Maritime and Colonial League plans involving Liberia, and he only found out about the agreement

Liberian business and encouraged the entrance of foreign groups at various levels of economic enterprise. Gus J. Liebenow, *Liberia: the evolution of privilege* (New York, NY, 1969), p. 92. Alternatively, this restriction mentioned by Makarczyk could apply only to the Liberian hinterland. Polish nationals had the right to enter the Liberian interior without a permit, which was required from other Europeans. Jan Hirschler, *Ze Lwowa do Liberii: Wspomnienia z Afryki tropikalnej* (Lwów, 1938), p. 99.

⁶¹ Janusz Makarczyk, *Widziałem i słyszałem: Wspomnienia podróżnicze* (Warsaw, 1957), pp. 72–3.

⁶² Białas, *Liga Morska*, pp. 212–13.

⁶³ Hirschler, *Ze Lwowa do Liberii*, pp. 86–7.

after it was signed.⁶⁴ Makarczyk, however, is quite clear that the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not only fully aware of the Maritime and Colonial League's involvement in Liberia, but that their true agenda was to make Liberia a Polish colony. He writes: 'After my return [from Liberia] I met in Warsaw a few disappointed candidates for "colonial governors", and I also met the accusation of putting at risk Poland's prestige because I did not bring back with me the request for the protectorate!'⁶⁵ Makarczyk writes that the Polish government had unrealistic expectations and failed to understand that Liberia's motive behind entering the treaty with the Maritime and Colonial League was to free the country from Firestone's patronage.⁶⁶

The major role in the development of relations between Poland and Liberia was played by Leo Sajous, who, according to Makarczyk, managed to convince President Barclay to engage in co-operation with the Maritime and Colonial League. Leo Sajous was a Haitian citizen and a medical doctor. In Haiti, he got involved in the Pan-African movement, becoming in 1930 one of the co-founders of the international periodical *La revue du monde noir*, which aimed to serve as the voice of African intellectuals in regard to studying and making known the African civilization.⁶⁷ According to Makarczyk, Sajous came to Liberia to represent the idea of co-operation between Haiti, Abyssinia, Liberia, and Africans living in the United States, and it was he who suggested that the Liberian government should act outside the League of Nations and invite independent European advisers.⁶⁸ Also, McBride seemed to be convinced that the idea of hiring foreign advisers came from Sajous.⁶⁹ President Barclay decided to work with Sajous and appointed him consul general of the Republic of Liberia in Poland.⁷⁰ Sajous's plan required the active support of at least one of the European countries. *Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny*, one of the Polish newspapers, suggested that Sajous's choice of Poland as a possible collaborator was influenced by a historical connection between Poland and Haiti, going back to the Napoleonic era.⁷¹ The newspaper also indicated that Sajous did believe that Poland, as a country that 'never

⁶⁴ Białas, *Liga Morska*, pp. 211–12.

⁶⁵ Makarczyk, *Widziałem i słyszałem*, pp. 77–9.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Kotti Sree Ramesh and Kandula Nirupa Rani, *Claude McKay: the literary identity from Jamaica to Harlem and beyond* (Jefferson, NC, 2006), p. 190.

⁶⁸ Makarczyk, *Widziałem i słyszałem*, p. 71. According to the report published by the Maritime and Colonial League, Sajous initially arrived to Poland in 1933 as an unofficial representative of Liberia, Haiti, and Abisynia to establish direct cultural and economic relations between these countries and Poland. *Sprawozdanie z działalności Ligi Morskiej i Kolonialnej 1.IV.1933 - 1.IV.1935* (Warsaw, 1935), p. 21. It remains unclear how exactly Sajous came in contact with the Maritime and Colonial League.

⁶⁹ Record of the conversation between McBride, Millard of the US Embassy in London, Thompson, and Wallinger, 18 Sept. 1934, TNA, FO 371/18042, pp. 244–51.

⁷⁰ Letter nominating Leo Sajous as Liberian consul general signed by Simpson, 23 Apr. 1934, AAN, MSZ, 642, p. 11. The exequatur was granted to Sajous on 20 Mar. 1935. Beck, 20 Mar. 1935, AAN, MSZ, 642, p. 6.

⁷¹ 'Umowa kolonizacyjna między Polską a Liberią', *Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny*, 330 (1934), p. 6. Descendants of Polish legionnaires who rebelled against Napoleon to support the anti-colonial uprising in Haiti were still living there. See Jan Pachoński and Reuel K. Wilson, *Poland's*

committed any atrocities against other nations' and just recently regained independence, would sympathize with Liberia's struggle to maintain sovereignty.⁷² William Erskine, the British ambassador to Poland, transmitted a summary of a speech made at the Maritime and Colonial League meeting at Cracow regarding Polish-Liberian relations, which explained Liberian interest in Poland in a similar way. According to the speaker, Poland was chosen as a country that had never harmed other nations and had only recently gained its independence so it could be counted on to support the Liberian insistence on independence.⁷³ Erskine noted, however, that

The speaker's concluding words formed an interesting pendant to his explanation of the Liberian Government's choice of Poland as a helper. The planters, according to the speaker, would be able to create spheres of influence embracing large areas, and thus to exert an influence on Liberia, as the example of the colonial powers shows that a first step towards gaining control is sending planters.⁷⁴

Makarczyk explains that Sajous did not think Poland had any colonial ambitions. Białas, however, called his explanation 'naïve' and pointed out that Sajous was negotiating with an organization with the word 'colonial' in its name. Białas drew the hypothesis that perhaps Liberia initiated closer relations with Poland in Geneva to win Poland's sympathy as one of the members of the Liberian Committee within the League of Nations.⁷⁵ Albert Edward Yapp, the British consul general and chargé d'affaires in Monrovia, transmitted a copy of the article from *The Daily Guardian* published in Freetown on 26 July 1934 entitled 'Searchlight on Liberia', which might confirm that the Liberian government did indeed count on Poland's support. Yapp seemed convinced that the article came from Monrovia and suspected that it was written by one or two members of the Liberian cabinet. He believed that part of this article was related to Liberian relations with Poland:

The simple truth is that this outcry against Liberia is nothing but organized propaganda for its partition between Great Britain, the USA, and France. At the same time that Liberia is being denounced, at least one World Power is making overtures to her and promising her moral support at Geneva and financial help in return for certain concessions. The strength and safety of Liberia lie in her membership of the League of Nations. Threats of mandating her or withholding financial aid will not intimidate her.⁷⁶

Caribbean tragedy: a study of Polish legions in the Haitian War of Independence, 1802-1803 (Boulder, CO, 1986).

⁷² *Ibid.* *Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny* gave Michał Pankiewicz from the Maritime and Colonial League as a source.

⁷³ W. Erskine to Simon, 4 Dec. 1934, TNA, FO 371/18043, pp. 154-7.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Białas, *Liga Morska*, p. 211.

⁷⁶ Yapp, 4 Aug. 1934, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/18042, p. 136.

In September 1934, Liberian Secretary of State Clarence Lorenzo Simpson visited Poland. According to Sajous, the visit was his initiative and was aimed at establishing direct personal relations with his Polish counterparts. He insisted on scheduling the visit just before the League of Nations session taking place in September, but the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs advised against it.⁷⁷ The Liberian representative, however, managed to meet with Mieczysław Fułarski from the Maritime and Colonial League on 30 August 1934 in Paris, before the League of Nations session.⁷⁸ The Liberian delegates expressed their readiness to co-ordinate their speeches in Geneva with Edward Bernard Raczyński, the Polish representative to the League of Nations, and to follow his advice closely.⁷⁹ Their visit to Europe was seen by Yapp as part of the government's preparations for their defence at the next League of Nations session.⁸⁰ In Warsaw, Simpson was supposed to have continued to negotiate a commercial treaty with Poland. Simpson, however, met with a disappointing reception in Warsaw. Simpson admitted that Liberia needed markets and that Poland might be a good outlet for coffee, but he said that his visit to Warsaw was merely a courtesy visit.⁸¹

The Maritime and Colonial League, the Liberian government, and the Polish government all seemed secretive about the agreement of 28 April 1934 and the details of their relations. Perhaps this was due to the disappointment of the Polish government resulting from Makarczyk's visit. Maybe this was also the reason why the Treaty of Friendship was never signed. As for Liberia, the agreement with the Maritime and Colonial League was never ratified. President Barclay, in his annual message to the Liberian parliament on 28 October 1934, stated only that a trade agreement between Liberia and Poland had been signed by the secretary of state and 'the Commercial Maritime Representative of Poland'.⁸² Was he trying to omit the usage of the name of the Maritime and Colonial League? If he was, perhaps it was to avoid upsetting public opinion in Liberia, which was sensitive regarding Liberia's sovereignty, by implicating engaging with an organization expressing colonial ambitions.

V

For President Barclay, the principal aim while engaging with the Maritime and Colonial League was to obtain experts ready to work with the Liberian government as advisers. At the time of the final withdrawal of the League's assistance plans, the Liberian representative stated that his country was determined to

⁷⁷ Juliusz Łukasiewicz to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 28 Aug. 1934, AAN, Ambassada RP w Paryżu, 123, pp. 13–14.

⁷⁸ Fułarski, 31 Aug. 1934, AAN, Ambassada RP w Paryżu, 123, pp. 15–17.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Yapp, 3 Sept. 1934, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/18042, pp. 209–12.

⁸¹ Yapp, 22 Oct. 1934, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/18043, pp. 12–15. Simpson also mentioned some rumours apparently circulating in Monrovia that the delegation meant to secure a loan from Poland. He stated that these rumours were not true.

⁸² Yapp, 10 Nov. 1934, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/18043, pp. 49–78.

secure the advice of foreign specialists.⁸³ President Barclay admitted to McBride that outside help and advice was essential, demonstrated his recognition of this with the presence of Polish experts, and added that after a few years of foreign help Liberia would be able to carry on unaided.⁸⁴

In August, two experts from Poland, Tadeusz Brudzinski and Jerzy Wincenty Babecki, arrived in Monrovia to serve as economic and sanitary advisers, respectively, as a part of Liberia's own plan of assistance.⁸⁵ This action of the Liberian government was met by the British with a certain dose of scepticism. They doubted that Liberians had any true intentions or means to improve the situation by themselves, especially considering the fact that the Liberian government did not reveal much about the scheme.⁸⁶ The British Foreign Office feared that the position of any foreign experts would be made impossible by the Liberian insistence on the protection of their constitutional rights.⁸⁷ Lord Lugard, former governor-general of Nigeria, expressed a similar view in commenting on a proposal made by the Liberian government to the Belgian government that they should nominate an adviser with administrative experience.⁸⁸ According to Lord Lugard, Liberia refused the essential conditions of the assistance plan and was trying to bluff the British and the Americans and delay any potential measures that the League of Nations or the great powers could undertake against it by appointing someone reputable as an adviser. He continued by suggesting that 'she [Liberia] will endeavour by making all kinds of promises to him to induce him to take up an attitude antagonistic to that of the League and the two governments concerned'.⁸⁹ Furthermore, even if the Liberian government had true intentions of implementing all the reforms proposed by this adviser, Lugard doubted that the scheme could bring a successful outcome due to Liberia's current financial situation:

If he suggests any reforms that Liberia professes to accept, they cannot be put into execution without funds, and these can only be found by the Firestone Corporation to which she is heavily in debt. She is pledged not to raise a loan in the circumstances, and indeed could not succeed in doing so.⁹⁰

Therefore the presence of foreign advisers in Liberia would be entirely useless unless supported by the League of Nations' power and funds. Similarly,

⁸³ Mower, 'The Republic of Liberia', p. 295.

⁸⁴ Yapp, 4 Sept. 1934, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/18042, pp. 223–8.

⁸⁵ Yapp to John Simon, 6 Aug. 1934, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/18042, pp. 144–5.

⁸⁶ Wallinger, 22 Aug. 1934, TNA, FO 371/18042, p. 155.

⁸⁷ Wallinger, 22 Oct. 1934, TNA, FO 371/18042, p. 311.

⁸⁸ A former vice-governor of the Congo was proposed, but he did not accept the Liberian government's invitation as he thought that the preset conditions in that country gave scant hope of a successful outcome to any mission he might undertake. Baron de Cartier de Marchienne to Seymour, 24 Sept. 1934, TNA, FO 371/18042, pp. 260–2.

⁸⁹ Copy of Lugard's letter to Orts enclosed in Lugard's letter to Simon, 30 Aug. 1934, TNA, FO 371/18042, pp. 161–3.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Yapp doubted whether any of the experts employed by the Liberian government would have any real authority to put their recommendation into operation. He reported his conversation with Rudolf Fuszek, who had been acting director for Sanitation and Public Health in Liberia for several years. According to Yapp, Fuszek was assured immediately after the arrival of the sanitary adviser by the secretary of state, on the instruction of the president, that the presence of the experts would not interfere with his work in any way. Any recommendation the experts should make would be referred to Fuszek for his observation.⁹¹

Yapp's dispatches from Monrovia provide an account of the activities of these two experts. Yapp recounts how Brudzinski and Babecki, together with Sajous as chief adviser, were responsible for putting into operation Liberia's own plan of assistance.⁹² Both Polish advisers were reported to work very hard, rushing around the place, assuming powers of decision and importance regarding their mission.⁹³ The government leased two houses in Monrovia to accommodate them and they were provided with a second-hand car and monthly salaries of 350 US dollars each. Yet Yapp suspected that no one, not even the Liberians, took them too seriously.⁹⁴ There was a joke about the introduction of Polish advisers circulating in Monrovia: 'we have discarded the lumber for the Poles' – the word 'lumber' referred to the American fiscal officers who all happened to be big men.⁹⁵

Brudzinski, serving as economic adviser, was mainly responsible for a revision of the customs tariffs, which provoked general resentment in the country. Because of that, it was said, as Yapp reported, that President Barclay told him that he had bungled the first task of any importance that had been entrusted to him. Brudzinski was appointed for a period of eighteen months.⁹⁶ Babecki, whose appointment as sanitary adviser was understood to be for six months only, had reportedly been spending a lot of time conducting a medical survey of schoolchildren and had attempted to take a census of the population of Monrovia. According to Fuszek, Babecki made various suggestions regarding the draining of stagnant water and the removal of refuse. He also made suggestions for the reorganization of staff in the hospital.⁹⁷ Suggested changes,

⁹¹ Yapp, 21 Aug. 1934, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/18042, pp. 200–3.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Yapp to Thompson, 12 Nov. 1934, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/18043, pp. 87–90. In comparison, in 1932, the annual salary received by the Liberian secretary of the treasury was 3,137.98 US dollars. The Department of State, *Liberia: documents relating to the plan of assistance proposed by the League of Nations* (Washington, DC, 1933), pp. 51–2.

⁹⁵ Annual report on Liberia for the period January 1934 to May 1935, Yapp, 15 May 1935, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/19235, p. 352.

⁹⁶ Revision of the annual report upon leading personalities in Liberia, Yapp, 20 Feb. 1935, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/19235, pp. 247, 2.

⁹⁷ Yapp, Monrovia, 22 Oct. 1934, TNA, FO 371/18043, pp. 12–15. The health conditions in 1929, when yellow fever made its appearance, were described as distressing. For many years, there were areas in Liberia where health conditions were in such a deplorable state in 1932 that it started to be considered a serious danger on the west coast of Africa. See Vincent J. Browne, 'Economic development in Liberia', *Journal of Negro Education*, 24 (1955), pp. 113–19.

however, could not be implemented due to financial constraints.⁹⁸ Babecki left Liberia in April 1935 and was replaced by Ludwig Anigstein. Upon his departure from Liberia, he admitted to Yapp that it was useless for him to be there with Fuszek as director of the Sanitation Service as they could not work together.⁹⁹ Anigstein was appointed in October 1935 to advise the Liberian government on matters of sanitation and public hygiene. His first act as an adviser to the Liberian government was to conduct a medical survey of the country.¹⁰⁰ Anigstein resigned by the end of 1936 after completing his report on health conditions in the Liberian interior, which was judged by the British Foreign Office as admirable.¹⁰¹ President Barclay commented during his annual message to the legislature given in October 1936: 'His work, having been completed, the Doctor felt that there was no further need for his services and, as he was not in good health, he tendered his resignation, which I accepted.'¹⁰²

VI

Speculation arose regarding the involvement of the Polish government in this scheme.¹⁰³ It seemed that some kind of arrangement with Poland was likely to be made.¹⁰⁴ In reply to semi-official inquiries, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that the appointments of Babecki and Brudzinski as advisers to the Liberian government had indeed been made with the knowledge and consent of the Polish government.¹⁰⁵ Suggestions had been made that, if the Polish government was involved in the advisers' scheme, it was going behind the League of Nations' back for it was to the League that Liberia appealed for assistance and Poland was represented in the League of Nations Council when that body strongly condemned the Liberian attitude toward the plan of assistance.¹⁰⁶ The Polish honorary consul, Rudolf Rathaus, arrived in Monrovia at the beginning of January 1935.¹⁰⁷ He quickly gave the impression that the interest of Poland in Liberia as a country was long-lived. He was also very ready to talk about the plans and aspirations of his country to gain a footing on the west coast of Africa. He spoke of Poland's intention to take various products from Liberia, including cocoa, coffee, and castor beans, which his compatriots were said to have planted in the interior. Rathaus was also reported to express an interest in the question of granting a mandate over Liberia to Poland. Rathaus, in his conversation with his French and

⁹⁸ TNA, FO 371/19235, p. 352.

⁹⁹ Yapp to Pink, 23 Apr. 1935, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/19233, pp. 193–7.

¹⁰⁰ Transcript of the annual message of President Barclay to the legislature from 19 Dec. 1935, Yapp, 4 Jan. 1936, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/20213, pp. 77–101, 96.

¹⁰¹ Pink, 26 Nov. 1936, TNA, FO 371/20213, p. 8.

¹⁰² Transcript of President Barclay's annual message to the legislature given on 28 Oct. 1936, Yapp, 6 Nov. 1936, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/20213, pp. 12–33, 21.

¹⁰³ Wallinger to Ashley Clark, 19 Sept. 1934, TNA, FO 371/18042, pp. 252–3.

¹⁰⁴ Yapp, 22 Oct. 1934, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/18043, pp. 12–15.

¹⁰⁵ Erskine to Foreign Office, 15 Oct. 1934, TNA, FO 371/18042, p. 311.

¹⁰⁶ Wallinger, 17 Sept. 1934, TNA, FO 371/18042, p. 204.

¹⁰⁷ Yapp, 29 Jan. 1935, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/19235, pp. 228–9.

American colleagues, allowed them to see that this idea was at the back of his mind.¹⁰⁸ However, if Poland tried to benefit from colonial rivalries, so did Liberia. The Liberian government gained Poland's support for Liberia's own plan of assistance by promising to provide what the Maritime and Colonial League was aiming for: establishing economic exchange and concession of land. Then the Liberian government presented the Polish mission as proof of recognition of the fact that Liberia needed reforms and that outside help and advice was essential, when in fact these experts remained largely powerless. At the same time, it could have created an impression that the Liberian government was making an effort to counterbalance British and American political and economic influence. This, in turn, could have added pressure on the American and British governments to come to terms with the Liberian government. It is hard to assess to what extent, if at all, British and Americans feared that the presence of Polish interests in Liberia could challenge their own position in this country. But the two American fiscal officers returned to Liberia on 1 September 1934 and Yapp indicated that one of the reasons for their return was as a countermeasure against the recent appointments of a body of foreign advisers.¹⁰⁹

By March 1935, Liberia and the Firestone interests had come to a settlement of supplementary loan and plantation agreements, the most important features of which were a reduction of the interest rate, new tax exemptions for Firestone, and exclusive rights to the minerals in the leased land.¹¹⁰ The United States recognized Liberia in June 1935, and Great Britain followed in December 1935.¹¹¹ At that time, Polish prospects in Liberia did not appear encouraging. In 1935, a few plantations established by Polish nationals started to operate in the Liberian hinterland.¹¹² The situation of planters did not seem to be stable. Hirschler, who came to Liberia on the invitation of one of the Polish plantation owners, wrote later in his memoirs that in the second half of 1935, while preparing for the trip, he was not even certain whether his host would still be in Liberia at the time of his planned visit.¹¹³

Planters sent to Liberia by the Maritime and Colonial League formed the Polish Syndicate in Monrovia to establish a commercial exchange between Poland and Liberia.¹¹⁴ In the Reppu region, the Syndicate established a shop selling products imported from Poland. According to Hirschler, it was the only store in the Liberian interior owned by a European.¹¹⁵ The merchandise for sale was brought from Poland to Liberia on board *Poznań*, a commercial vessel chartered with the Maritime and Colonial League's funds.¹¹⁶ The trip was

¹⁰⁸ Whittall, 6 June 1935, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/19233, pp. 273–6.

¹⁰⁹ Yapp, 17 Sept. 1934, Monrovia, TNA, FO 371/18042, p. 290.

¹¹⁰ Wesley, 'Liberia begins its second century', p. 63.

¹¹¹ Mower, 'The Republic of Liberia', p. 295.

¹¹² A note regarding the Maritime and Colonial League presence in Liberia (not dated), AAN, Konsulat RP w Monrowii 5, pp. 19–21.

¹¹³ Hirschler, *Ze Lwowa do Liberii*, pp. 13–14.

¹¹⁴ AAN, Konsulat RP w Monrowii 5, pp. 19–21.

¹¹⁵ Hirschler, *Ze Lwowa do Liberii*, p. 223.

¹¹⁶ 'Do Afryki Zachodniej', *Morze*, 2 (1935), p. 16.

organized with the co-operation of the Polish Ministry of Industry and Trade, Institute of Export, with the aim of introducing Polish products to West African markets.¹¹⁷ According to local traders in Monrovia, all the goods brought by the Polish vessel, which unloaded about 45 tons, benefited from favourable treatment such as the waiving of import duty. The British and other traders nevertheless seemed quite confident that as long as such advantages as these were not enjoyed by the Poles they could hold their own and would have little to fear in the face of Polish competition. They pointed out that their head offices were already buying in Poland such goods as could be sold there, and therefore they did not see that there was any place for Polish middlemen. The presence of Polish advisers in Liberia may have helped their countrymen; however, the British Foreign Office expected the advisers to lose much of their influence once the Firestone agreements had been approved.¹¹⁸

In October 1936, the Polish consul in Monrovia reported a negative campaign in the Liberian press targeted against Poland. The Liberian ambassador in Paris, during his visit to the Polish embassy, explained that public opinion in Liberia was becoming anxious due to the rumours that Poland was attempting to turn Liberia into its colony.¹¹⁹ The situation worsened further in 1938 due to the growing distrust of the Liberian authorities toward any whites except for Americans.¹²⁰ The Maritime and Colonial League was accused of not keeping the terms of the agreement by not paying compensation to the local farmers for the leased land.¹²¹ The situation of Poles in Liberia was further complicated by the investigation carried out by the Liberian authorities that showed that Polish citizens were involved in selling hunting firearms to locals, which was forbidden by law.¹²² By 1938, the plantations had fallen into decline and the Polish Syndicate was dissolved as not profitable.¹²³ The League initially attempted to defend its position; eventually, however, in May 1939, the Maritime and Colonial League decided to withdraw completely from Liberia.¹²⁴

VII

Poland failed to establish a long-lasting economic and political presence in Liberia; however, as Frederick Cooper reminds us, the past can only be studied from the point of the present, and looking at 'the consequences of alternatives taken and alternatives lost' serves to enable a better understanding of policy patterns at a particular moment in time.¹²⁵ The Polish interest in obtaining colonies did not develop in isolation from contemporary events, becoming a

¹¹⁷ Michał Pankiewicz, 'Nasza wyprawa do Afryki', *Morze*, 4 (1935), pp. 6–7.

¹¹⁸ TNA, FO 371/19233, pp. 273–6.

¹¹⁹ Łukasiewicz to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 Oct. 1936, AAN, MSZ, 7011, pp. 1–2.

¹²⁰ Mańkowski to Polish consulate in Marseille, 27 July 1938, AAN, MSZ, 4464, pp. 1–3.

¹²¹ Mańkowski to Polish consulate in Marseille, 18 Aug. 1938, AAN, MSZ, 4464, p. 6.

¹²² Mańkowski to Polish consulate in Marseille, 17 Jan. 1939, AAN, Konsulat w Monrowii 5, pp. 8–9.

¹²³ Mańkowski to Polish consulate in Marseille, 27 July 1938, AAN, MSZ, 4464, pp. 1–3.

¹²⁴ Kwaśniewski to *Międzynarowe Towarzystwo Osadnicze*, 25 May 1939, AAN, MSZ, 9765, pp. 17–18.

¹²⁵ See Frederick Cooper, 'Possibility and constraint: African independence in historical perspective', *Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), pp. 167–96.

product of its times. The Polish government and the Maritime and Colonial League, by interfering in Liberia, were looking for ways to participate in colonialism and benefit from it in the way colonial powers essentially did, by using political influence, economic presence, and settlers. The Polish government seemed to avoid being directly implicated in the Liberian affairs; however, there can be little doubt that the Maritime and Colonial League had its backing despite the disappointment reported by Makarczyk. The agreement with the Liberian government from 1934 was signed by the Maritime and Colonial League, but it included clauses directly involving the Polish state. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs admitted that the advisers to the Liberian government were sent there with their knowledge. Also, the Liberian administration seemed to be convinced that the co-operation with the Maritime and Colonial League guaranteed the support of the Polish government. Perhaps the Polish government was indeed trying to go behind the League of Nations' back instead to gain control over Liberia. At the same time, however, it appears that the League of Nations was perceived by the Polish government as an institution capable of making changes to the status quo of colonial possessions by manipulating the mandate system to satisfy emerging colonial ambitions of European non-colonial powers. The described encounters between Poland and Liberia signify the variety of the colonial interactions. Poland was not a colonial power, nor was Liberia a colony. The past of both countries, however, was entangled with colonialism. The question that arises is to what extent can past experiences with colonialism affect the future of countries and nations? How did it affect the way Poles and Americo-Liberians perceived themselves in relationship to each other and in relationship to global politics and processes? Although Poles in the German empire were subject to colonial practices, the leaders of the colonial movement in Poland perceived the role of Poles in relationship to overseas possessions of the empire as the role of colonizers. It is also the role they assumed in their relations with Liberia. Liberian rulers, however, did not seem to perceive Poland as such. Americo-Liberians themselves can be described as colonizers considering their relationship to the population of Liberian hinterland. The complexities of colonialism expose the relativity of the categories of 'colonizer' and 'colonized'.

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