

In July and August of 2017 I used the generous IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award to travel to Poland to examine documents related to my dissertation topic in several archival institutions. As a doctoral candidate in Modern European History, I have been studying the relationship between Poland and maritime colonialism in the interwar period (1918-1939), especially the ways in which the latter shaped the former's internal and external policies during the last critical years before the outbreak of World War II. This summer's investigations have yielded many promising results, expanded my understanding of the topic and of the availability of materials, and better defined the parameters of my research.

Before my journey to Poland, I held several hypotheses regarding the country's historical colonial record. Based on my previous research related to a Polish commercial expedition to Liberia in 1934-38, I had observed that Polish interwar statesmen and activists sought, rather unsuccessfully, to expand Poland's trading frontiers through pioneering missions, which they often described as "colonial." I continue to believe that Poland's failures to establish a productive relationship with Africa stemmed from the tensions between the Poles' desire to reach great-power status in a colonial age and their past as victims of European imperialism. Despite verifying this conviction, however, the documents I have consulted suggest other, perhaps more important reasons for Poland's peculiar relationship to maritime colonialism.

The study of several collections stored at Warsaw's **Central Archive of Modern Records** (Archiwum Akt Nowych, or AAN) and **Central Military Archive** (Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe, or CAW) have encouraged me to place Poland's "colonial" projects of the 1930s in a broader context that includes earlier attempts to define Poland's place in the world and colonialism itself through commercial and settlement missions. The collections *Akta Janiny i Kazimierza Warchałowskich* (AAN 2/428), *Archiwum Rodziny Niedenthal* (AAN 2/2672), and *Akta Michała Gieysztora* (AAN 2/364) proved especially illuminating since they document privately sponsored settlement projects in Latin America, as opposed to later government-supported initiatives in Africa. I have learned from those files that Poland's legacy of partitions and statelessness contributed to an understanding of "colonization" among Polish emigration leaders in Peru, Brazil, and Argentina that was different from the popular Western one. The

experiences of these activists in the 1920s contributed to the increasing role of the Polish state in projects described as colonial a decade later, since many of them became leading figures in the government.

Units from the collections *Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych* (AAN 2/322), *Konsulat RP w Marsylii* (AAN 2/464), and *Konsulat Honorowy RP w Tananarivie* (AAN 2/731) have drawn my attention to the significance of the so-called “Jewish Question” in shaping the Polish government’s stance toward maritime colonialism. In the late 1930s many Polish statesmen and Revisionist Zionists reached the conclusion that cultural and economic tensions between ethnic Poles and Jews had become insurmountable. They claimed, therefore, that if Palestine could not be turned into a Jewish “National Home,” alternative destinations for a mass Jewish emigration should be found, especially given the rise of the openly anti-Semitic Nazi Germany along Poland’s western border. I have examined many files demonstrating that Poland’s diplomatic attempts to receive a colonial mandate over Palestine and a colonial concession in Madagascar stemmed from a desire to create such Jewish “colonies.” Although anti-Semitism in Poland was a major contributor, the projects of Polish-Jewish colonization also created opportunities for Jews to acquire power and reaffirm their questioned belonging to the Polish nation. Adding yet another layer of complexity, units in the collections *Ambasada RP w Berlinie* (AAN 2/474) and *Departament Spraw Morskich i Kierownictwo Marynarki Wojennej* (CAW I.300.21) suggest that Poland’s diplomacy might have voiced colonial demands in the League of Nations in order to render the corresponding German claims unsuccessful. Moreover, the files related to the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in the collection *Delegacja RP przy Lidze Narodów* (AAN 2/513) explain Poland’s vision of becoming the European protector of Africa’s independence movements and the circumstances that discouraged Polish diplomats from pursuing that path.

Visits to smaller archival institutions in Poland have made sure that I acknowledge the role the country’s colonial aspirations played in its domestic policy. At the **Audiovisual Archive** (Archiwum Audiowizualne) in Warsaw, for example, I examined propaganda films that used colonial slogans and imagery to encourage citizens to visit Palestine (MF.0502) or informed them about living conditions in Latin America (MF.0135). At a regional branch of the **National Archives in Kraków** (Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie, or ANK), I have also analysed documents from the *Liga Morska i Kolonialna*

collection (ANK 30/46/2) depicting the implications of membership in a colonial organization for everyday life in the provincial town of Bochnia.

Thanks to the generosity of the IRIS, my summer trip to Poland has been a bridgehead for further dissertation research in Berlin and Aix-en-Provence. Having gotten a grasp of more than one dimension of Poland's relationship to maritime colonialism in the interwar period, I am prepared to sharpen the focus of my research and better select collections and archival units at the institutions in Western Europe.