Colonial Precedents and Contemporary Echoes: Coerced Displacement and Asylum Policies

Zanib Javed
Islamia College Lahore
***Correspondence**: j_zanib@gmail.com

Citation | Javed. Z, "Colonial Precedents and Contemporary Echoes: Coerced Displacement and Asylum Policies", MCCSS, Vol. 2, Issue. 2, pp. 100-113, June 2023
Received| May 21, 2023; **Revised|** May 30, 2023**; Accepted|** June 15, 2023; **Published|** June 21, 2023.

The UK's deal with Rwanda to relocate asylum seekers challenges refugee rights and undermines the Geneva Convention, setting a precedent for countries to externalize migration management. This shift risks reshaping global protection towards transactional agreements and strips refugees of agency, making them vulnerable to exploitation. This paper explores the intersection of historical colonial practices of coerced displacement and the contemporary landscape of asylum policies, shedding light on their interconnectedness. The analysis traverses' historical instances, from the Atlantic slave trade to the forced migration of indigenous communities and the relocation of marginalized groups such as convicts and refugees. It delves into the intricate tapestry of relocation tactics employed, encompassing deportation strategies, offshore containment, and the resettlement of undesirable populations within and beyond the Empire's borders. Through meticulous examination, the study unravels the threads linking past colonial practices to contemporary asylum policies. It scrutinizes recent initiatives such as the UK-Rwanda Migration and Economic Development Partnership, revealing echoes of colonial power dynamics in their execution. The paper dissects the ramifications of these policies on the international refugee framework, contemplating their implications on global disparities in refugee distribution and their potential to undermine established conventions like the 1951 Refugee Convention. By contextualizing present-day asylum policies within the historical continuum of coerced displacement, this paper aims to illuminate the persisting impact of colonial precedents on contemporary approaches to population relocation and asylum governance.

Keywords: Migration, Deportation strategies, Relocation Tactics, Offshore, Containment.

Introduction:

In recent decades, Britain and other "Western" countries have adopted highly restrictive asylum policies. Scholars have proposed various explanations for these policies, commonly based on the belief that today's asylum seekers differ significantly in numbers and characteristics from previous groups. This perspective termed the "myth of difference," suggests that past cohorts were smaller, manageable, and mainly European, while current ones are notably larger and predominantly non-European. It's suggested that Western governments committed to universal human rights in the mid-20th century but adjusted their policies when the influx of asylum seekers underwent a significant change. Revisiting the origins of contemporary refugee rights through the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, this article presents evidence challenging the "myth of difference." It demonstrates that the British government held hostile views toward non-European refugees, especially those from colonies, from the outset of the convention. This scrutiny questions prevailing assumptions and highlights the exclusionary dynamics of present-day asylum practices. The article relies on fresh archival research, drawing evidence from British government documents at the National Archives and UN archives,

including negotiations related to the refugee convention and human rights declarations. These findings are substantiated by secondary sources. Recently, the notion of expulsion has emerged as a succinct concept used to scrutinize unchecked displays of political or economic authority. The act of forcibly moving someone from a favored place to a presumed unfavorable one, termed enforced removal, carries consequences beyond the often-tragic personal stories linked to it. This practice exceeds exile in its intensity of violence and surpasses imprisonment in its enduring impact. The process involves violence specifically directed at the individual's body, potentially resulting in physical harm or even death. However, expulsion's scope extends beyond merely transferring a specific number of individuals from one place to another. It holds significance as it perpetuates and reinforces social and spatial hierarchies. In this current context, "expulsion" refers to the compelled elimination or deportation of unwanted migrants [1]. It also involves the historical practice of coerced displacement within the British colonies, impacting diverse groups like enslaved individuals, indigenous communities, indentured laborers, and refugees. Deportation's repercussions extend beyond those immediately subjected to removal, affecting a much larger populace. At an individual level, deportation instills heightened fear and destabilizes a broader population, including individuals who might potentially face similar removal. This article centers on the broader political implications of deportation, particularly its role in perpetuating historically entrenched power dynamics between individuals and locations, a phenomenon inherently tied to colonial legacies. While deportation plays a part in this process, along with other methods of migration control, the primary emphasis in this discussion remains on deportation itself [2][3][4].

This article scrutinizes the 2002 Migration and Economic Development Partnership (MEDP) established between the United Kingdom and Rwanda. Presented alongside primary and secondary legislations in the UK Parliament between 2022 and 2023, the MEDP's historical roots in deportation procedures stretch beyond merely perpetuating existing power dynamics (though it does contribute to that) to replicating specific actions and language derived from Britain's colonial past. This analysis posits that the MEDP marks a departure from the United Kingdom's migration policy post-1970s. Before the MEDP, the UK predominantly focused on repatriating relatively small groups of individuals to their home countries, with a brief deviation between 2003 and 2010. The MEDP, or Migration Enforcement and Deportation Policy, perpetuates deportation and dispersal methods prevalent during Britain's colonial era's concluding phase, thereby extending the influence of these colonial practices into contemporary times [5][6][7]

The prevalent understanding of how colonial origins influence present asylum practices is evident in this topic. The MEDP has attracted considerable scholarly attention, with commentators highlighting its colonial connections. This study contributes to the discourse in two distinct ways, aligning with subsequent sections of this scholarly work. Firstly, we delve into an examination of deportation and enforced removal practices in the United Kingdom since the 1970s, emphasizing how the MEDP deviates from this contemporary approach. The following segment of the analysis focuses on historical British colonial policies regarding coerced displacement, seen as an extension of the MEDP. The practice of relocating individuals within the British Empire and confining them to specific areas was a fundamental aspect of British colonial governance, manifesting in various forms across the First and Second British Empires. This study offers a concise overview of historical narratives involving the slave trade, transportation, indenture, and migration within the British Empire, drawing from a substantial body of secondary literature. Subsequently, our focus shifts to the twentieth century, during which refugee relocation became prevalent. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, we've consulted both secondary and primary sources [8][9].

It's worth noting that our aim isn't to provide an exhaustive exploration of British relocation practices, given the numerous instances warranting consideration. Rather, our

methodology seeks to underscore a consistent pattern of displacement, specifically the dispersal of refugees, closely resembling current strategies to relocate them to external regions. The phenomenon of scattering refugees across various areas within the British Empire was notably prevalent during and immediately after the Second World War. Additionally, there are indications that an even larger scale of dispersal was either under consideration or actively pursued. The conclusion aims to synthesize and reframe the preceding sections within the context of colonial power structures. The subject at hand concerns enforced removals from the United Kingdom (UK) and the UK-Rwanda Plan. The UK government's intention to forcibly repatriate specific asylum seekers denied asylum to Rwanda is outlined in the Migration and Economic Development Partnership (MEDP) between the UK and Rwanda, officially signed on April 13, 2022. Anticipation for this agreement was widespread, met with substantial political resistance preceding its signing, primarily due to the Nationality and Borders Act 2022. This act, detailed in Schedule 4, established the legal framework for such agreements and has been undergoing parliamentary proceedings since July 2021. Presently, the ongoing legislative process in Parliament concerns the Illegal Migration Bill 2022-23, which aims to bolster avenues for the effective implementation of the MEDP. Following the MEDP's signing, opposition to forced removal notably surged. This opposition extended to prominent figures such as King Charles III and the Archbishop of Canterbury, alongside collaborative efforts from human rights and refugee support organizations both within the UK and worldwide [10][11].

The first deportation under the Migration Enforcement and Deportation Program (MEDP) was scheduled for June 14th, 2022, involving a total of 47 individuals. However, the operation came to a halt just as the aircraft was preparing to take off. In September and October 2022, two separate legal proceedings took place concerning this deportation effort. The final decision, issued in late December 2022, affirmed that the Home Secretary had the legal authority to authorize the mentioned deportations [12]. However, the decision did allow for an appeal on specific grounds. At this point, it's expected that a final decision on the appeal will be reached in the latter part of 2023. Despite the suspension of removals to Rwanda until the appeal's resolution, individuals are still receiving notifications about their planned deportation to Rwanda. The Rwanda plan stands out as a significant departure from the established deportation practices in the United Kingdom, which have undergone changes since the 1970s. The central argument of this research revolves around a resurgence in forced displacement reminiscent of the historical era of British colonialism [13]. The incorporation of enforced returns of denied asylum seekers into the UK's immigration control practices didn't gain substantial prominence until 2001. In 2000, the number of denied asylum seekers removed from the UK was 2990, showing gradual growth since its inception in 1992. However, from 2000 onwards, there was a notable surge in the forcible removals of denied asylum seekers, peaking at 11,783 in 2004. Despite a substantial increase in the volume of asylum claims, most of which were eventually denied, removals during the 1990s remained relatively stable. The UK witnessed the highest number of asylum applications in 2002, totaling 84,132 applications. The political significance of asylum was profound, leading to the involvement of the Prime Minister's office rather than the Home Office in its handling. In September 2004, Tony Blair declared that monthly deportations of denied asylum seekers should exceed the number of rejections by the end of 2005. This declaration triggered the ongoing politicization of data concerning enforced removals [14].

Between 2000 and 2004, there was a significant shift in the importance of forced returns within the framework of UK immigration enforcement. Initially, these returns held limited significance, mostly remaining theoretical. However, as time passed, there was a substantial rise in the number of forced returns, making them a prominent and influential topic in national politics. This phenomenon has been termed the "deportation turn," a shift typified by practices observed in the UK but not exclusive to it. Stricter policies regarding the repatriation of denied

asylum seekers notably intensified in 2004 and 2005, largely due to increased political attention to this issue. However, following this period, there has been a consistent decline in enforced returns [15].

The situation in 2022-23 shows distinct parallels with the deportation trend from the early 2000s. However, the initial responses to these circumstances have diverged. This sheds light on the historical context of the removals to Rwanda while underscoring the significant differences between the Rwanda plan and reactions seen two decades earlier. Since 2010, there has been a gradual increase in asylum applications, particularly evident in a significant surge in 2021. During this period, there was a noticeable decrease in both asylum application decisions and the removal of individuals denied asylum, as reported by the Home Office in 2023. Consequently, by the end of 2022, over 160,000 individuals were awaiting a decision on their asylum claims for more than six months [16]. During this period, the United Kingdom has witnessed a noticeable resurgence in deportations, leading to a decrease in enforced removals reminiscent of the early 1990s. This trend can be partially attributed to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The current scenario is marked by a significant rise in media coverage surrounding the entry of individuals into the United Kingdom through irregular means, particularly via small watercraft. The number of arrivals via small boats was minimal in 2018 but experienced a substantial increase to 8,466 by 2020. In 2022, the issue of small boat arrivals became a prominent political concern, with a recorded total of 47,755 arrivals. The surge in migration can be linked, in part, to the implementation of heightened security measures at channel ports. Consequently, individuals seeking to cross borders illegally have been compelled to alter their routes, opting for less conspicuous and relatively safer methods of clandestine transportation, such as hiding within the cargo compartments of trucks [17].

The dramatic increase and extensive media coverage have contributed to shaping a narrative that portrays a state of emergency, often tied to existing shortcomings within the asylum system. The Prime Minister's continuous attention directed towards asylum policy marks the first such sustained focus in the past two decades. In January 2023, Rishi Sunak outlined a set of five 'pledges', one of which aimed to decrease the number of small boat arrivals and shift attention toward asylum matters. The process of forcibly relocating individuals between countries is intricate. In liberal democracies, there's a historical precedent of substantial public resistance against compelling displacement, especially for individuals with established connections in their local communities and neighborhoods[18]. The exorbitant cost of forced deportations is noteworthy, highlighted by a comprehensive 2013 Home Office analysis revealing that removing a single individual amounted to £15,000. This financial burden holds weight, especially considering the prevailing fiscal constraints faced by public budgets during that period. Hence, there was a compelling economic rationale for the decline in forced deportations, particularly given the minimal public concern about this issue at that time.

Despite resistance to compelled displacements, deportation plays a crucial role for individual states and the broader international state system. This phenomenon has been referred to as the "international police" of populations. Forcibly relocating an individual from a nation where they're deemed to be residing unlawfully to their nation of origin serves to reinforce the link between citizenship and territory, which is a fundamental aspect of the state system [19].

The typical practice of deportation involves forcibly removing individuals considered to be residing unlawfully in a nation back to their place of origin or citizenship. This process poses geopolitical challenges as it requires the host state's consent to accept the repatriated migrant. Information disclosure in deportation cases might be restricted, especially when disputes arise over the individual's citizenship or when there's a lack of diplomatic communication between

the involved states [19]. However, affluent nations have commonly agreed on readmission agreements, often with coercive terms, to ease this process.

The primary deviation from repatriation to the individual's nation of citizenship is seen in legislative measures known as 'safe third country' provisions. Since the enactment of the Nationality, Immigration, and Asylum Act 2002, serving as the framework for expedited enforced removals starting in 2003, the government gained the authority to label specific nations as 'safe' in the context of asylum claims. This allows for swift deportations to these nations. The 'safe' designation can also extend to countries through which an individual might have traveled before seeking asylum in the United Kingdom.

In rare cases, an asylum seeker could be deported to a nation where they aren't citizens. This can happen if it's proven that the individual transited through that country and had the opportunity to seek asylum there [20]. Therefore, these individuals are relocated with the expectation that the host nation will allow them to formally apply for asylum. The legislative structure in the European Union regarding the allocation of responsibility for asylum seekers originated in 1990 with the Dublin Convention. Subsequently, this framework became part of the EU acquis through a set of regulations commonly known as the 'Dublin' regulations. However, after the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union starting in January 2021, the country lost the ability to use this specific mechanism for transferring asylum seekers within Europe. This change has exacerbated the existing challenges in managing the backlog in the asylum system. It's important to note that in the context of the United Kingdom, this primarily affects a limited number of individuals, totaling a few hundred who are relocated annually [21].

The Rwanda proposal stands out as a clear departure from the earlier strategies used for forced deportations from the United Kingdom. Rather than immediate deportation to their country of citizenship or a country they have passed through, individuals will be compelled to relocate to a country where they have never lived and lack any connections or acquaintances. The UK government cited past instances of the Australian government relocating asylum processing, along with initiatives by the EU and UNHCR to transfer specific asylum seekers. However, it's important to note that neither of these initiatives directly mirrors the UK's proposed plans [22]. The Australian policy, which was enacted in 2012 as an enhanced iteration of the 'Pacific solution' initially established in 2001, entailed the relocation of persons who were apprehended while attempting to enter the country by boat, directly to detention facilities situated in either Nauru or Papua New Guinea. In contrast to the proposal put up by the United Kingdom, which seeks to shift legal responsibility to Rwanda, the examination of asylum claims in this case was conducted in accordance with Australian legislation [23].

The Memorandum of Understanding was finalized on April 13, 2022, in Kigali, outlining the agreement between the UK Home Secretary, Priti Patel, and Rwanda's Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Vincent Biruta. The document consists of 24 paragraphs, with an additional seven paragraphs in an appendix focusing on matters concerning data protection and reporting. In the preamble, recognition is given to Rwanda's considerable expertise in accommodating refugees, alongside the United Kingdom's extensive history of providing asylum. It begins by stating the goal of enhancing collective global responsibilities for safeguarding refugees and migrants. However, the primary objective of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) becomes evident a few sentences later in the preamble, aiming to "prevent and address illicit facilitation and unlawful cross-border migration by establishing a bilateral migration partnership [24]."

In contrast to previous agreements referenced by the United Kingdom, this specific arrangement isn't about outsourcing but entails a transfer of authority to assess certain asylum requests. In Rwanda, individuals have the choice to seek asylum or not, but their status

determination relies on Rwanda's legal framework following the provisions outlined in the Refugee Convention. The UK has already disbursed £120 million to Rwanda as stipulated in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), with further payments expected in the future.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has provided significant criticism of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Their initial assessment is cautious, outlining concerns regarding the provisions in the MOU. The UNHCR questions the legitimacy of the transfer agreement, as the primary responsibility to provide protection lies with the State where asylum is sought. According to the UNHCR, transfer arrangements could be deemed inappropriate if seen as an attempt by a party to the 1951 Convention to partially or wholly relinquish its obligation. They express worry about the agreement's lack of legal enforceability, cautioning it could undermine Rwanda's asylum system and lack adequate safeguards for asylum seekers. The analysis suggests that the arrangement doesn't align with the principles set out in the 1951 Convention. Additionally, criticisms focus on how the plan could impact the mental well-being of asylum seekers awaiting determinations [25].

The Rwanda agreement aims to address the substantial build-up of unresolved claims within the United Kingdom's asylum policy since 2020. This situation, akin to various governance issues, might have been anticipated by adhering to effective bureaucratic benchmarks. Since 2010, under the current government's tenure, the number of asylum applications has surpassed the number of decisions made. Consequently, a significant backlog of 160,000 individuals in a state of uncertainty has accumulated over time. The prolonged delays within the asylum system infringe upon fundamental norms governing the preservation of human dignity, which the government has pledged to uphold.

However, the political discourse often leans towards new ideas, shaping the negotiations for the Rwanda plan. This has brought attention to the UK government's practice of issuing non-legally binding Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), as seen in this case. This mode of communication suggests that the government recognizes the MOU's significance lies in its publicity among the UK voting public rather than its actual impact on addressing the backlog of pending asylum decisions [26].

The high-profile court proceedings might have served the government's aim to garner more attention for the policy and present itself as somewhat against the prevailing establishment after holding power for 12 years. The initial ruling on the eight challenges to the Rwanda policy, released on December 19th, 2022, generally sided with the government. These cases involved 11 individuals designated for deportation to Rwanda and four organizations contesting the policy on behalf of others. The Home Office argued that three out of the four organizations lacked direct impact and, therefore, standing to challenge the policy. The court agreed, rendering these organizations unable to pursue further appeals. The court combined multiple challenges into 12 "generic" claims, all of which were ultimately dismissed.

The rejection of these claims becomes evident early in the 139-page verdict. While acknowledging the case's public importance and the natural inquiries arising from transferring asylum seekers to another nation, the judgment explicitly defines its scope and purpose in paragraph 5. It highlights that certain issues fall outside the court's jurisdiction, clarifying that the court's primary function is to ensure correct interpretation and adherence to the law, along with safeguarding rights established by Parliament [27]. Given Parliament's recent passing of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, which sanctioned enforced removals to Rwanda, the court found that these measures were legally sound. Within the context of individual cases, the court acknowledged several plaintiffs who effectively raised objections and were granted permission for a judicial review due to their unique circumstances. Despite the considerable opposition to the policy, the court ultimately affirmed the government's power to deport individuals to Rwanda [28].

The Court of Appeal's ruling, issued on June 29, 2023, is quite straightforward. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) played a more official role in this case, providing substantial evidence that Rwanda cannot be considered a secure nation. The court agreed that sending asylum seekers to Rwanda would raise safety concerns, mainly due to deficiencies in Rwanda's asylum system. However, the court dismissed the idea of sending refugees to a nation where they hadn't previously lived solely to assess their asylum claims. There's a likelihood that the case will reach the Supreme Court. Criticism of the contract has been substantial due to its broad scope, high cost, and the initial plan to relocate only about 200 individuals out of over 160,000 awaiting decisions. These factors collectively raise doubts about the arrangement's ability to achieve its intended goals. For the UK government, the main issue is its ability to wield authority effectively. This assertion is crucial as it supports our core argument that the historical precedent for the Rwanda plan doesn't primarily stem from modern deportation policies post-1970, but rather from colonial practices involving orchestrated migration and the displacement of refugees. Our focus will now shift to this specific topic [29].

Forced Relocation in Colonial Contexts:

Numerous historical accounts have extensively delved into the topic of migration within the British Empire, offering diverse perspectives that cover internal, regional, and global movements. These narratives span various forms of British governance, from settler colonies to territories under British administration without substantial settlement, operating as colonies, protectorates, mandates, and dependent territories. Scholars have dedicated considerable research to examining coerced displacements experienced by different groups across distinct times and contexts. The forced displacement of individuals was integral to colonialism's establishment and the demarcation of colonial borders during the extensive period of British dominion over vast territories. This trend can be traced from the earliest British colonies in sixteenth and seventeenth-century America to the later transfer and relocation of refugees across British colonies in the twentieth century. Scholarly works, bolster this historical trajectory.

Attempting to comprehensively cover every instance of coerced displacement within the British Empire or deeply delve into the intricate details of these events is impractical. These historical events often involved voluntary migration, individual decision-making in relocation, resistance to displacement, and the assertion of the right to remain, adding complexity to the narrative [30].

This study aims to illustrate that while the Rwanda plan represents a departure from the UK's deportation policy post-1970s, it isn't a recent innovation. Through a comprehensive examination of existing scholarly literature on relocation within the Empire, our goal is to spotlight significant historical instances that underpin the phenomenon of 'offshoring' migrants and refugees. Specifically, we concentrate on individuals considered undesirable and situated at the lowest strata of racial hierarchies. Our analysis underscores that this practice stems from a deep-rooted history of colonial ideologies and actions that influenced the spatial placement of racialized populations.

The Atlantic slave trade, spanning roughly from 1500 to 1900, stands as a pivotal example of forcibly displacing individuals, particularly enslaved people of African descent transported to the Americas for plantation labor. Settler colonialism relied on the mandatory displacement of enslaved individuals, both across borders and within colonial America's boundaries. Moreover, besides the economic exploitation faced by the enslaved population, the process of Indian Removal played a significant role in the territorial acquisition, growth, and formation of the United States [31].

The displacement, relocation, and expulsion of indigenous communities were significant aspects witnessed in white settler colonies. The Ulster plantations in Britain were established in

the early 1600s through the settlement of Scottish and English planters, resulting in the displacement of the Irish population from their ancestral lands. This factor played a crucial role in the English invasion of Ireland. Additionally, the English carried out forced evictions on Scottish tenant farmers in the Scottish Highlands and Islands from the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. These clearances led to economic hardship, displacement to unproductive areas, increased mortality, and migration to other regions within the Empire for the Highlanders.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, transportation emerged as a prevalent method of coercive displacement in colonial endeavors. It was widely used by various European empires as a form of punishment, deterrent, population control, and a means of occupying and settling remote frontiers using convict labor. Convicts were transported in different directions, including from Europe and major urban centers outward, within nations, and between colonies and the peripheries of empires and political entities. The practice of forcibly relocating English, Irish, Welsh, and Scottish convicts to colonies abroad, initially to North America and the Caribbean, and later to Australia after the American Revolution, served both as punishment and a way to mobilize labor, aiding in the growth of British colonial influence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries [13].

The ongoing efforts to intercept and turn away refugee boats in the English Channel can be seen as an expression of the persistent colonial idea of offshore containment and border control. These actions also echo a historical trend where Britain has historically relocated racialized and socially marginalized individuals to its colonies.

The 18th-century British resettlement of refugees is exemplified in the case of Black individuals exiled due to their involvement in the American Revolution. These individuals fought alongside the British and opposed slavery. After settling in New York and later Nova Scotia, approximately three thousand people of African descent were evacuated to Sierra Leone in 1792, promised independence, self-governance, and property [32]. However, these assurances held no weight, leading to a challenging and discriminatory reception in Sierra Leone and Botany Bay in Australia, where they received no compensation for their contributions. Facing hardships, they testified that their relocation to England wasn't voluntary and shared accounts of separation from family in America. Financially disadvantaged, some turned to theft and became among the first convicts brought to Australia.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, British colonial administration in places like India restricted certain movements while encouraging others. They facilitated professional migration to various destinations, recruiting clerks, soldiers, and other skilled workers for infrastructure development in new port towns and colonial states. In cases where labor was scarce for endeavors like mining and plantation agriculture, indentured labor was utilized to address shortages.

However, there was a contradictory emphasis on restricting the mobility of certain communities during the 19th century, confining them geographically. Policies targeted nomadic groups, labeling them as "criminal" and enforcing their immobility. Legislation like South Africa's Pegging Act, Ghetto Act, Indian Foreigners Act, Criminal Tribes Acts, and Hur Acts of Sindh confined specific groups to designated regions. The enforced relocation and confinement of Black South Africans into distinct 'homelands' during the era of European colonialism exemplifies this interconnectedness between coerced relocation and limited mobility, reflecting aspects of segregation and apartheid.

The discourse unveils a recurring pattern within the expansive British imperial framework, a pattern of directing migration along specified paths while simultaneously imposing restrictions on the movement of migrant and transient populations. A hierarchical world and Empire, shaped by race as a fundamental organizing factor, underpinned colonial governance

strategies. Relocating individuals, particularly those placed within lower racial classifications in the colonial system, outside the United Kingdom gained prominence in the 20th century. Understanding the Rwanda deportation program necessitates exploring the historical context of colonial "politics of dispersal," relocation, and repatriation during the 20th century, rooted in colonial history's various facets.

This study examines two crucial aspects: the migration patterns of laborers in the early 20th century, towards or away from specific countries under colonial influence—and the intentional placement of refugees in colonized territories during the interwar period. The UK-Rwanda project is often viewed as a significant economic development initiative. Subsequent analysis will reveal that the UK sometimes justified relocating refugees to its colonies by asserting that such moves would spur 'development' and economic progress in the recipient regions.

The system of indenture expanded post-slavery abolition, involving contractual agreements that seemingly encompassed voluntary participation and a commitment to return after a labor period. The colonial state portrayed indentured labor migration as voluntary, distinct from the coerced nature of the slave trade. Migration regulation initially aimed to facilitate the movement of indentured labor in specific directions. Scholars debate the interpretation of "consent" regarding indentured laborers relocated to unfamiliar places and working conditions they had limited knowledge about. However, in the context of the UK-Rwanda plan, the concept of consent seems illusory. According to the Memorandum of Understanding, asylum seekers deported to Rwanda will have the freedom to leave Rwanda at their discretion. Yet, the means by which these individuals will depart from Rwanda remain unclear [33].

In the early 20th century, migration regulations underwent a significant shift from facilitating migration to constraining it. While the concept of British imperial subjecthood aimed to be comprehensive, individuals in colonized territories faced increased limitations due to migration restrictions based on racial distinctions within the United States and the British Empire. These controls emerged due to pressure from white settler colonies aspiring to build national sovereignties on principles of white supremacy. European settler colonies perceived indentured and free Asian migrant labor as a threat to their established political and economic dominance. The Colonial Office in London initially aimed to avoid legislation that could strain Britain's relationships with Asian nations like Japan and incite rebellion within its colonies, notably India. However, it eventually acquiesced, allowing immigration restrictions specifically targeting non-white individuals in the settler colonies.

In regions like the Transvaal, certain British authorities and settler entrepreneurs advocated using Chinese labor as a temporary measure. These laborers were promptly deported after their duties ended to prevent permanent settlement. The commitment to controlling the influx of Asian labor and restricting immigration in white settler colonies echoed a mindset described by [34] as valuing "white mobility and nonwhite immobility," emphasizing the "impermeability of colonial borders."

This colonial approach of 'controlling' migration towards specific destinations while encouraging immobility persists through the 20th and 21st centuries, notably in the context of refugee resettlement during the interwar period.

In the early 1930s, the League of Nations appealed to the Foreign Office regarding around 10,000 Assyrian refugees displaced from Iraq. The Foreign Office, in turn, urged the Colonial Office to explore housing these refugees across various British territories, including Cyprus, East Africa, Ceylon, Mauritius, Seychelles, Tanganyika, Northern Rhodesia, British Guiana, Nyasaland, and Uganda. In 1935, the League of Nations expanded its plea, requesting accommodation for refugees of diverse origins like Jewish, Assyrian, Turkish, Armenian, Russian, and Saar descent within the colonies. Although these initiatives didn't materialize,

Britain successfully resettled significant populations to regions with which they might not have had prior connections during World War II.

These relocated refugees were often categorized as "subaltern whites," occupying a marginal status within whiteness. The relocation continued a historical practice of transferring prisoners of war and refugees across the British Empire seen during the Boer War and World War I. The interwar period lacked a formal legal definition of 'refugee,' leading to flexible usage and varying categorizations for displaced individuals [35].

Opposition to relocating war-displaced individuals to colonies came from stakeholders like the Colonial Office, white settlers, and administrators. Yet, various colonies in the Caribbean, Africa, British India, princely India, and Australia served as temporary sites for diverse populations during the war. These groups, including Jewish refugees, freed Polish prisoners, political prisoners, and individuals from Malta and Cyprus, were sometimes confined as "enemy aliens."

Post-war, as decolonization loomed, dispersal became more pertinent. India's independence in 1947 altered its role as a host for European war-displaced refugees, challenging India's engagement with 'transnational whiteness.' Displaced white Europeans received more favorable treatment and aid from British authorities compared to displaced British Indians, despite around half a million British Indians also being displaced during WWII, with their refugee status not universally recognized.

India, along with Pakistan, grappled with a massive refugee crisis due to the 1947 split, displacing around 15 million people. However, the UK was reluctant to allow the displaced populations held in India to transit through its territory, instead proposing their relocation to remote African and Caribbean colonies still under British rule.

The British government considered the Caribbean, historically a destination for enslaved individuals and indentured laborers, as a potential refuge for undesired refugees from the UK, facing opposition from the Colonial Office. Jewish communities had settled in the Caribbean since the 17th century, and the population grew in the British West Indies in the 1920s, as many sought to escape persecution under the Nazi regime [36]. However, their arrival wasn't universally welcomed.

In 1948, the British Guiana and British Honduras Commission, chaired by Sir Geoffrey Evans, explored establishing settlements for "excess" Jewish refugees and populations from other West Indian islands. Despite opposition from the Colonial Office and local governors, and concerns about feasibility, this proposal aimed to divert attention from limitations on migration to Palestine.

Conflicts among the Colonial Office, local governors, and the British government over resettling Jewish refugees in the Caribbean underlined the persistent idea that colonies would inevitably become destinations for displaced individuals, despite officials' reservations.

British colonial authority was often justified by claiming colonies lacked self-governing capacity. 'Developmental colonialism' posited that white colonizers guided colonized populations toward improved living conditions. During decolonization in the 1940s, refugees were sometimes seen as catalysts for transformation, albeit occasionally viewed as rivals to indigenous people.

The Evans Commission presented a contrasting view on agricultural potential in British Guiana, depicting refugees as pioneers beneficial for the colonies' development. They proposed settling a hundred thousand immigrants, primarily as plantation owners, laborers, and smallholders, mirroring strategies seen in postcolonial India to relocate oppressed and impoverished individuals [37].

The UK-Rwanda Migration and Economic Development Partnership echoes historical colonial practices. Doris Uwicyeza, a legal negotiator for the partnership, implies vulnerability might not be prioritized for refugees. Rwanda is anticipated to receive investments benefiting all

migrants, reminiscent of historical justifications where refugees were dispersed to marginalized regions for economic "development." The UK Home Office emphasized economic prosperity through investments in upskilling and mutually beneficial projects for migrants and hosts in Rwanda.

The 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees initially defined refugees, primarily focusing on displaced Europeans before 1951, excluding many asylum seekers from colonized or formerly colonized territories who faced racialization despite substantial refugee crises in these regions. In 1967, the Convention removed racialized territorial and temporal constraints. However, in 1968, the UK implemented the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968, aiming to restrict East African Asians' migration to Britain. Earlier, the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 had already curtailed Commonwealth citizens' [38] entitlements, particularly non-white immigrants, to enter the UK. Concurrently, East African Asians were leaving due to Africanization policies, with a significant exodus in 1972 prompted by Idi Amin's expulsion of this group from Uganda. Many of these East African Asians held British citizenship, yet the legislation prevented them from returning to their home country.

A group of East African Asians in the UK challenged the statute, citing discrimination by the European Commission of Human Rights. While some were successful in their case, those classified as British Protected Persons (BPPs) were found not legally entitled to reside in the UK. The exclusion of BPPs was deemed acceptable, leaving them stateless refugees. Collaborating with the UNHCR, the British government relocated stateless East African Asians, including BPPs, to at least twenty-five global locations [39].

The historical context of East African Asians provides insights into the UK's current approach to postcolonial citizenship and asylum, especially concerning the UK-Rwanda initiative. This comparison underscores the contrast between policies obstructing entry and those dispersing or relocating individuals. These techniques, as previously suggested, are deeply rooted in the historical context of colonialism.

Conclusion:

The ongoing efforts of the current UK government to establish the UK-Rwanda Migration and Economic Development Partnership prioritize halting immigration via sea routes, potentially at the expense of the country's global reputation and the well-being of refugee populations. Despite lacking any actual deportations to Rwanda, this policy has gained some support from segments of the voting population but faces significant opposition due to its limited impact and financial unsustainability. The exploitation of anti-migrant sentiment for immediate electoral gain is a common tactic in Europe and North America.

This analysis delves into the colonial roots of the policy, highlighting an innovative inquiry. However, it's essential not to misinterpret Rwanda's willingness to adopt the policy as solely its own decision. While Rwanda stands to gain evident benefits, including a substantial initial payment of £120 million, it's crucial to note that the Rwandan government's autocratic nature, labeled "not free" by Freedom House in both 2022 and 2023 reports, means the agreement reflects a non-representative faction of the political elite. Even if Rwanda were more democratic, the £120 million payment would undoubtedly carry a coercive element. The Democratic Green Party of Rwanda has expressed significant opposition, arguing against transferring responsibilities solely based on financial resources and influential power.

The colonial associations in this policy reinforce a framework normalizing asymmetrical power dynamics, perpetuating hierarchical ties between state institutions and marginalized migrants. The policy risks categorizing migrants along racial lines, consciously or unconsciously reinforcing existing ethnic divisions. It extends beyond deportation risks, redefining belonging and non-belonging, hindering full societal participation.

Normalizing colonial relations intensifies challenges in finding sustainable solutions to global displacement, with most forcibly displaced individuals residing in previously colonized

nations. Policies shifting responsibility from affluent to less affluent nations perpetuate the idea that these individuals are excess burdens to be offloaded, validating the dispersion of displaced individuals and reinforcing the perception that hosting large numbers of refugees is burdensome for impoverished nations.

The article's second section delves into Britain's historical colonial tactics, shedding light on the relocation of surplus populations within the Empire. Post-Brexit, nostalgia for the Empire has increased in the UK, aligning with the prevailing anti-migrant sentiment the current administration capitalizes on for political gain. This historical context provides insights into the post-Second World War period when significant undesired refugee relocation occurred across the British dominions. Despite this, the colonial response underscores a lack of significant global influence rather than continuity.

In the late 1940s, burdened by war debt and infrastructure damage, the UK strategically transferred issues beyond its financial capabilities to other entities. However, in 2022, the government focused on enhancing decision-making processes and intensifying removal efforts, constrained by economic limitations and high costs associated with forced removals. The Rwanda scheme holds a performative aspect, intentionally garnering attention beyond bureaucratic practices.

The program embodies colonial power dynamics in its nature, seen as a move not genuinely addressing asylum issues. It's viewed as a strategic maneuver by the current UK administration to regain electoral support and theatrical production to creatively address a widely acknowledged policy objective. Anticipating opposition from civil society and potential legal challenges, the strategy assumes favorability among a segment of the population, aiming for significant electoral influence.

The calculations made by elected governments are commonplace, but examining the present government's political analysis often carries a tinge of cynicism. This policy's distinction lies in the close scrutiny of colonial references, reflecting customs from Britain's colonial era, particularly the resettlement of refugees toward the Empire's end. Even if this strategy fails to achieve its aims, it could validate concepts regarding surplus populations based on racial identity and geographical location. UNHCR's concerns about impairing the 1951 Convention suggest potential consequences beyond the immediate, damaging the international system. Essentially, the Rwanda plan and colonial-era migration laws validate global refugee distribution disparities, reinforcing the rationale behind forced displacement.

References:

[1] A. E. Brunnet, N. dos Santos Lobo, T. Silveira, C. H. Kristensen, and D. Derivois, "Migrations, trauma and mental health: A literature update on psychological assessment," *Encephale*, vol. 46, no. 5, pp. 364–371, Oct. 2020, doi: 10.1016/J.ENCEP.2020.03.009.

[2] R. Blackmore *et al.*, "The prevalence of mental illness in refugees and asylum seekers: A systematic review and meta-analysis," *PLoS Med.*, vol. 17, no. 9, Sep. 2020, doi: 10.1371/JOURNAL.PMED.1003337.

[3] S. Hussain, "Advancing Plant Health Management: Challenges, Strategies, and Implications for Global Agriculture," *Int. J. Agric. Sustain. Dev.*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 73–89, Apr. 2024, Accessed: Oct. 15, 2026. [Online]. Available: https://journal.xdgen.com/index.php/ijasd/article/view/216

[4] T. Ali, A. Ali, T. Jalbani, and A. Ali, "Exploring Computational Models for Syntactic Analysis in Sindhi Part-of-Speech Tagging," *Int. J. Innov. Sci. Technol.*, vol. 7, no. 10, pp. 255–265, Dec. 2025, doi: 10.33411/IJIST/1702.

[5] D. Bhugra, "Migration and mental health," *Acta Psychiatr. Scand.*, vol. 109, no. 4, pp. 243–258, Apr. 2004, doi: 10.1046/J.0001-690X.2003.00246.X.

[6] Z. Memon, S. K. Devrajani, A. A. Tagar, and Z. Yongjun, "Adoption of Farm Mechanization for Improved Yield in Pakistan: A Comprehensive Review," *Int. J. Agric. Sustain. Dev.*, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 238–257, Dec. 2024, Accessed: Oct. 15, 2026. [Online]. Available:

https://journal.xdgen.com/index.php/ijasd/article/view/228
[7] S. Rashid, S. Munawar, and N. Naveed, "A Framework of Software as a Service Using a Crowdsourcing Approach: A Case Study of Smart Classroom," *Int. J. Innov. Sci. Technol.*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 1151–1167, Aug. 2024, doi: 10.33411/IJIST/20246311511167.
[8] A. Smith, A. Buadze, and M. Liebrenz, "The United Kingdom's Rwanda asylum policy and the European Court of Human Rights' Interim Measure: Challenges for mental health and the importance of social psychiatry," *https://doi.org/10.1177/00207640221148091*, vol. 69, no. 2, pp. 239–242, Jan. 2023, doi: 10.1177/00207640221148091.
[9] B. A. Khan and T. Kousar, "An On-Policy Tactile Certificate for Safe Traversability in Confined Environments," *Front. Comput. Spat. Intell.*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 115–134, May 2026, Accessed: Oct. 01, 2026. [Online]. Available: https://journal.xdgen.com/index.php/FCSI/article/view/541
[10] N. De Genova, "Spectacles of migrant 'illegality': The scene of exclusion, the obscene of inclusion," *Ethn. Racial Stud.*, vol. 36, no. 7, pp. 1180–1198, 2013, doi: 10.1080/01419870.2013.783710.
[11] A. Khan and M. Amir, "Harnessing Drone Swarms for Enhanced Search and Rescue Operations: Efficiency, Resilience, and Future Directions," *Front. Comput. Spat. Intell.*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 141–153, Aug. 2025, Accessed: Oct. 12, 2026. [Online]. Available: https://journal.xdgen.com/index.php/FCSI/article/view/381
[12] A. Nap, A. Van Loon, J. Peen, D. J. F. Van Schaik, A. T. F. Beekman, and J. J. M. Dekker, "The influence of acculturation on mental health and specialized mental healthcare for non-western migrants," *Int. J. Soc. Psychiatry*, vol. 61, no. 6, pp. 530–538, Sep. 2015, doi: 10.1177/0020764014561307.
[13] B. Anderson, M. J. Gibney, and E. Paoletti, "Citizenship, deportation and the boundaries of belonging," *Citizensh. Stud.*, vol. 15, no. 5, pp. 547–563, Aug. 2011, doi: 10.1080/13621025.2011.583787.
[14] S. B. Coutin, "Deportation Studies: Origins, Themes and Directions," *J. Ethn. Migr. Stud.*, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 671–681, Mar. 2015, doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2014.957175.
[15] W. Walters, "Deportation, Expulsion, and the International Police of Aliens," *Citizensh. Stud.*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 265–292, 2002, doi: 10.1080/1362102022000011612.
[16] L. Veracini, "Understanding colonialism and settler colonialism as distinct formations," *Interventions*, vol. 16, no. 5, pp. 615–633, Sep. 2014, doi: 10.1080/1369801X.2013.858983.
[17] S. Maddison, "Indigenous identity, 'authenticity' and the structural violence of settler colonialism," *Identities*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 288–303, Jun. 2013, doi: 10.1080/1070289X.2013.806267.
[18] J. Carey and B. Silverstein, "Thinking with and beyond settler colonial studies: new histories after the postcolonial," *Postcolonial Stud.*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 1–20, Jan. 2020, doi: 10.1080/13688790.2020.1719569.
[19] K. Juhl and O. Einar Olsen, "Societal safety, archaeology and the investigation of contemporary mass graves," *J. Genocide Res.*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 411–435, Dec. 2006, doi: 10.1080/14623520601056257.
[20] P. Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," *J. Genocide Res.*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 387–409, Dec. 2006, doi: 10.1080/14623520601056240.
[21] L. Rugema, G. Krantz, I. Mogren, J. Ntaganira, and M. Persson, "'A constant struggle to receive mental health care': Health care professionals' acquired experience of barriers to mental health care services in Rwanda," *BMC Psychiatry*, vol. 15, no. 1, Dec. 2015, doi: 10.1186/S12888-015-0699-Z.
[22] C. Mesa-Vieira *et al.*, "Mental health of migrants with pre-migration exposure to armed conflict: a systematic review and meta-analysis," *Lancet Public Heal.*, vol. 7, no. 5, pp. e469–e481, May 2022, doi: 10.1016/S2468-2667(22)00061-5.
[23] P. Sen, "The mental health needs of asylum seekers and refugees – challenges and solutions," *BJPsych. Int.*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 30–32, May 2016, doi: 10.1192/S2056474000001069.
[24] S. Schmidt, E. van der Meer, S. Tydecks, and T. Bliesener, "Wie lässt sich Delinquenz bei Personen mit türkischem oder arabischem Migrationshintergrund erklären?: Eine Befragung

von forensischen Experten," *Forensische Psychiatr. Psychol. Kriminologie*, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 304–321, Nov. 2017, doi: 10.1007/S11757-017-0443-2.
[25] P. Sen *et al.*, "The UK's exportation of asylum obligations to Rwanda: A challenge to mental health, ethics and the law," *Med. Sci. Law*, vol. 62, no. 3, pp. 165–167, Jul. 2022, doi: 10.1177/00258024221104163.
[26] B. O'Connor, "I witnessed the horrors of offshore detention and am appalled by the UK's Rwanda plans," *BMJ*, 2022, doi: 10.1136/BMJ.O1502.
[27] H. Lai, C. Due, and A. Ziersch, "The relationship between employment and health for people from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds: A systematic review of quantitative studies," *SSM - Popul. Heal.*, vol. 18, Jun. 2022, doi: 10.1016/J.SSMPH.2022.101075.
[28] C. La Cascia *et al.*, "Migrant Women-experiences from the Mediterranean Region," *Clin. Pract. Epidemiol. Ment. Heal.*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 101–108, Aug. 2020, doi: 10.2174/1745017902016010101.
[29] A. C. Hollander, H. Dal, G. Lewis, C. Magnusson, J. B. Kirkbride, and C. Dalman, "Refugee migration and risk of schizophrenia and other non-affective psychoses: Cohort study of 1.3 million people in Sweden," *BMJ*, vol. 352, Mar. 2016, doi: 10.1136/BMJ.I1030.
[30] N. Hashemi, M. Marzban, B. Sebar, and N. Harris, "Perceived discrimination and subjective well-being among Middle Eastern migrants in Australia: The moderating role of perceived social support," *Int. J. Soc. Psychiatry*, vol. 67, no. 2, pp. 110–119, Mar. 2021, doi: 10.1177/0020764020940740.
[31] S. P. N. Groen, A. J. M. Richters, C. J. Laban, J. T. Van Busschbach, and W. L. J. M. Devillé, "Cultural identity confusion and psychopathology: A mixed-methods study among refugees and asylum seekers in the Netherlands," *J. Nerv. Ment. Dis.*, vol. 207, no. 3, pp. 162–170, Mar. 2019, doi: 10.1097/NMD.0000000000000935.
[32] D. I. Kopf, "Partha Chatterjee. The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories. (Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History.) Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1993. Pp. xiii, 282. Cloth $49.50, paper $15.95," *Am. Hist. Rev.*, vol. 100, no. 4, pp. 1281–1282, Oct. 1995, doi: 10.1086/AHR/100.4.1281.
[33] C. Anderson, "Introduction: A Global History of Convicts and Penal Colonies," *A Glob. Hist. Convicts Penal Colon.*, Nov. 2018, doi: 10.5040/9781350000704.CH-001.
[34] T. S, "Role of Welfare Organization in Advancing Societal Image," *Magna Cart. Contemp. Soc. Sci.*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 61–71, [Online]. Available: https://journal.50sea.com/index.php/MC/article/view/619
[35] S. Cosemans, "Undesirable British East African Asians. Nationality, Statelessness, and Refugeehood after Empire," *Immigr. Minor.*, vol. 40, no. 1–2, pp. 210–239, May 2022, doi: 10.1080/02619288.2021.1967752.
[36] M. Collyer, S. Hinger, and R. Schweitzer, "Politics of (Dis)Integration – An Introduction," *IMISCOE Res. Ser.*, pp. 1–18, 2020, doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-25089-8_1/FIGURES/1.
[37] M. Collyer, "Deportation and the Micropolitics of Exclusion: The Rise of Removals from the UK to Sri Lanka," *Geopolitics*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 276–292, Apr. 2012, doi: 10.1080/14650045.2011.562940.
[38] J. Chatterji and D. Washbrook, "Introduction : Concepts and questions," *Routledge Handb. South Asian Diaspora*, pp. 1–10, Jan. 2014, doi: 10.4324/9780203796528-1.
[39] J. Chatterji, "'Dispersal' and the Failure of Rehabilitation: Refugee Camp-dwellers and Squatters in West Bengal," *Mod. Asian Stud.*, vol. 41, no. 5, pp. 995–1032, Sep. 2007, doi: 10.1017/S0026749X07002831.
Copyright © by authors and 50Sea. This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.