

# Good Citizens? Ugandan Asians, Volunteers and ‘Race’ Relations in 1970s Britain

by *Becky Taylor*

In February 1973 Diane Wood, a local woman who had been a volunteer at the Greenham Common Resettlement Centre for Ugandan Asians since it had opened the previous autumn, had her pass withdrawn, was ‘banned from all installations’ and was escorted off site by the military police. The American airbase outside Newbury in Berkshire, underused at the time,<sup>1</sup> had been opened to house some of the 28,000 Ugandan Asians who came to Britain after having been expelled by Idi Amin in the autumn of 1972. Since its opening Wood had thrown herself into the life of the camp, putting in long hours, becoming closely involved in the ‘tragedies, births, illnesses, deaths, problems of resettlement, hopes, fears’ of the residents, and building up friendships on the way.<sup>2</sup> Working sometimes over twelve hours a day she attempted:

to insert some fun, some outside interests and a variety of means of relieving the boredom... organised painting for the children, she took groups for swimming, she invited children to stay with her for weekends, she drove people to Heathrow Airport to locate their luggage, she took adults for shopping expeditions...<sup>3</sup>

How did such an apparent paragon of selflessness come to be banned from the camp? Perhaps we should step back first to consider whether this is even an appropriate question meriting serious historical attention. After all, this was a tiny incident, concerning only Diane Wood, some of her ex-volunteer colleagues and camp residents. Set against Idi Amin’s targeted harassment of his nation’s 80,000 Asian population, harassment which had included stripping them of their possessions, livelihoods and citizenship and culminated in their forced expulsion from Uganda, the treatment of a British volunteer in Berkshire might seem insignificant. Similarly, an account of the arrival of Ugandan Asians which focuses on British volunteers, rather than giving attention to the experiences of expellees themselves, risks perpetuating an approach to history which foregrounds majority society at the expense of others. If there is anywhere that the experiences of refugee

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and displaced people can reasonably be expected to take centre stage, is it not surely in accounts of their arrival, reception and resettlement in Britain?

In this article I argue that paying attention to such small moments not only lies within the wider tradition of micro history, but offers a way to synthesize concerns more often associated with postwar British history than with neglected histories of refugees and forcibly displaced populations. Refugee history, long ignored by academic historians, has in recent years begun to attract more attention, with histories of refugees now ranging from global and continental surveys to consideration of specific cohorts and places.<sup>4</sup> In a parallel move, work has been produced which challenges the conventional belief in Britain's history of welcoming refugees, and reflects seriously on how Britain's attitudes towards receiving outsiders were shaped by government's and wider society's grudging acceptance (and sometimes exclusion) of refugees.<sup>5</sup> Despite these advances in scholarship, and despite the growing sophistication of research more broadly on the impact of international migrants on Britain, refugee history has remained marginal to such examinations.

Yet the arrival of particular cohorts of migrant and refugees is not only a way into asking questions around the extent and limitation of a society's welcome of strangers, but can also productively be used to develop understanding and reinterpreting of a wide range of historical concerns. Jordanna Bailkin's work has already shown the importance of moving beyond simplistic readings of the British welfare state to consider how its history might be fruitfully set alongside histories of decolonization and migration.<sup>6</sup> Here, I take the reception and resettlement programme for Ugandan Asians in 1972–3 as a lens through which to explore the intersection of post-colonialism and ideas of good citizenship, individual political engagement and voluntarism. Specifically, I offer a detailed exploration of the dynamics within resettlement camps between the official camp administration, volunteers and camp residents, to reveal something of the changing nature of early 1970s Britain.

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The arrival of 28,000 Ugandan Asians in Britain in the autumn and winter of 1972–3 happened at an unpropitious time. Four years earlier, when around a thousand Kenyan Asians were arriving by plane each month fleeing the effects of Africanization policies, the British press began to talk of the 'Kenyan Asian crisis'. At that moment the National Front was only one of the anti-immigrant groups capitalizing on the panic, tying rising prices, economic difficulty and uncontrolled immigration together into a toxic mix of racism and street action.<sup>7</sup> The legislative response to this outcry, the 1968 Commonwealth Immigration Act, was rapidly pushed through Parliament and explicitly sought to end the Kenyan Asians' uncontrolled arrival. This Act – strengthened by the Immigration Act 1971 – introduced a requirement to demonstrate a 'close connection' with the UK either by birth, or through

parents or grandparents, and in so doing excluded most Asian UK passport-holders from unrestricted entry to Britain. This was not only seen as a betrayal of 'commitments made and pledges given' for continued British protection to both Kenyan and Ugandan Asians upon independence, but also left expellees potentially stateless.<sup>8</sup> So by the time Idi Amin announced in August 1972 that all Ugandan Asians had ninety days to leave the country, they no longer had any automatic right of entry into the UK, and were instead dependent on getting a visa through a highly restrictive voucher scheme.<sup>9</sup> Within the UK unemployment was reaching a ten-year high, giving further ammunition to opponents of immigration and prompting anti-immigration demonstrations in cities across Britain.<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, when the British government caved in to internal and international pressures to take responsibility for Ugandan Asians with UK passports, it did so in a highly charged atmosphere in which hostility for the expellees was expressed politically, in the media and on the street. And although public sympathy towards the expellees grew over the autumn as stories of Amin's atrocities reached the British press, it remained the case that the official Ugandan Resettlement Board, tasked with delivering the government's reception and resettlement programme, was defensive about its role.<sup>11</sup> The Board simultaneously needed to ensure the rapid and successful resettlement of a heterogeneous group of people, many of whom were elderly and did not speak English or have easily transferrable employment skills, while not being seen to offer them more favourable treatment than that received by the wider British population. Squaring this circle was achieved partly through the use of volunteers, who from the outset were absolutely central to the Board's reception and resettlement strategy. The volunteers present at airports and way-stations and in the resettlement camps were much publicized in the media and had the effect of demonstrating a groundswell of public support for the Ugandan Asians. Their visibility also served as a rebuttal to media criticisms levelled at the Board that the expellees were 'relying on social security and costing the Government money'.<sup>12</sup> This was not an empty impression, but rather had considerable substance. Volunteers significantly reduced staffing costs and allowed the camps to offer a wider range of services than they otherwise would have been able to.<sup>13</sup>

Refugee support in Britain has a long history of voluntary associations and voluntary action and the diversity and vibrancy of Britain's voluntary movements have been noted. The National Council for the Promotion of Social Service was created in 1919 as an umbrella body for 'the great mass of civic and voluntary welfare organizations that had sprung up all over Britain since the late Victorian era'.<sup>14</sup> The ideal good citizen was 'not the paid public official, nor even the democratically elected local councillor, but the active, altruistic private person who freely donated his or her services to the community as a charitable volunteer'. It was this apolitical understanding of good citizenship, rather than one centring on political action, which was to dominate the citizenship and voluntary movements in twentieth-century

Britain. For refugees, if the very first contact with Britain was – via the immigration official – with the state, very soon they were typically handed on to voluntary organizations. As a result, the reception and resettlement process would commonly bring them face to face with the ‘active citizen’. While sometimes these volunteers might be co-nationals or co-religionists, by the postwar period they were more likely to be from the Women’s Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS) or Red Cross, acting not out of personal fervour for the political cause the refugees embodied, but out of a more general commitment to civic duty.

But alongside these official uniformed volunteers a different breed of volunteer could also be found. McKay and Hilton have suggested that the period from the 1960s marked the beginning of a new phase of political engagement with the state because of the rise of radical politics, the ‘explosion’ of pressure-group politics and (stemming from this) the emergence of the professionalized NGO. They see this as exemplifying a trend which both brought with it and epitomized ‘secularisation; identity politics and the equality agenda [and] the expansion of the democratic realm’. Many of the organizations looked at by McKay and Hilton were single-issue pressure groups, but taken together the implications of their activities went much deeper, calling into question ‘the proper role of government [and] the role of the citizen’ in a late modern democratic society.<sup>15</sup> We should be cautious in claiming the late twentieth-century explosion of pressure groups as a new phenomenon, since the British state had long faced determined opposition to its actions from organized groups springing from a thriving civil society. We need only recall the Anti-Corn Law League, Chartists, the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, and the WSPU to confirm that radical pressure-group activity was a well-established, if always contentious, part of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century public and political sphere. And we should also acknowledge the direct lineage between such bodies and the formation of refugee support organizations in the early twentieth century. Helen Jones has demonstrated how after the outbreak of the first world war, women involved in suffrage and other activist organizations turned their organizations and individual efforts to relief work and the support of refugees.<sup>16</sup> And it was International Voluntary Service (IVS), formed after 1918 to foster peace between nations through international voluntary work, that took on a major role in the Ugandan Asian resettlement programme, by co-ordinating volunteers across south-west England.

So the new wave of 1960s assertive pressure groups working outside the framework of established political and labour organizations must be set within a longer history. This is not, however, to underplay their historical specificity. We can position them firmly within other contemporaneous shifts occurring in British society which together profoundly challenged elitist discourses and establishment control of key institutions, including higher education, government, professional organizations and the media. These

were the years which saw, for example, the creation of Shelter and of Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) which, building on the work of leading sociologists, brought to the fore the deep flaws in the welfare system and the ongoing housing crisis.<sup>17</sup> Such formal organizations were one expression of a wider disquiet and radical critique of society. This was expressed by (often) young people with a diffuse range of concerns, from the anti-nuclear activists of the Committee of 100 and CND, to opponents of the Vietnam war and the flowering of the post-1968 housing and squatter movements.<sup>18</sup>

Much has been written on how migration from Britain's ex-colonies was also contributing to the reshaping of Britain by the 1960s. Here it is sufficient to draw out two particular trends. First, and perhaps least obviously, over 25,000 colonial administrators, social scientists and planners returned from the ex-colonies. Back home they sought to find a place in post-colonial Britain, often contributing their expertise to debates over urban planning, community building and race relations in the process.<sup>19</sup> The Ugandan Resettlement Board drew heavily from their ranks in order to staff the Ugandan Asian resettlement camps, seeking their advice and installing them as camp administrators. Secondly, better known and far more discussed, was the passing of the 1965 and 1968 Race Relations Acts. These pieces of legislation are usually criticized for their weakness, and for their top-down 'management' of social tensions and migrants' grievances. This approach to managing 'race relations' was often at odds with the anti-racist politics and activism of grassroots organizations. These groups were producing a new politically articulate generation ready to use this as a critique of the limits of social democracy and to engage in anti-racist activism in Britain. As the Indian Workers' Association put it in 1971, 'race relations committee members... will not serve the people but will bark for their imperialist masters'.<sup>20</sup> Yet even this tension suggested a changing Britain where the state accepted that an assimilationist agenda no longer provided a workable model, and where growing numbers of individuals accepted that racism was endemic and demanded organized opposition. As Camilla Schofield and Ben Jones suggest, exploring the work of activist organizations may offer a way into considering how the politics of immigration and 'race relations' related in complex ways to the reformulation of progressive politics in postwar Britain.<sup>21</sup> So, when in mid August 1972 the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service called a meeting to form what became the Central Committee for the Welfare of Evacuees from Uganda (CCWEU), the diverse and contested terrain of British civil society of the early 1970s was revealed. The CCWEU aimed to co-ordinate the efforts of sixty-three major voluntary organizations which ranged from the Jewish Board of Deputies and the National Council for Social Service to the Institute for Race Relations, the Supreme Council of Sikhs in UK, the Indian Workers' Association and the pacifist IVS.<sup>22</sup>

By the time the first expellees began to arrive in the autumn of 1972, the task facing the Ugandan Resettlement Board was daunting. In order to keep

public disquiet to a minimum the expellees needed to be resettled as quickly as possible, and in a low key and cost-effective manner. To facilitate this, the Board had accepted the centrality of volunteers to their work, with the consequence that it would be unable to control who exactly became involved. Early on it was clear that volunteers came from two very different trajectories: one more traditionalist, associated with the uniformed organizations, particularly the WRVS, which worked directly with the Home Office and the individual camp administrators as part of a formal hierarchy; the other, a loose coalition of civil-society organizations and individuals ranging from church groups to sectors of the emerging and politicized immigration and race-relations movements working under the CCWEU. In the rest of this article I explore how the intersection of differing approaches to voluntary work, active citizenship and 'race relations' played out not only across the Ugandan Asian resettlement programme generally but also specifically within the close confines of Greenham Common resettlement camp. Diane Wood's experiences show us just how fraught these intersections might be.

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From the arrival of 180 expellees on 18 September 1972 to the dissolution of the Ugandan Resettlement Board on 31 January 1974, 28,608 people were dealt with by the Board. The vast majority of the arriving expellees came on chartered flights to Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted. From here they were bussed directly to the main resettlement camps, notably Stradishall, an ex-RAF base near Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk. When that camp began to reach capacity other ex-military bases were brought into use, including Greenham Common outside Newbury.<sup>23</sup> The need to deliver a rapid and robust response to the situation pushed the Board towards constructing itself as a tightly controlled body under the leadership of Sir Charles Cunningham. He and the Board's secretary, Tom Critchley, were supported by a mix of representatives from central and local government and the emerging world of 'race relations', with voluntary effort being represented by Mrs Charles Clode of the WRVS.<sup>24</sup> From the outset there was a demarcation between the core work of the Board, which was co-ordinated and delivered by civil servants and other official appointees funded directly by the government, and ancillary services which were the responsibility of the voluntary organizations.

What is immediately striking is how heavily the Board drew on the experience of recently retired administrators from the ex-colonies. Emerging work on the 'afterlife of empire' has begun to unpick the relationship between returning administrators and the impact of empire and decolonization on aspects of the welfare state, and here we can see how it operated in the Ugandan Asian crisis.<sup>25</sup> Although the Board was supported by seconded civil servants from, and was answerable to, the Home Office, it was the Foreign and Commonwealth Office which provided initial advice on the selection of civil



servants and camp administrative staff. On its recommendation the ex-Governor-General of Uganda, Sir Walter Coutts, was drawn into the selection process, picking, for example, Sir Richard Turnbull, the last Governor of Tanganyika, as head of airport reception arrangements. And it was on their recommendation that Mr R. A. Wilkinson, a former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Social Services in Kenya, was appointed to acquire and prepare accommodation for the reception and resettlement programme. Wilkinson, along with Turnbull and Coutts, put together a list of potential camp administrators, making it almost inevitable that a disproportionate number of those appointed to the camps had served in the Colonial Service either in Kenya or elsewhere across the empire. Former Kenyan administrators included Pollock-Morris and Robertson who ran Raleigh Hall camp in Staffordshire and Brigadier Beyts who was appointed camp administrator at Greenham Common. Other administrators were chosen through standard application procedures, but they too often had a military or colonial background. Captain Rothwell, a senior former RAF officer living in Suffolk, was appointed head of Stradishall camp; the head of Kensington had served as a CID officer in Uganda; Major Arrowsmith, a former Chief of the Immigration Service in Malaya, became head of West Malling, while Captain Fuller, who was appointed to Tonfanau (Gwynedd), had had 'previous service in the colonies'.<sup>26</sup> Appointees' colonial experience was not always East African: the key requirement seems to have been a colonial or military background as a proxy for general administrative competence. This itself tapped into the ethos of the colonial civil servant as the archetypal generalist, able to face any unexpected challenge with equanimity. Yet implicitly, if not explicitly, it also sent a signal that the Ugandan Resettlement Board was treating the matter as a quasi-military 'colonial' problem brought home. As we will see, this was to have a significant influence on the day-to-day management of the camps and the experience of the expellees within them.

At the peak of the reception process in late October and early November, the Board and the camps struggled to keep pace with the arrivals. Originally the Board had envisaged expellees being met at airports, taken to a reception centre and rapidly moved out into the community, in line with the government's explicit strategy of dispersing them as quickly as possible right across the United Kingdom. Yet the difficulties of finding adequate housing, compounded often by the expellees' unfamiliarity with British society and English as a language, meant that this process was far slower than anticipated. In turn this led to people staying longer in the camps and consequently to extreme overcrowding. During the peak of arrivals in late October and early November, at Stradishall:

People were sleeping in dormitories containing forty or more with only a few inches between each bed, and at the worst stage they were sleeping on mattresses on the floors of storerooms and in large cupboards. The food fell to an abysmal quality.<sup>27</sup>

All this added importance to the presence of volunteers. From the moment expellees stepped off the plane to the time that they arrived in their new homes, volunteers were on hand to ease them along different steps on the way:

Hot drinks and refreshments on arrival. . . care of babies and young children; care of the old, the sick and the handicapped; first aid centres transport within the airport and from the airport to the reception centres; transport to hospitals for those needing hospital treatment; telephone communication; general welfare; the issue of warm clothing to those needing it.<sup>28</sup>

The WRVS led the way in providing catering at airports and way-stations, in collecting, sorting and distributing clothes at the camps and in managing local welfare arrangements in places of resettlement. Alongside them the Red Cross and St John's maintained first-aid stations and dealt with the front-line care for infants, young children, the old, sick and disabled. Citizens' Advice Bureau volunteers were assigned the 'complex and delicate task of interviews and documentation' to begin the process of matching expellees with employment opportunities.<sup>29</sup> Given all this activity it was no surprise that, in common with the Hungarian reception and resettlement programme of 1956, the Board's final report made much of the efficiency, tolerance and cheerful nature of the voluntary effort:<sup>30</sup>

It is probably no exaggeration to say that never since the war has this country seen voluntary effort extended so willingly, and on such a scale; nor can there be many instances of closer harmony between voluntary and statutory services working together to achieve agreed objectives.<sup>31</sup>

This official assessment of the operation is worth unpicking. Analysis of the voluntary efforts surrounding the Hungarian operation has suggested that we need to be mindful of the dynamics behind the rhetoric of 'welcome' of a refugee group. A narrative of British hospitality could merge imperceptibly with expectations of gratitude and of good behaviour from the recipients of charitable effort. In turn, this underplayed the rights of refugees, both to protection under the 1951 Convention, and to the benefits of the welfare state.<sup>32</sup> When we examine the reception of the Ugandan Asians in this light, it is clear that similar forces were in play, with scenes of gracious volunteers ready and willing to welcome refugees who were thankful recipients of British generosity:

We will always be grateful to each and every member of the Volunteers, Staff, WRVS, Red Cross, Saint Johns, Medical, Policy, County Council, the Resettlement Board and the kind people of the surroundings for their



help and sympathetic welcome. . . We should try and adjust ourselves in every way to our present happy but temporary life in the camp and never *complain* but always *suggest*, politely. . . We should cooperate with all the members of Staff who are doing their best to look after our health and happiness. . .<sup>33</sup>

This message, from the President of one camp's Asian Committee to its residents, shows how expressions of gratitude could be tied up with messages of compliance or self-abnegating obedience. Layered into this, and setting it apart from the Hungarian resettlement effort, was the legacy of colonialism: 'it was a situation in which every person in authority was white and every white face the face of somebody in authority. It was a reconstruction, albeit perhaps an unconscious reconstruction, of the colonial situation'.<sup>34</sup> The political scientist and expellee, Mahmood Mamdani captured something of this in his account of life at the Kensington camp. He identified the camp administrator's desire to have oversight of all aspects of the running of the camp as 'the familiarity the master has with the affairs of the servant, not the familiarity a member of a family has with another'. In this case the master-servant relationship was understood as being heavily racialized, governed by the 'rather blunt conviction of a colonialist that there existed a natural hierarchy in the world, that some people were just born better than others'. Mamdani's account of his time in the Kensington camp is thick with encounters with peremptory officials, brusque and uninformative uniformed volunteers and a culture of barrack-style authoritarianism.<sup>35</sup> In a similar vein the journalist Derek Humphry and CCWEU volunteer Michael Ward came to the conclusion that within the camps the 'style of administration was the style of command; the style of the Asians was subservience'.<sup>36</sup>

As expellees' stays in the camps turned from days into weeks, and sometimes, months, expellees' politeness and gratitude began to give way to criticism of their conditions and sometimes also assertive forms of action. In at least two camps – including Greenham Common – residents not only threatened to instigate a food strike, but also went to the press with their complaints. The important point here is not that the food was bad – it would have been surprising if mass catering organized at short notice and on a tight budget was good – but what the incidents revealed. Sir Richard Turnbull, commenting on Greenham's threatened food strike, referred dismissively to the 'so-called grievances' and 'nonsense' raised by those complaining of the quality of the food and the implied discrimination in having separate 'Asian' and 'British' messing arrangements. Denying any substance to the complaints, instead he blamed Sherali Bandali Jaffer. Jaffer was a prominent member of the Ugandan Ismaili community and ex-member of the Ugandan parliament who had been visiting camps checking on conditions. Accusing him of trying to 'build up imaginary grievances', Turnbull simultaneously questioned his status and used it against him: 'Don't forget that *if he is in*

*fact a politician*, he is likely to have a QC up one sleeve and a special correspondent up the other'.<sup>37</sup> Engel, Kensington's camp's administrator – an ex-Ugandan CID official – was challenged by Jaffer, who suspected that the Board had sent a circular letter to all camp administrators warning them of Jaffer's political activities. Reporting back to the Board on this encounter, Engel stated 'Subject suspects that there is a letter. . . I denied the existence of any such letter'.<sup>38</sup> The cumulative impression of the Board's and camp officials' actions is of a defensive administration, anxious to protect itself from any criticism at the expense of openness and a commitment to resolving reasonable complaints.

While undoubtedly knee-jerk authoritarianism formed part of the parameters determining the encounters between volunteers and expellees, it would be too simplistic to suggest that the reception operation was simply colonialism translated into camp life in Britain. WRVS archives reveal fragments of a more complicated picture where individual encounters suggest something far more fluid and reciprocal, such as reference to the 'moving and unique' experience of one WRVS volunteer, who was invited to the funeral of one of the elderly Muslim residents of Faldingworth camp; or the rare confession of another to be 'really feeling rather frightened', before starting on her first shift at a camp's clothing store.<sup>39</sup> We also need to pay attention to the presence of camp staff and WRVS workers at Faldingworth and Hemswell camp, invited by residents to their Diwali and Eid celebrations, who sat on the floor through nearly four hours of 'deafening' music, 'wild' dance and recitations ('didn't understand a word').<sup>40</sup> All these suggest encounters were less stable and controllable than either the Board or individual camp administrators might have liked. And while we might locate WRVS volunteering within a broader culture in which gratitude might be expected from its recipients, it is also the case that very many camp residents genuinely respected and were moved by the enthusiasm and dedication of some of the volunteers. Internal camp newsletters carried notes of thanks and short articles dedicated to WRVS workers like Mrs R, 'who on some days arrived at 8.00 in the morning and often left in the early hours of the following morning taking everything in her stride and not once complaining about the long hours'.<sup>41</sup>

If there could be fluidity in the encounters between uniformed volunteers and expellees, it was also the case that the culture expellees brought with them was neither homogeneous nor static. Partly this was due to the heterogeneity of the Ugandan Asians themselves. Despite the press tendency to portray expellees as 'middle class' English-speakers ready to integrate, in fact they came from a wide range of class, linguistic and caste backgrounds and religious affiliations. And cutting through these different attachments was the issue of age, with generation increasingly proving to be an important marker of difference. The 'winds of change' which had been sweeping through Africa from the late 1950s were partly about decolonization, but were equally an expression of wider shifts in these newly independent

countries. In the Nairobi and Kampala of the 1960s and early 1970s the combination of growing urbanization, commerce and industrialization with expanding school and higher education supported the rise of a new middle class and a new youth generation. Expressed as much in the adoption of Western youth fashion – mini-skirts, bell-bottoms – as in the new journalism epitomized by *Drum* and the emergence of new and fusion musical styles, the youth of newly independent East Africa were challenging their elders.<sup>42</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, who as a student had been involved in the American civil-rights movement before taking up a post at Makerere University, was one of the new generation of intellectuals developing internationalist anti-colonial and anti-racist critiques of society. And the memories of Yasmin Alibhai-Brown make it clear that challenging established racial and societal norms in this rapidly changing East Africa had more than a theoretical element. In Kampala she had attended a racially mixed youth club and had played Juliet to a black Romeo, causing a rift between her and her father: ‘Oh, the agony and ecstasy of transgressive acts!’<sup>43</sup> This reminds us that camp residents were not simply empty vessels into which the assumptions, priorities and regulations of the camp staff could be poured to achieve a set of predicted outcomes. Expellees were neither leaving a fixed cultural hinterland nor entering a predetermined British future. Indeed the chaos of camp life worked against this. Despite the intentions of the camp hierarchy, staff were unable to keep control in the way they might have desired: too many expellees were arriving too quickly; facilities were too limited; and information and staff were not shared adequately within or between camps.

These contingent factors created a space in which CCWEU volunteers rapidly demonstrated they sometimes had very different ideas and priorities to both the camp administration and the uniformed voluntary services. Significantly different in approach from the Board and the assumptions of ex-colonial administrators, the CCWEU’s workers were made up of a mixture of British and minority ethnic volunteers. Many of the former brought with them experience working abroad through VSO or similar organizations, or in anti-racist or social-services work in the UK. John Ennals, who had fought with Tito’s partisans, as well as chairing CCWEU through its first few months and being the director of the UK Immigrants Advisory Service, was also the director of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. In May 1973 his role in CCWEU was taken over by Helene Middleweek, who had worked for Shelter and Camden Council Social Services Department while also running the Scrap Ringway 1 campaign against the Inner London Motorway. Also on the Executive Committee was Mrs Hope, from the Society of Friends Race Relations Committee, and Hannah Stanton, ‘until recently teaching in the University of Uganda and... best known for the stand that she made in South Africa with Helen Joseph in 1960 which resulted in her imprisonment’. Prominent CCWEU members Mary Dines and Vishnu Sharma were both workers for the Joint Committee for the Welfare of Immigrants. Aiming to work alongside rather than ‘for’

national and local level Indian Workers' Associations, Pakistan Welfare Associations, the West Indian Standing Conference and the Campaign against Racial Discrimination, it was often portrayed as the 'militant wing of the race relations movement'.<sup>44</sup> Taken together then, the national leadership of the CCWEU represented a very different vision of post-colonial British society than that embodied not only in the Ugandan Resettlement Board but also its official volunteer organization, the WRVS.

This was made clear right from the outset of its activities. Unlike the Board, with its focus on moving the expellees out of the camps as soon as possible, the CCWEU decided that its volunteer Liaison Officers were to give 'paramount importance' to expellees' welfare. Recognizing that the expellees had had 'a highly traumatic experience', and that they were expected in a short period of time to 'be ready and prepared to move out of the camps into normal and sometimes very uncomfortable Britain life', volunteers focused on personal interactions and making daily life more bearable for residents. As a result CCWEU volunteers were often able to build up a good rapport with camp residents. Less tied to the official resettlement programme, with its focus on dispersal, more likely to view the expellees as equals rather than colonial subjects, volunteers were well placed to develop sympathetic relationships with residents. And while WRVS workers often took on roles which put a counter between themselves and the expellees – working in the clothing stores or dispensing tea – other volunteers worked side by side with expellees across a wider range of activities which gave a human face to the day-to-day life of the camps:

Some volunteers will excel at organizing sports, others will be good at running the canteen and will only be happy in the recreation room with the disco blaring out full tilt; other volunteers will shine in taking part in occupation groups, others will manage the transport or edit the newsletter each week – ornamenting it with comic faces, others are prepared to help the statutory educational representatives with teaching; others are now helping in a 'face to face' getting to know the Asian evacuees who are still in camps...<sup>45</sup>

None of these activities were controversial in themselves, indeed, they were all ways of making camp life more humane and liveable for the expellees. And yet given the very different political approaches of the CCWEU and the Board and the heightened atmosphere surrounding the reception and resettlement process it was perhaps inevitable that the former would become strong critics of the Board and that tensions and public disagreements rapidly emerged. In fact the WRVS's decision to remain outside of the Co-ordinating Committee, instead aligning itself directly with the Board and the 'official' resettlement effort, was indicative of the broader split between different types of voluntary organization. Over the winter and early spring of 1972–3 when all aspects of the resettlement programme were

overstretched and tensions erupted, generational differences often became proxy for radically different political allegiances and lifestyle choices.

At the national level this difference was obvious in the CCWEU's concerted opposition to the policy of rapid resettlement and dispersal, but the tensions were equally obvious in everyday life within the camps. Repeatedly the archival evidence demonstrates how the Co-ordinating Committee volunteers often felt that their work was undervalued, that they were marginalized from the camp hierarchy and at odds with the aims of its administration. Often younger volunteers, characterized as 'enthusiastic amateurs' and 'do-gooders' or 'hot-headed' in broadsheet newspapers and civil-service minutes alike, were seen as hampering the steady professionalism of the WRVS and camp hierarchies: 'young volunteers are inclined to complain that 'pictures of long haired yobbos doing their bit are never shown in the papers: it is always the ladies of the WRVS'. Such resentment bubbled over into frustrations over divergent ways of working:

There have been cases of people bringing carloads of good clothes to the camps, only to be told by a WRVS lady that they must be taken away again for 'correct sorting'. Apparently, this means packing the clothes into bundles of five, folded according to WRVS regulations with no edges showing, and tied with a slip knot. In one instance, Asian women and children were seen walking around the camp in the cold wearing only skimpy sandals, yet there were boxes of strong shoes in the WRVS clothing store.<sup>46</sup>

Differences in working style could spill over into active obstruction and withholding key resources. At West Malling camp CCWEU volunteers were 'allocated no space at all, whereas the WRVS had more than enough', while in other camps, where they were not recognized as having any role to play, they struggled to gain access to basic information, telephones or office space. By the end of October 1972, when the reception efforts were at their height and Stradishall camp was overflowing, the Co-ordinating Committee sent its keyworker Chattu Karadia to help co-ordinate the unaffiliated volunteers. The official camp structure, 'staffed almost entirely by the WRVS', persistently refused to work with him despite being so overstretched, allegedly because the camp administration had decided he was 'a spy'. Subject to less explicit marginalization, Claire Taylor, seconded from the Society of Friends and working at the Kensington centre, admitted she had 'not found her position easy'. It was only through persistence, gradually building 'a very good relationship with the CSV volunteers' and making 'a niche for herself organizing occupations for the women' that she was finally 'accepted by the Administration'.<sup>47</sup>

Given the political inclinations of many of the CCWEU-affiliated volunteers and the personal connections they built with expellees, it is not surprising that when food strikes were threatened and other complaints were raised

by camp residents, volunteers often sympathized and became involved in action. Those working under the auspices of the IVS were singled out by the camp hierarchy for disapproval. One camp official claimed that they ‘were all Communist, or tarred with the Communist brush, that they were idle, long-haired layabouts, whose sole purpose seemed to be to spread discontent on the Camp and to drum up imaginary grievances’. The caterer responsible for five of the camps in the south-west alleged that it was IVS volunteers who were behind complaints of residents over the food which was being provided:

He gave as an illustration the behaviour of a young volunteer at yesterday’s midday meal; apparently some aspect of the catering arrangements displeased him, and he stood in the dining hall loudly shouting ‘discrimination, discrimination’... while the manager spoke, the volunteer had not listened but had sat back in his chair and laughed and whistled and sung... these young men were adopting a similar attitude in all the Camps... [it is important to find out] who is responsible for this campaign of disruption.<sup>48</sup>

Here we see the IVS volunteer deploying the emerging language of race relations – ‘discrimination’ – alongside the physically disrespectful behaviour associated with rebellious youth culture. Together they were guaranteed to raise the ire of the camp administration. Yet it was not only ‘radical’ IVS affiliates among the volunteers who were seen as problematic. The limited surviving archival evidence on this suggests that any group or individual who questioned or challenged either Board policy or the decisions of the camp administration were liable to incur suspicion. One report noted that ‘[n]ot in the “danger” category, but none the less a possible disrupting element are the Bristol Quaker group’, and went on to outline how ‘by authoritarian methods they “bulldoze” their roll to regional control status, thereby alienating other voluntary organisations’.<sup>49</sup> At the Kensington camp Mahmood Mamdani made explicit that the two non-uniformed volunteers – ‘women, one American and the other English, both students’ – had a good rapport with the expellees, but as ‘time went on... and “trouble” began to brew in the camp, their sympathies with the residents disqualified them as “loyal” members of the staff’.<sup>50</sup>

\* \* \*

This then marked the wider territory onto which the experiences of Diane Wood and her fellow CCWEU volunteers at Greenham Common camp can be mapped. We know about Wood’s dismissal because deep running frictions between the camp administrator, Brigadier Beyts, and Greenham’s volunteers culminated in an inquiry carried out by the Board. The inquiry into the role of volunteers at Greenham covered three connected issues: the



peremptory dismissal of a volunteer who had spoken to the press about the proposed food strike, the running of the camp's social centre, and how these intersected with the manner of Diane Wood's removal. Two different narratives emerge from the inquiry and surrounding correspondence. One, pushed by the Brigadier and representatives of the Asian Committee, depicted Beyts as working to uphold standards of decency against the permissive influence of decadent volunteers. The other, from the volunteers themselves, portrayed them as a dedicated and selfless group, giving all they could for the residents yet continually coming up against petty restriction and irrational prejudice. Within these narratives the food strike and the camp's social centre acted as lightning rod for the divergent working styles and agendas of the different forces at play at Greenham Common.

The social centre had been opened on the initiative of the volunteers, who saw it was important to create an informal meeting space, for 'apart from the dormitory blocks there was nowhere for the Asians to spend the day and relax from the regimentation that necessarily existed in the dining hall'. It was well-equipped with 'a television, record-player, table tennis tables, games, toys and books, comfortable chairs, electric urns, a water heater and other smaller things'. The camp's social worker, Tim Bond – who seems to have been trusted by all sides – saw the space as providing not only a useful focus for activities, but also a space for mixing between camp residents and the local population:

[It] was a great success and a cross-section of the Asians made use of the facilities. A number of Asians offered to help and they looked after the canteen, selling coffee, tea, cigarettes, Indian snacks etc. . . . We were open from 10 am, till 11pm. . . the club (at it became known) was not only a place for recreation, nor just a coffee and snack bar, but more important it was a meeting place where people knew they could always find at least two of us to talk to. . . A number of English people also visited the club and were able to answer questions . . . to give friendly advice and to create a happy atmosphere in the Camp.<sup>51</sup>

Beyts himself however described the centre as 'nothing but a bloody nuisance', 'an unhealthy place' and even a 'whore house'.<sup>52</sup> He objected to the way that the club was decorated, for as well as pieces of artwork produced by children at the camp, it was 'used by teenage students who had covered the walls with Student Union slogans and general incitements to make themselves heard'. On top of this, besides a gambling incident – involving a group of older men playing rummy for small stakes – to which the police had been called, he alleged there were 'continual complaints by parents about promiscuity arising from social events', leading to girls being banned by their parents from attending the centre.<sup>53</sup> In the idiosyncratic words of Captain Meer, head of the Asian Committee which took over the running of the club after Diana Wood left:

The young people had been drifted away [sic] . . . and placed in such a situation, whereas they betrayed their parents and homes to stay in the community centre, where they got full training of undisciplined attitude, by branding their minds towards self-freedom.<sup>54</sup>

It was not simply older camp residents who were uncomfortable with the situation. Beyts raised the case of 'one senior citizen of Newbury' who complained that his daughter had met an 'Asian student' at one of the dances and was 'distracting her from her studies'.<sup>55</sup> Articulated in the more moderate tones of the Board's investigation team, the camp administration, members of the older generation of Ugandan Asians and locals all expressed anxiety:

that young Asians were being introduced too rapidly to aspects of western culture with which they would have been unaccustomed in Uganda, and that young people and even children were being kept up too late in the evenings.<sup>56</sup>

And in the eyes of both the Asian Committee and Beyts it was Diana Wood who, as a key organizer of the social centre and perceived ringleader of the volunteers, must be removed in order to re-establish 'a well organised atmosphere controlled through the proper channel [sic]'.<sup>57</sup> At this point Wood had her pass withdrawn and was escorted off-site by the military police.

Yet those involved in running the social centre challenged its depiction as a den of iniquity:

On Saturday nights we had a Disco, which stopped before midnight, and some English girls came up from Newbury for this. Some of the Asian boys were accused of taking these girls down to their blocks afterwards and we were held responsible for this. I do not feel that we should be considered guardians of morality on the Camp and certainly there was never any indecency of any sort in the Community Centre. The Discos were attended by old men, women and children, so that there was never any question of any immoral behaviour, yet this label was attached to the place and however hard I tried to dispel the rumour, it remained.<sup>58</sup>

Without wanting to overstate the cultural freedoms available to Ugandan Asian youth before they came to the UK, it is reasonable to conclude that in organizing discos, youth events and social spaces for the young, the younger British volunteers often did little more than push at an open door. This forging of alliances within the younger generation which cut across 'race' boundaries, simultaneously challenged Ugandan Asian elders' ideas of appropriate social interaction and propriety *and* provoked outrage among more traditionally minded volunteers and official camp staff.

From the opening of the camp Brigadier Beyts, with his solidly colonial and largely military background, had obviously struggled with the presence of the CCWEU volunteers.<sup>59</sup> Volunteers reported how he 'frequently' stated that he did 'not like working with a woman' or indeed 'do-gooders'. He particularly disliked the lack of a clear chain of control, in that the volunteers did not work directly under his command. So he saw the IVS's stated position that it was to act as a 'genuinely independent presence in the Centre' as inherently undermining his authority. He took a strong dislike to the CCWEU's liaison officer at Greenham whom he described as a 'charming but devious young man', and wrote disparagingly of how Diane Wood 'walked into this Centre of her own volition. . . and installed herself in our social centre'.<sup>60</sup> His discomfort with the younger volunteers' ways of working and any perceived threats to camp authority was also visible in his summary dismissal of one of their number, Sara Michaels. She, the Board believed, was 'undoubtedly genuinely concerned about the running of the canteen', but was required to leave camp after she spoke to the *Daily Telegraph* and the BBC about the threatened food strike. Beyts had considered her remarks 'indiscreet and exaggerated' and potentially threatening to the good running of the centre, and felt himself entirely justified in asking her not to return.<sup>61</sup>

Such comments were in complete contrast to his relationship with the WRVS, to which he looked for assistance in distributing not only clothes but all camp supplies. In turn WRVS volunteers described him as a 'charming man, and kind and helpful when asked', and found his wife 'always courteous, helpful and friendly'. The WRVS workers, while speaking of the 'wonderful job' the non-uniformed volunteers were doing 'if they are properly organised', also reflected that CCWEU workers needed to be 'very firmly dealt with'. The WRVS co-ordinator at the camp admitted she found the relationship between the volunteers and the Asian Committee troubling. She described its Chair as 'very pompous and full of rights for the Asians', and disliked how the IVS, whom she saw as 'all. . . well left of centre politically', always 'backed him up'.<sup>62</sup> This affiliation between Beyts and the WRVS seemed to express a congruence over ideas of organization and a particular way of working which perhaps included an unspoken assumption that politics had no place in volunteering and that the British had a duty to side with each other.

What is significant here is that these attitudes were reinforced by the Board's investigators. Their final report supported Beyts's account of the expulsion of Diana Wood, suggesting in the blandest possible terms that everyone had 'acted in good faith'. This conclusion flew in the face of the evidence contained in internal Board correspondence, which singled out Beyts's behaviour in the affair, describing him as having been 'considerably less than frank' and his behaviour as 'difficult to defend'.<sup>63</sup> Such language signalled a bureaucratic acknowledgement that volunteers' accusations of bullying, lying and irrationality were true. That the Board's inquiry decided in favour of Beyts is however no surprise. From the outset the inquiry had

been designed to attract as little attention as possible and to come up with no controversial findings. The Board, mindful of the impact of a joint IVS/CCWEU report in December which had highlighted problems with the resettlement process, was worried that CCWEU were ‘determined to make an issue’ of the situation at Greenham. In fact, before even opening the inquiry Cunningham believed that the head of IVS, Eric Parsloe – seen by the Board as a ‘troublemaker’ and ‘an irritant’ – was ‘obviously behind the whole matter’.<sup>64</sup> This contrasts with the tone of correspondence between the Board and Beyts during the investigation, which was conspicuously chummy, with first names used and Beyts being privately kept up to date with developments. As Diana Wood put it:

At first I could hardly believe that an inquiry could possibly be as partial as it was. The semantic acrobats which proclaim such objective euphemisms are as plausible as a good lie... the whole thing was designed to prove nothing... [except that] we were all ‘jolly good people’ and lets continue to be ‘jolly good chaps right to the end’.<sup>65</sup>

\* \* \*

According to the police I have been ‘banned’ from the camp. In other words I am being treated like a criminal... my whole life is in ruins because everything happening to me now is related to the upheaval from Greenham... I have spent a lot of money I can ill afford on telephone calls, second hand mattress, car journeys not to mention hours of my time helping people to get jobs, talking to suicidal teenagers, listening to stories of racial prejudice, trying to get Eng. classes going...<sup>66</sup>

This is the voice of Diane Wood. The voice of a disappointed ‘good citizen’, someone who had thrown herself into welcoming Ugandan Asian expellees, working hard for long hours in an entirely voluntary capacity, only to be dismissed on spurious grounds. The passion expressed in her letters to the Board is at once testimony to the emotional labour involved in her work, and utterly at odds with the culture of service as understood by the Board and the camp hierarchy. That Wood herself was never accused of being involved in any of the more political elements of camp life was beside the point. The nature of her work at Greenham, particularly her involvement in the social centre, marked her out as an unsettling element, someone who in the minds of Beyts, WRVS volunteers and some of the older Ugandan Asians could be associated with the ‘yobbish’ pacifism of the IVS, the food strikes, the lack of clear boundaries between camp residents and local people, and the challenging of clear and established hierarchies.

As with the reception of Hungarians in 1956, the depiction of the Ugandan Asians as grateful and respectable was central to the establishment

strategy of reducing discord over their arrival. It was dependent both on a particular idea of Britishness – apolitical and consensual, good at ‘muddling through’ and coping in a crisis – and of the expellees – as compliant, eager to get on and assimilate into British life, and grateful for being taken in at their hour of need. It was a depiction shorn of politics, of unfairness and of racism, and left little room for the expellees to challenge conditions in the camps. What this article suggests instead is that under pressure these representations broke down to reveal something much harder-edged and more intransigent: for the Ugandan Asians and politically and socially committed volunteers alike, the bounds of acceptable behaviour were far narrower than the Board liked to admit. Whether speaking out against poor-quality food, running a disco or a social space, anything which threatened tightly defined ideas of appropriate behaviour or could feed into public criticism of the Board was dealt with summarily.

What emerges more broadly from this close look at Greenham camp is a picture of Britain on the cusp of change. Through the divisions within the camp we can trace some of the new fault lines which were developing in British society more generally: lines forming not around ‘race’ or nationality, but around generation and anti-racist politics. Arguably this was the collision of people and outlooks which would normally remain in very separate spheres. The camps forced into close physical and social proximity older colonial styles of administration together with a new generation holding sharply different attitudes not just towards ‘race’, but also to gender, generation, sociability and political organizing. The conflicts over the social centre or the food strike speak of an establishment schooled in hierarchy (including racial and colonial hierarchies), of bureaucracy and obedience rubbing up against a fluid collection of individuals motivated by a diffuse range of ideals, where connections based on generational attitudes and political affiliations could surmount difference of nationality or ethnicity. In such an atmosphere the very concept of who and what made a good volunteer – and by extension a good citizen – became highly charged. All were convinced of their role as a ‘good citizen’ in supporting the reception and resettlement of expellees, but the experiences of Diane Wood suggest that at this moment in 1970s Britain there were sharply divergent ideas over what this meant.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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1 Greenham had acted as a joint RAF-US Air Force base during the Second World War, although the Americans had withdrawn shortly after the war. They reoccupied it in 1967, but mainly used it as a mail-sorting depot for its bases across Europe. The expellees were housed in the vacant RAF section of the base.

2 Letter from Diana Wood to Charles Cunningham, 18 Feb. 1973: The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA), HO289/36.

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5 See for example David Cesarani and Tony Kushner, *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain*, London, 1993; Colin Holmes, 'Hostile Images of Immigrants and Refugees in Britain', in *Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives*, ed. Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, Berne, 1997, pp. 317–34; Kushner and Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide*; Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933–1948: British Immigration Policy, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust*, Cambridge, 2001.

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7 See for example 'Kenya Asian rush to Britain', *The Times*, 26 Jan. 1968, p. 5 and '1,000 More Asians Fly to Britain', *Guardian*, 27 Feb. 1968.

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23 At the peak of the reception operation there were sixteen reception and resettlement camps: Stradishall, Suffolk; Hemswell and Faldingworth, Lincolnshire; West Malling, Kent; Greenham Common, Berkshire; Heathfield and Plasterdown, Devon; Houndstone and Doniford, Somerset; Piddlehinton, Dorset; Raleigh Hall, Staffordshire; Tonfanau, Gwynedd; Gaydon, Warwickshire; Hobbs Barracks, Surrey; Kensington Barracks, London; Maresfield, Sussex.

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27 Derek Humphry and Michael Ward, *Passports and Politics*, Harmondsworth, 1974, p. 29.

28 D. R. Dewick, 'Evacuation and Resettlement of Ugandan Asians', n.d. Appendix 16: 'Establishment of a refugee camp', note by R. A. Wilkinson: TNA: HO289/95.

29 Dewick, 'Evacuation and Resettlement', p. 14: TNA: HO289/95. The Citizen's Advice Bureau had been a direct creation of the National Council for Social Service in 1938 in anticipation of the outbreak of war.

30 Becky Taylor, 'Their Only Words of English were "thank you": Rights, Gratitude and "Deserving" Refugees to Britain', *Journal of British Studies* 55: 1, 2016, pp. 120–44.

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33 Quoted in Humphry and Ward, *Passports and Politics*, pp. 65–6. Emphasis in original.

34 Humphry and Ward, *Passports and Politics*, p. 65.

35 Mamdani, *From Citizen to Refugee*, p. 95.

36 Humphry and Ward, *Passports and Politics*, p. 65. Humphry was an investigative journalist with the *Sunday Times* specializing in race relations, immigration, prison conditions, police brutality and corruption. Ward acted as a Regional Organiser for the CCWEU during 1973.

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50 Mamdani, *Citizen to Refugee*, p. 93.

51 Letter from Tim Bond, Social Worker, to Miss Cashmore, URB, 22 March 1973: TNA: HO389/35.

52 Letter from Diana Wood to Charles Cunningham, 18 Feb. 1973 and letter from Bond to Cashmore, 22 March 1973: TNA: HO389/35.

53 Letter from Beyts to URB, 15 Feb. 1973: TNA: HO389/36.

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56 Report of the Enquiry into the Use of Volunteers at Greenham Common, 22 March 1973: TNA: HO389/35.

57 Statement by Captain Meer, contained in Letter from Beyts to Barraclough, 20 Feb. 1973: TNA: HO389/36.

58 Letter from Tim Bond, Social Worker, to Miss Cashmore, URB, 22 March 1973: TNA: HO289/35.

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61 Report of the Enquiry into the Use of Volunteers at Greenham Common, 22 March 1973: TNA: HO389/35.

62 Greenham Common Resettlement Centre Report, 8 Oct. 1972: RVS: RFG-31G-08-10-1972; and Letter from WRVS Regional Headquarters, Reading, to national headquarters, 13 Nov. 1972: RFG-31-13-11-1972.

63 URB Internal notes 24 Jan. and 20 Feb. 1973: TNA: HO389/35.

64 Memo from Cunningham to Barraclough, 18 Feb. 1973: TNA: HO 289/36.

65 Letter from Diana Wood to Tom Critchley, 7 Jan. 1973: TNA: HO 289/36.

66 Letter from Diana Wood to Tom Critchley, 7 Jan. 1973: TNA: HO 289/36.

**ABSTRACT**

This article uses the reception and resettlement programme of Ugandan Asians in 1972–3 as a lens through which to explore the intersection of post-colonialism and ideas of good citizenship, individual political engagement and voluntarism. Specifically, using a detailed exploration of the dynamics within Greenham Common Resettlement Camp, the article shows how relationships between (ex-colonial) government officials and the WRVS who ran the official side of the resettlement programme came into conflict with younger, more left-wing volunteers and expellees. As well as revealing the significance of (post) colonial attitudes and background among camp administrators and the associated attitudes to hierarchy and race, it also shows how a newer generation of anti-racist activists were beginning to challenge such attitudes. Through integrating its discussion of generational conflict among the expellees themselves alongside conflicts between the official camp administration, volunteers and wider voluntary services this article seeks to reveal some of the key social changes in early 1970s Britain.