

**Jewish Refugees in Cyprus and British Imperial Sovereignty in the Eastern
Mediterranean, 1933-1949**

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Introduction: Empire and refugees in the first -half of the twentieth century

When is a migrant a refugee, an asylum seeker, an illegal immigrant? As recent events remind us, such designations are of crucial importance as they entail different treatments for people on the move and reveal the political priorities of those using them. Numerous scholars have shown that they were first codified as administrative categories involving different sets of rights by governments and international organizations in the context of the unprecedented, massive population displacements caused by the two world wars. Armenians fleeing massacres in the Ottoman Empire, White Russians seeking refuge after the Bolshevik Revolution and the Russian Civil War, Muslims and Orthodox Christians officially ‘exchanged’ between Greece and the new-born Republic of Turkey or Jews escaping Nazi persecution: each new mass displacement of people in the interwar period and after the Second World War forced Western governments, operating under the scrutiny of domestic and international public opinion, to devise a legal, institutional, economic but also discursive framework meant to guide and legitimize their reactions to the challenges of these new migratory flows.¹ Such frameworks were also intended to establish a common language between, on the one hand, governments and, on the other, both public opinion and the growing number of international organizations –governmental and nongovernmental- involved in the management of migrants and refugees, from the League of Nations to the United Nations, and the Red Cross to the American Joint Distribution Committee.

In the context of this broader discussion, few studies have focused on the use of European colonies as potential places of temporary or permanent settlement for displaced people, an issue entirely separate from those of settler colonialism, of the establishment of penal colonies, or of the creation of internment camps in the colonies for prisoners of war or civilians considered as enemies.² Because of its numerous and important political ramifications, the British Mandate of Palestine represents an exception to this general rule of relative academic neglect: indeed the topic of Jewish migration, legal and illegal, to Ottoman and then British-controlled Palestine brings together very broad themes such as those of European anti-Semitism, nationalism -in its Zionist form- Holocaust studies, and the debate over the origins of the ongoing Middle East conflict.³ This article proposes to further explore the role of colonies in the management of interwar European migratory flows by focusing on the case of the reception of Jewish refugees in the British colony of Cyprus from the 1930s to the late 1940s.

From the Nazi takeover of power in 1933 to the creation of Israel in May 1948 and beyond, Cyprus, a British colony since 1878, was recurrently considered as a place of temporary settlement for Jews fleeing persecution in Europe. In the 1930s, British authorities considered Jewish migrants as ‘refugees’, but for political reasons –which will be examined later in the article- were averse to granting them asylum in Cyprus. By contrast, following the Second World War, the island became, much against the will of the local colonial administration, a clearing ground for Holocaust survivors and other European Jews *en route* for Palestine. Since the adoption of the 1939 White Paper, Jewish immigration to Palestine, still under Britain’s control, had been drastically curtailed⁴; as a consequence, the greatest part of that migration was clandestinely organized. In the official nomenclature, Jewish migrants were labelled ‘illegal immigrants’ and Cyprus was no longer a place of refuge but one of detainment for those among them intercepted at sea or picked up on the shores of Haifa.

Between August 1946 and February 1949, 53,510 men, women and children transited through one of the three Cyprus camp sites before being allowed to enter what became the state of Israel.⁵

Jewish migration to and through Cyprus is by no means an unexplored topic. In a seminal study, Stavros Panteli offers a *longue durée* perspective on Jewish and Cypriot entanglements. While this is a nuanced and carefully documented survey, the long-term approach it adopts is beset by a degree of essentialization in its implicit assumption of the coherence over time of the social groups under scrutiny, the ‘Cypriots’ and the ‘Jews’.⁶ Yossi Ben-Artzi authored ground-breaking work on the experience of Jewish settlers in Cyprus from the late 19th century to the mid-1930s, a period during which the island was considered by Zionist organizations as a substitute for Palestine or at least a temporary solution to the anti-immigration quotas implemented there by the British.⁷ A recent collective volume edited by Giorgos Kazamias and Giorgos Antoniou provided a useful synthesis of the state of the art on the question of Jewish migration to and through Cyprus from the late 19th to the late 20th century.⁸ Finally in her Master’s thesis drawing on the archives of the British government and of various Jewish organizations, Branka Arrivé focused on the internment of Jewish ‘illegal migrants’ in Cyprus between 1946 and 1949.⁹ All of these studies highlight the continuities and changes in terms of the institutions, the organizations and the people involved in relocating European Jews in Cyprus within differing frameworks, whether that be the creation of agricultural colonies in substitution to immigration to Palestine, or temporary settlement in the context of heightened persecutions in Europe, or detainment in camps. Yet most of these works concentrate on the relations between British authorities, international organizations and Jewish stakeholders, leaving out of their scope of inquiry both Cypriot reactions to, and the involvement of the broader British empire in the management of Jewish migrations.¹⁰

This article aspires to weave together these different threads of inquiry: namely to propose a multidimensional analysis of the specific question of Jewish migration to Cyprus and that of the function of European colonies in the context of interwar and post-war mass displacement. Drawing on British official archives and articles in the Greek and Turkish Cypriot press, this paper will be primarily concerned with the manner in which Jewish settlement in the island gave rise to competing notions of territorial sovereignty. In principle, in the context of Cyprus, a British colony, this resided in the British state through its local representative, the colonial governor. Yet in attempting to ward off or closely control Jewish migration to the island, British administrators in Cyprus often invoked the rights and the needs of the Cypriot people which, as the latter's trustees, they were bound to protect. Implicit in the island's administrators' position was the notion that, especially in the wake of the Second World War, British sovereignty on the island could only be preserved by refraining to treat Cyprus as *territorium nullius* where populations could be freely transplanted regardless of the locals' feelings.¹¹ Crucial to this redefinition of British imperial sovereignty on Cyprus was the island's organic link with Mandatory Palestine throughout the 1930s and until the final evacuation of Cyprus' Jewish camps in February 1949: so called Jewish 'illegal immigrants' landing in Palestine or intercepted at sea were transshipped to Cyprus' camps whence they were released back to Palestine in conformity with the rate fixated by the 1939 White Paper of 750 refugees per month. In this equation then, stateless persons, Jews coming from various locations in Europe, aspired to reach a territory of transitional international status, Palestine as a League of Nations Mandate, and ended up detained in a territory, Cyprus, whose status as a British colony was confirmed in this very process. While Cypriot reactions shared the fact that they were overwhelmingly negative, they pointed, through the differing nature of the rights they invoked and the different ways they claimed these rights would be trampled by the detention of Jews in the island, to divergent representations of Cyprus as a polity.

In following these lines of inquiry, this article aims to make two broader historiographical contributions. It seeks, first, to highlight the importance of postwar (First and Second World War) forced population displacements in redefining imperial sovereignty. It intends, secondly, to revise the historiographical consensus regarding Cyprus' function in the British Empire. Most historians agree that Cyprus only became gradually 'useful' to the British Empire after the Second World War, following each wave of imperial retreat from India and Palestine (1947-1948) to Egypt (1956).¹² Instead, the argument is here made that the use of the island as a clearing ground for Jewish refugees, disconnected as it was from its projected use as a military base, played a considerable role in ingraining the impression in official circles that Cyprus was an important link within the British imperial structure. In turn, this impression, or new ethics of tutelage, contributed to enhance the image of the island's strategic indispensability. Incidentally, a close examination of the official terminology employed to characterize Jewish migrants in the 1930s and the 1940s highlights the contribution of European colonial empires in the making of official categories applicable to migrants to this day. The article follows a chronological progression: After a brief survey of the debates generated by arrival of refugees in Cyprus before the First World War, the paper will contrast the experience of Jewish refugees in the 1930s and throughout the Second World War to that of the so-called 'Jewish illegal immigrants' detained in the island between 1946 and 1949.

Refugees in Cyprus in the context of pre-First World War Ottoman and European upheavals

When under Ottoman rule, Cyprus often functioned as a place of forced or self-imposed exile for dignitaries who had fallen from grace with the Sublime Porte: famously, the island hosted the Young Ottoman Namık Kemal between 1873 and 1876.¹³ But it was when the British took over the administration of Cyprus in 1878 that the island became, in earnest, in the

eyes of a number of endangered European and Anatolian communities, a 'place of refuge', in the words of Stavros Panteli.¹⁴ Lying at 'about 600 miles east of the Greek mainland, only 40 miles south of the Anatolian coast, and about 100 miles west of Lebanon'¹⁵, Cyprus more than once served as a haven for refugees escaping the convulsions shaking the Ottoman Empire and, later, Central and Eastern Europe. The following brief review will only focus on two cases from the early period of British rule –the Armenian and early Jewish migrations to Cyprus– which can reasonably be considered to involve refugees, namely persons fleeing active persecution.¹⁶ It will leave aside foreign settlement schemes such as the failed 1878-1880 project to create a Maltese colony in the island.¹⁷

The case of Armenian refugees is here quite exemplary. Armenian refugees and survivors landed in Cyprus after each new wave of persecution in the Ottoman Empire, from the Hamidian massacres of 1895 to the 1915 genocide through the 1909 Adana massacre.¹⁸ Susan Pattie thus points out that the 1891 census shows 280 Armenians living in Cyprus, but that by 1901 that figure had nearly doubled, to 517 as a result of the 1895 pogroms in Diyarbekir, Aintab, Kilis, and elsewhere. Cyprus was chosen, Pattie argues, because it was under British rule and as a result thought to be a safe haven close enough to Cilicia, where refugees hoped they would return once tensions subsided.¹⁹ However as Pattie and Andrekos Varnava observe, many of these refugees merely transited through Cyprus. Varnava reports that the British census of 1911 registered 511 Armenians, a number which merely doubled by the 1921 census peaking at 3,337 in the 1931 census.²⁰ Armenian immigration to Cyprus elicited strong reactions from Greek Cypriots particularly in the context of the Greek defeat in Asia Minor in late 1922. Indeed British authorities only authorized those Asia Minor refugees to settle in Cyprus who were British subjects, demonstrably Cypriots or Armenians.²¹ 'Greeks were only allowed to land if persons were found willing to vouch for all their expenses.'²² In these conditions, the local press began to denounce alleged British plans to establish Armenian

colonies which would set off the ‘ethnological transformation of the island.’ The weekly *Alitheia* [Truth] thus went on to assert that ‘[a]bove any feeling of philanthropy must prevail and dominate that of self-preservation and the feeling of racial security which revolts itself against this large-scale Armenian colonization.’²³

Before the First World War, Cyprus had also been considered as a place for temporary and sometimes permanent settlement for Jewish refugees escaping persecution in Europe. Yossi Ben-Artzi thus maps out the three attempts made by different groups to settle Jews in rural sites between 1882 and 1935. The first one was a short-lived attempt (1883-1884) by the Syrian Colonization Fund (a Christian Protestant philanthropic organization) which organized the transfer of thirty-five Russian Jewish families (163 people) near the village of Kouklia, in the Paphos district. This was followed by a 1897-1900 effort coordinated by the Rothschild-supported Ahavat Zion (London-based Russian and Polish Jewish organization) involving fifteen handpicked families to develop a farm in Margo (Nicosia district). Finally, building on this latter attempt, a plan was devised and supported between 1898 and 1935 by the Jewish Colonization Association to develop farms in Margo, Kouklia and Cholmakchi: this involved 162 people in thirty-five farms but it eventually petered out as the gates of Palestine were opened following the Balfour Declaration and the British takeover of Palestine.²⁴ Ben-Artzi argues convincingly that the proximity of Palestine doomed these early attempts to failure as the island could only truly serve as a ‘springboard’ to the Promised Land.²⁵ And yet their mere recurrence and the efforts invested by Jewish settlers in the island’s economy –Jewish entrepreneurs are credited for being the first to establish large mechanized factories in Larnaca and for developing the citrus industry in Famagusta and Limassol²⁶- imprinted Cyprus in the institutional memory of Jewish organizations as a fallback location in the event of a closure of the route to Palestine. It is then not surprising that, in the critical context of the 1930s marked

by the Nazi takeover of power in Germany and British restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine, these organizations would seek to reroute Jewish refugees to the island.

From Jewish ‘refugees’ to ‘illegal immigrants’, 1933-1945

In the 1930s Cyprus became a place where, for reasons both local and international, British imperial anxieties crystallized. In October 1931, Greek Cypriots, motivated both by economic difficulties and political frustration revolted against the British colonial administration in several parts of the island, a movement that culminated with the burning down of the governor’s residence in Cyprus’ capital, Nicosia. British authorities used this event as a pretext to completely reverse their policy in the island and worked to restrain and eventually eradicate Greek but also Turkish nationalism. The ten alleged ringleaders of the revolt were deported for life while immigration laws were tightened to pre-empt the return of diaspora Cypriots considered politically subversive (nationalists and communists). Representative politics was abolished as local authorities (municipal councils, village authorities) were thenceforth to be directly appointed by the governor. Finally the press was subjected to draconian censorship while public assemblies of more than five people without prior official authorization were prohibited.²⁷ The severity of the measures adopted in Cyprus is symptomatic of a broader sense of threat among British authorities regarding their Mediterranean possessions. Italy in particular aggressively challenged British supremacy in the Middle Sea.²⁸ At the same time as the British government sought to enforce law and order in their Mediterranean possessions, the Nazi government in Germany escalated their anti-Semitic policies thus swelling the number of Jewish refugees.

The British government was officially in charge, since 1920, of the Mandate of Palestine, where many European Jewish refugees aspired to settle. Given the stiff opposition of Palestinian Arabs to Jewish settlement, Britain began accepting a limited number of Jewish

refugees in the metropole itself, and contemplated relocating Jewish refugees throughout their Empire (Northern Rhodesia, Tanganyika, British Guiana).²⁹ Cyprus was also considered, although British authorities reiterated, wary of the politically volatile situation in the island, that this was in no way meant to become systematic policy. Jewish organizations were receptive both to the temporariness of this solution, themselves considering Cyprus as a ‘stepping-stone to Zion’.³⁰ Thus several delegations of German scientists and public figures representing various international Jewish organizations visited the island throughout the 1930s to examine the possibility of establishing small settlements of Jews meant to exploit the untapped economic potential of the island, particularly through the cultivation of citrus for export.³¹ Crucial to these considerations was the fact that in Cyprus, land, labor and water were cheaper than in Palestine and the island, being a British colony, benefited from Imperial Preference.³² A major argument for settlement in Cyprus was of course the proximity to Palestine.³³ The passport control officer of the British Embassy in Warsaw thus reported in September 1934 that he had received a very large number of applications from ‘Polish Jews’ to emigrate to Cyprus but that, ‘after careful inquiries’, he was ‘convinced that about 90% of the applicants applying to [him] ... are only concerned in using the Island as a stepping-stone to gain admission to Palestine’.³⁴

Although the explorations were carried out by various organizations, they were for the most part coordinated. This is salient in the involvement of Norman Bentwich, who had officiated as Attorney-General for the British High Commission in Palestine and who later on worked as an intermediary between the Colonial Office and the Jewish organizations interested in Cyprus. In the 1930s, he was thus writing on behalf of the United Jewish Appeal, the American Joint Distribution Committee, and the American Palestine Campaign to the colonial secretary of Cyprus to inquire about the possibility of settling a few Jewish families on the lands acquired by the ‘Jewish bodies’.³⁵ Lands were purchased through intermediaries, for

example in the Larnaca district (Perivolia, Meneou, Softades and Kiti for a total of 856 and 5/8 of dönüm³⁶). In 1934, Governor Sir Herbert Richmond Palmer reported that ‘two colonization and plantation companies were formed (The Cyprus Palestine Plantation Company Ltd and the Cyprus Farming Company), and which proceeded to purchase large plots of land of orange groves near the towns of Larnaca, Famagusta and Limassol.’ The total number of settlers at the time was estimated at 200 near Famagusta and fifty around Larnaca.³⁷

Reactions among Cypriots to the arrival of Jews was occasionally positive but overwhelmingly negative, particularly in the politically repressive context of the 1930s when they felt that their views were ignored by the British government. Among the few positive reactions one can evoke the position of the inhabitants of Paphos, the island’s westernmost and poorest district. Opposition there, according to the district commissioner, only came from the Orthodox Church, as other Paphiotes contemplated the economic opportunities which citrus growing could represent for their district.³⁸ On 11 August 1933, the mayor of Paphos, Nicolaos Nicolaides and his council sent a letter to the president of the Pan-Israelitic Congress in Prague to encourage Jews to come and settle in his district, which enjoyed ‘the best climate of all the island’ and ‘where the soil is fertile and suitable for all kinds of agriculture’.³⁹ The Cyprus Government supported such local initiatives provided they did not ‘deprive existing inhabitants of their means of livelihood’.⁴⁰ The Acting Director of Land Registration and Surveys opined that an eclectic migration of Jewish farmers experimented in scientific farming ‘would give a stimulus to orange tree planting and w[ould] secure quick and cheap means of transport to all European markets where the Jews of Palestine have established most competent agencies. Cypriot orange cultivators w[ould]profit by co-operation’.⁴¹

More often and elsewhere in the island however, the Greek Cypriot religious and professional elite opposed Jewish immigration on the grounds that this was part of a British demographic engineering policy meant to destroy the movement for *enosis* [the political project

aiming at unifying Cyprus to Greece]. A particularly virulent example of such disposition is illustrated by the following extract from the 26 September 1933 editorial of the Nicosia-based newspaper *Protevousa* [Capital]:

Jews as reported daily in the press flock together into Cyprus and purchase or negotiate for the purchase of thousands of donums (sic) of land and that with the knowledge and approval of Government. (...) The Government have expressly declared that they are determined to make us understand that we are British citizens. They have omitted though to tell us that they have also a plan for changing us into serfs of the Jews.⁴²

Reflecting a rather typical form of anti-Semitism, part of the press welded economic concerns with racial bias, with a September 1938 article in *Paratiritis* [Observer] suggesting that ‘Jewish brains and capital which have terrorized the Garman [sic] nation might just as well be kept out of Cyprus because this small Island realizes that it cannot resist such a powerful weight of cleverness, skill, ability and material force (...)’.⁴³

Less strident criticism of Jewish migration, focusing on its potential economic impact and stressing the island’s limited resources, was widely shared among Greek Cypriots, from the Orthodox clergy to communist activists and from the elites to the villagers.⁴⁴ Hence on 19 March 1933, Archbishop Cyril III sent a memorandum to the governor opposing Jewish migration on the grounds that this would put a strain on the local economy and alter the island’s demographic balance.⁴⁵ The press reported constantly on the size of the lands purchased by prospective Jewish settlers or settling agencies. Thus on 20 August 1936, the influential, Nicosia-based daily *Eleftheria* [Freedom] published a very detailed and district by district breakdown of immovable property purchased by Jewish interests including land, trees, vineyards and orchards, houses, wells, warehouses, as well as the price of all these purchases.⁴⁶ Eventually, resistance to Jewish immigration became organized. On 18 August 1938, *Eleftheria* thus reported that professionals carried a petition –prepared by Joannis

Shoukouroglo, wholesale merchant of Nicosia- to the Nicosia Municipal Council to ‘frustrate the infiltration and establishment of Jews in Cyprus’ which received up to 200 signatures.⁴⁷ In April 1939, a petition to the Cyprus government against Jewish settlement gathered 5,000 signatures.⁴⁸ What seems to be the undeniable common ground behind all these reactions to Jewish immigration, beyond the differing levels of stridency in which they were publicly enunciated, is a feeling of frustration against the colonial administration’s tendency to take decisions without consulting the local population. This, in the eyes of these journalists and commentators, was another illustration that Cypriots had been deprived of sovereignty over their island.

Paradoxically enough, the question of Jewish migration became the one issue over which the views of the local elite and those of the Cyprus government converged. Striving as they were to restore their own vision of order in Cyprus, which entailed the island’s depoliticization, the colonial administration remained attentive to these local reactions. They were wary lest this issue might federate discontent and become a matter of local political fermentation. British authorities therefore consistently turned down requests by various international Jewish agencies to consider large settlements in the island, although the arguments they used to do so were always economic rather than political. And in this, colonial authorities in Cyprus merely reproduced locally what A. J. Sherman calls the ‘reigning economic wisdom in the 1930s [which] still saw immigrants as unwanted competitors in drastically shrunken labor-markets rather than potential national assets (...).’⁴⁹ In October 1934, an official at Cyprus’ Colonial Secretariat wrote that:

[i]mmigration of Jewish labourers, even on a restricted scale, is not advisable as it would prejudice local labour and cause illfeeling between the two elements [i.e. Jews and Cypriots]. Whilst a small number of industrialists with sufficient capital behind

them would be rather helpful towards the industrial development of the colony and would provide work to native labour.⁵⁰

In other words, to settle in Cyprus, Jews, just like all foreigners wishing to migrate to the island in the 1930s, needed to be not only self-sufficient, but capable of improving the island's economy. Indeed, foreigners needed to have a minimum of £20 of allowance with them in cash or credit, be travelling first or second class, or have a non-transferable ticket to some other country, or possess a permit to enter Cyprus.⁵¹ In addition, in 1934, the Cyprus government began drafting a Land Law prohibiting the transfer of land to non-Cypriot aliens without the authorization of the Governor.⁵²

For pauper Jewish refugees fleeing Europe, the treatment was significantly different. At all times, the Cyprus Government attempted to keep track of the number of Jews employed in Cypriot industries and the way in which Jewish labor might constitute a threat to Cypriot labor. In late 1938, the Commissioner of Larnaca was thus asked to inquire into the Button Factory in Larnaca which employed Jewish workers and where Cypriot workers had recently been fired.⁵³ Migration to Cyprus became even more difficult once the Great Arab Revolt began in earnest in Palestine in 1936 as British authorities tightened their immigration laws to the Mandate but also to Cyprus, anticipating the possibility that the island might be used as a fallback destination.⁵⁴ Notably, the possibility of Jewish settlement in Cyprus constituted a major factor for the evolution of the notion of British nationality as applicable to Cypriots. Law 14 of 1939 thus defined 'native of the colony' in the following way:

any person who is a British subject and a) was born in the Colony or of parents who at the time of his birth were ordinarily resident in the Colony; or b) obtained the status of a British Subject by virtue of the Cyprus (Annexation) Orders in Council 1914 to 1929, or by reason of the grant by the Governor of a certificate of naturalization under the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act, 1914, or c) is the wife of a person to whom

any of the foregoing paragraphs applies not living apart from such person under a decree of a competent court or of a deed of separation, d) is a child, step-child or adopted child having been adopted in a manner recognized by the law, under the age of eighteen years, of a person to whom any of the foregoing paragraphs applies.⁵⁵

Under these conditions, around 400 handpicked European Jews only had found sanctuary in Cyprus between 1933 and 1939.⁵⁶ Hence in a somewhat deviated way, Jewish migration became the one issue over which British authorities restored some say in the conduct of public affairs to Cypriot opinion makers. This would change drastically during the Second World War which forced the British government to refine its language referring to migrants and the rights associated with the new administrative categories designed to refer to them.

Two important events shifted British policy regarding Jews seeking refuge in Cyprus: the May 1939 British 'Palestine Statement of Policy' (White Paper) which, following the Great Arab Revolt (1936-1939) imposed stringent quotas for Jews migrating to Palestine; and of course the beginning of the Second World War which swelled the number of Jewish refugees.⁵⁷ As the numbers of Jews attempting to flee Europe for Palestine further increased at the time, one consequence of the 1939 White Paper was that a greater number of them began to be considered no longer as 'refugees' but as 'illegal immigrants'.⁵⁸ This discursive shift was very significant because it almost immediately conditioned British views on the possibility of providing temporary shelter to Jewish refugees in Cyprus. Commenting on the governor of Cyprus' resistance to pressures by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, an official at the Colonial Office thus stated in June 1939 that:

I am entirely on the Acting-Governor's side in this matter, if only on the ground that we owe a greater duty to our Cypriot citizens than to alien Jews many of whom are not even attempting to escape from persecution. If disease breaks out on these ships it will no doubt be a terrible thing, but presumably the crew will dump their cargo into the sea

and I cannot see that any responsibility can be attached to us because the immigrants fail to survive what they well know to be a dangerous adventure.⁵⁹

Such characterizations were insensitive to the fact that Jews attempting to escape from Europe had fallen prey to what Michael Marrus calls a 'black market in refugees, often run by Greek or Bulgarian gangsters, encouraged by the Nazis who were then trying to make Europe *Judenrein* [free of Jews according to the Nazi terminology].'⁶⁰ They were all the more crude in view of continuous reports from different sources on the dramatic conditions in which Jewish refugees were travelling from Southeast Europe. In July 1939, Professor Irene C. Soltau of the American University of Beirut, wrote that 750 passengers crammed in a tiny coastal collier named Frossoula with a Greek crew and carrying a Panama flag, with little food, and brackish water had been held for more than fifteen days in quarantine in Beirut.⁶¹ However British authorities, convinced that '[n]ews travels very quickly in Jewish circles', did not waiver: they believed that a single exception made to their draconian prohibition of Jewish immigration to Cyprus would mark the beginning of an uncontrollable flow.⁶²

This uncompromising attitude loosened somewhat with the beginning of the Second World War as the number of European refugees, Jews and non-Jews, fleeing the Nazi advance in different parts of the continent increased exponentially and the British government busied itself to find for them places of temporary settlement. In November 1942, the Secretary of State for the Colonies informed the governor of Cyprus of his intention to use Cyprus 'as a clearing area for Jewish refugees' in groups of 400-500 people at a time to be removed elsewhere every time that quota was reached.⁶³ In 1942 Jews fleeing Axis-occupied Europe had few choices in terms of destination: Many fled to Turkey and the British government unofficially adopted the policy of allowing those among them who made it to Istanbul to proceed to Palestine.⁶⁴ Conditions for Jews in Turkey were difficult at the time following the German-Turkish Non-Aggression Pact compounded by discriminatory measures adopted against non-Muslim

minorities such as the 1942 capitation levy (*varlık vergisi*).⁶⁵ Concurrently, by March 1943, 4,650 Greeks had found refuge in Cyprus after the Nazi invasion in Greece in April-May 1941.⁶⁶ Colonial authorities feared that a heightened presence of Greek refugees in Cyprus would encourage *enosis* while at the same time ‘the provision of asylum to large numbers of non-Greek refugees, when Greece itself is in such dire straits, would equally tend to cause disturbing political reactions-particularly if the refugees are Jews. In Cyprus there is very strong popular sentiment which is hostile to Jews’.⁶⁷ The situation became more complicated after 1943 when operations in the then German-held Dodecanese –an Italian possession between 1912 and 1943- forced Greek residents, particularly from Kastellorizo, to migrate.⁶⁸ By early December 1943, Cyprus had received 2,400 Dodecanesian refugees.⁶⁹ A tense exchange ensued between the Colonial Office and Cyprus on the one hand trying to convince the High Commissioner of Palestine on the other to accept them all on both political and humanitarian grounds as Cyprus was said to be overwhelmed with refugees in spite of the assistance of the United Nations Middle East Relief and Refugee Administration (MERRA).⁷⁰ Palestine eventually had to oblige and accept some 8,350 of Dodecanesian refugees although it protested that ‘[a]ny delay on the admission of [Jewish] refugees from Egypt to Palestine owing to the admission of ‘Aryan’ –i.e. mostly Polish and Dodecanesian- refugees is bound to have the most unfortunate reaction on the Jewish community ...’.⁷¹

British authorities took pains to ensure that the numerous refugees transiting through Cyprus were properly identified and assigned to categories which it was felt should under no circumstances mix. This intense classificatory exercise followed a number of rationales and had to take into account the predicament of refugees often bereft of papers. If distinguishing Poles was done on the basis of nationality, it was the special circumstances of the arrival of Jews that set them apart from what British authorities problematically called (although always in quotation marks) ‘Aryan’ refugees. In the case of Greeks, a distinction was fleetingly

envisaged between ‘Dodecanesians’, legally Italian subjects some of whom were suspected of fascist sympathies, from ‘free Greeks in existing MERRA camps’ which in essence designated all Greek citizens.⁷² In establishing these categories of refugees, British authorities were first and foremost seeking to preserve as much flexibility for themselves as possible in settling the future of the territories under their control. This was one way in which they outlined a fledgling typology distinguishing between territories which it was understood would only be temporarily occupied, such as the Aegean islands including the Dodecanese,⁷³ and others whose future would be discussed within the frame of the general peace settlement, namely Cyprus and Palestine. Cyprus however, in the management of the refugee crisis, had already proven to the Colonial Office what George Horton Kelling calls its ‘utility as an outwork of the Levant’.⁷⁴ In effect, Cyprus would continue to be instrumental in managing the flow of Jewish refugees and Holocaust survivors *en route* to Palestine for some years after the end of the war.

The time of the ‘detainees’, 1946-1949

In August 1946, still bound by the official quota of Jewish migrants to Palestine they had defined before the Second World War, the British government designated Cyprus as the place for the temporary internment of Jewish refugees seeking to clandestinely reach the Mandate.⁷⁵ As Arieh J. Kochavi and Branka Arrivé write, this decision intervened right after, and in the context of, the bombing in Jerusalem of the King David Hotel by the Jewish paramilitary organization Irgun on 22 July 1946, which cost the lives of 91 people, most of them British officials.⁷⁶ On 12 August, the Cyprus Government passed a law authorizing the Governor of Cyprus to detain any person designated as an ‘illegal immigrant’ and giving him the right to set up and run the camps or delegate the setting up and management of the camps.⁷⁷ Plans were laid out for the construction of camps with the help of military authorities the cost of which, it was decided, would be borne by the Government of Palestine, to the exasperation

of the Palestinian Arab leadership.⁷⁸ Detention camps were opened on 14 August 1946 for illegal Jewish migrants to Palestine at Karaolos near Famagusta and Xylotombou in the Larnaca district. Here again the power of categorization is illustrated in the fact that treatment of these migrants was a natural consequence of their designation as 'illegal immigrants'. Hence British authorities refused to consider alternative characterizations such as the one enjoined by the British Chief Rabbi's Emergency Council of 'displaced persons under British care'.⁷⁹

Complications around the detainment of Jews in Cyprus arose from the fact that it touched on four major policy issues. The first such issue concerned the magnitude of the movement as official figures for the number of refugees had to be constantly revised upwards. Intimately connected to this was the concern of Cypriot reactions to the setting up of camps in the island. Another difficulty had to do with the political cost for Britain of detaining in camps refugees who for the most part had spent extensive periods of time in, and survived, Nazi camps. Consequently and fourthly, there arose the question of how to officially designate the detainees. Most of them originated in one of the camps which were set up for 'Displaced Persons' according to the official postwar terminology crafted by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (created by 44 countries in 1943),⁸⁰ and were considered as such by the United Nations, at least until the moment they took to sea. But once they set out clandestinely to travel by sea to Palestine, they became 'illegal immigrants' in the eyes of the Colonial Office likely to threaten the political balance British authorities were trying to preserve in the Mandate between the conflicting priorities of the Arabs and the Jews: such differences of nomenclature were consequential as they conditioned, as mentioned before, official responses to refugees' claims for entitlements.

It was made clear from the outset that Jewish refugees would not be held indefinitely in Cyprus but that the island would serve as a clearing ground, authorizing each month 750 of them to head on to Palestine.⁸¹ While this quota reinforced the organic link between the

Mandate and Cyprus, it also provoked a bottleneck in that it proved too low with regard to the ever-expanding number of arrivals in the island. By November 1946 there were already 7,000 refugees.⁸² In March 1947, officials believed that the Cyprus camps capacity of 20,000 would be quickly overrun as an estimated 30,000 Jewish refugees were concentrated near ports of embarkation in Europe (mainly in France and even more so in Italy).⁸³ In addition, Aliya Bet, the organization of clandestine Jewish migration to Palestine, was said to have at its disposal 30 ships (25 ready and 5 being prepared) with a capacity of 24,700 passengers.⁸⁴ By April 1947 the number of Jewish refugees thought to be seeking ways to migrate to Palestine had reached 35,000, most of them concentrated in Italy (an estimated minimum of 22,500), France (8,000) and Belgium (4,000).⁸⁵ By 1948, Cyprus had three sets of camps, each comprising 12 camps, mostly tented but also hatted, able to host a ceiling figure of 34,000 persons.⁸⁶

The local press unanimously decried the detention of Jews in Cyprus, although newspapers did so along rationales which reflected their different political inclinations. The Greek Cypriot right and the Orthodox Church argued that whatever capacity Cyprus had to welcome refugees needed to be reserved for Greeks and that Jews should only be allowed to stay in the island for the time necessary to make arrangements for them to proceed to Palestine.⁸⁷ This line of argument sometimes reactivated an anti-Semitic rhetoric, as when the nationalist lawyer Savvas Loizides wrote in March 1946 that the ‘wandering Jews’ were an ‘exploitative and destructive’ force.⁸⁸ Although obviously not sharing the Greek nationalist articles’ feelings about the necessity to welcome Greeks in Cyprus, the Turkish Cypriot press was also very critical of Jewish settlement in the island. It voiced concerns about the economic pressure this would bring to bear on Cypriots and often did so reactivating anti-Semitic tropes. Dr. Fazıl Küçük, founder of the newspaper *Halkın Sesi* [The People’s Voice] and of the Association of the Turkish Minority of the Island of Cyprus (Kıbrıs Adası Türk Azınlık Kurumu-KATAK) thus opined in March 1947 that ‘there has never been a local community

which had benefited from the presence of Jews’, as the latter formed a ‘selfish tribe working and toiling only for its own interest’.⁸⁹ A year earlier, one of *Halkin Sesi*’s regular contributors, writing under the nickname Yavuz, asked ‘[w]hat can we [the Cypriots] be if not a snack for the Jews who managed to economically destroy the Germans, one of the wisest nations of them all’?⁹⁰

Reactions also came from the left, although they were motivated by different concerns. *Anexartitos* (the *Independent*), an influential Nicosia-based Greek Cypriot daily close to the island’s communist party AKEL (the Progressive Party of Working People), usually adopted a moderate tone.⁹¹ One of the party’s most prominent members, Fifis Ioannou, suggested however that official declarations as to the temporariness of the Jews’ stay in the island should not be taken at face value. The exiguity of the quota of those refugees allowed to proceed to Palestine was such that some of them were bound to remain in Cyprus. Such a prospect, the author went on, would put tremendous stress on the Cypriot population as ‘our land, with its poor agricultural production, and the almost complete absence of any industry worthy of that name, cannot cover the needs of thousands of Jews whom one fine morning it was decided, without our people even being consulted, that they should be shipped to Cyprus.’ Adopting what could be termed an Arabophile position, Ioannou put the question of Jewish refugees in a broader context, suggesting that their migration to Palestine should be stopped, that Palestine should gain its independence as a unitary Arab and Jewish state and that conditions should be made viable for Jews to remain in Europe.⁹²

Aside from common concerns regarding the economic impact of the detainment of Jews in Cyprus and the occasional overlap of anti-Semitic biases, what fundamentally bound reactions in Cypriot newspapers of different political persuasions was a preoccupation with sovereignty and concretely with the right to decide who could be authorized to live in the island. Again as in the 1930s, this was a concern the legitimacy of which the colonial administration

tacitly rather than explicitly, acknowledged. As a result they constantly pressed the Colonial Office to involve other British colonies in welcoming Jewish refugees.⁹³ The camp of Atlit, twenty kilometers from Haifa in Palestine itself, was reopened in March 1947 with a capacity of 2,250.⁹⁴ British authorities considered this an unsatisfactory solution as it basically allowed Jewish ‘illegal immigrants’ to set foot in the Mandate. Yet the governors of all other colonies resisted calls from the British government to accept Jewish ‘illegal immigrants’, bringing up arguments which ranged from the dangers of increasing Zionist activism in regions where Jews were already settled, the possibility of political and racial tensions with the local population, and, in almost all cases, the scarcity of resources. The governor of Kenya, Sir Philip Mitchell, was emblematic in this respect, characterizing the Secretary of State’s request that some of the migrants be relocated in his colony as ‘exceedingly unwelcome’ and worrying that he might have to ‘exhibit to the African population (which has had quite enough to digest) these people, who are after all the drags of the ghettos of Europe’.⁹⁵ Instead, Mitchell proposed to dispatch the immigrants in the islands of the Pacific: ‘You can put the whole lot on Vanua Levu in Fiji’ because ‘[d]istance is of no real importance; once people are on ships they can go on steaming’.⁹⁶ The Colonial Office further envisioned the possibility of ‘borrowing’ an Italian island –Lampedusa or Pantellaria were mentioned- as a temporary landing ground for Jewish illegal immigrants. But the Foreign Office argued that this was only practicable if the guarding duties were assigned to Italian officials because they were ‘anxious to avoid having to ... keep British troops in Italy after the 90 day period [as] this will only encourage the Russians to look for an excuse to keep their troops in the Balkan countries.’⁹⁷ Facing the urgency of the matter, Cyprus and its extension, the Palestinian camp of Atlit, were retained as the only viable solutions.

Another strategy British authorities deployed was that of attempting to control the flow of Jews upstream, namely by putting pressure both on Jewish organizations which managed

the illegal passages to Palestine and on the European countries where the traffic originated.⁹⁸ Yet most immigrants when embarking were in possession of correct passports and visas valid for entry into such countries as Costa Rica and Panama while the ships were registered under the flags of these countries. This in effect made it legally impossible to deport back the immigrants to the countries they came from. Those refugees who did not have the proper documents destroyed the ones in their possession once on board one of the ships making it impossible to trace their place of origin.⁹⁹

While all costs related to camp life in Cyprus were covered by the High Commission of Palestine, organizing daily life in the camps still raised three major challenges for British authorities: ensuring the material, intellectual and spiritual welfare of the detainees; obtaining sufficient guards and providing them with the appropriate prerogatives; and finally, developing a public relations policy. 2,200 troops were recruited from the British army to take up guarding duties, while the sustenance of detainees was ensured by British authorities in collaboration with Jewish organizations, such as the Jewish Agency or the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC). By March 1948, 120 workers of the AJDC were working full-time in the camps, assisted by 1,800 detainees and were able to dispense a daily diet of 2,500 calories per adult.¹⁰⁰ Education of the youth was entrusted to the Rutenberg Foundation of Haifa. Spiritual welfare, in the form of ritual and religious services, was provided by the British Chief Rabbi's Emergency Council and the Government of Palestine.¹⁰¹ While practically collaborating with British authorities, Jewish organizations, were in fact, as Arrivé points out, preparing detainees for life in the future state of Israel.¹⁰²

The issue of the prerogatives given to the camp guards was closely related to that of public relations. On the one hand British authorities were adamant in considering Jews in Cypriot camps as detainees, people who broke the law by attempting to illegally migrate to Palestine and therefore as deserving a different, and harsher, treatment than the one meted out

to other ‘displaced persons’. On the other hand, aware that most of them were Nazi camp survivors, British authorities were particularly concerned about damaging accusations of ill-treatment at a time when world opinion was trying to grapple with the magnitude and the atrocity of the genocide of European Jews. This dilemma became particularly acute when the question was raised of the amount of force guards were entitled to use against potential escapees. Would the use of deadly force be allowed? Initially reluctant to authorize it, the British government yielded to pressure from governor of Cyprus and the military authorities who made the use of force the uncompromising point of their involvement in the management of Jewish refugees.¹⁰³ Considering how damaging Jewish casualties could be for their image, the British government decided however to precede their decision with a public announcement which, it was hoped, would contextualize it and make it more acceptable. Hence on 13 August 1946, the British Prime Minister issued a public declaration condemning the clandestine organization of the mass arrival of Jews in Palestine, known colloquially as the ‘underground railway to Palestine’ and referring to ‘evidence that the terrorist element among the Jews has been reinforced from the ranks of the illegal immigrants’.¹⁰⁴

Military authorities charged with guarding the camps were constantly monitoring acts of open or tacit resistance among detainees and commented on them in terms that highlighted their own frustration with what they perceived as ungratefulness on the part of the detainees. In November 1946, Major General Atkinson of the War Office thus described the refugees as being of ‘an extremely low type’, who ‘remained surly and uncooperative’. He resented their policy of ‘passive resistance’ which resulted in ‘transforming what was originally a clean and well found camp into an insanitary eyesore detrimental alike to health and comfort’. This in turn, he opined, provided ‘material for anti-British propaganda’.¹⁰⁵ The fact that British officials preferred to attribute such attitudes to the alleged cultural and moral shortcomings of their hosts or ill-will on their part, may be illustrative of the limitations of their training as civil

servants, constantly preoccupied with performance. Rarely would they acknowledge that such acts of passive resistance resulted from the dejection of persons who saw no end to their condition as captives, bouncing from one camp to another. But while instances of passive resistance could be frustrating, British authorities were much more concerned with the militarization of the camps in Cyprus.

Atkinson thus went on to report that the ‘immigrants’ were mostly ‘healthy young adults’, who organized themselves in groups by nationality, with each group appointing a leader and with group leaders then electing a camp leader.¹⁰⁶ Later reports highlighted the organic connections between acts of open resistance in Cyprus and in Palestine. On 13 August 1946 a Kol Israel broadcast called for the Jews of Haifa to break the curfew and proceed to the port to help the immigrants, an initiative which resulted in several arrests made and one death and several injuries in Hadar Hacarmel.¹⁰⁷ A June 1947 report stated that:

[t]he Hebrew and Zionist flags fly side by side above the tents and an assault course is in daily use: the immigrants openly practice grenade throwing, various forms of drill as well as visual signaling to and from the other camp. The place is, in fact, a kind of training base for the terrorist groups in Palestine and drafts of trained terrorists leave every month under the 750 arrangement after successfully completing the course (I believe the arrangement is that the 750 are chosen to some extent by the various Jewish authorities and not entirely in accordance with the “first in, first out,” arrangements).¹⁰⁸

In an insightful article, Daniel Cohen shows how humanitarian agencies and Jewish organizations contributed, willingly and unwittingly, to developing among refugees and Holocaust survivors grouped in camps a ‘Zionist collective consciousness’.¹⁰⁹ In Cyprus, by October 1948, the situation had become tense enough to lead to the shooting of nineteen-year-old escapee Schlomo Chaimsohn by British guards. This immediately led to a twenty-four hour hunger strike in all Jewish camps in Cyprus.¹¹⁰

As this latter incident illustrates, things came to a head between the time when the British government decided in February 1947 to take up the question of Palestine to the United Nations and the declaration of the state of Israel on 14 May 1948. Upon learning of the British referral of the Palestine issue to the UN, Jewish organizations (the Jewish Agency, Revisionist organizations such as the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe led by Peter Bergson, the Zionist Organization of America) decided to double down on their efforts to exfiltrate European Jews to Palestine.¹¹¹ At that time the ‘illegal immigration organization’ was said to be close to having at its disposal a grand total of 37 ships with a capacity of 42,450.¹¹² To tackle this challenge, British authorities in Cyprus and in London appointed in September 1947 a retired Indian Civil Service official, Sir Godfrey Collins, as ‘Commissioner, Jewish Camps’ –or ‘Comjew Famagusta’ according to the ungainly name of his telegraphic address- with privileged access rights to the High Commissioner of Palestine, the General Headquarters Middle East Land Forces, the relevant departments of the Cypriot government (Medical and Health Services, Passport Branch, Customs, Post Office), Jewish organizations and finally the Secretary of State for the Colonies.¹¹³ This can be considered as the moment when the detention of Jews in Cyprus is externalized or outsourced, in any event officially acknowledged as temporary in view of the pending independence of Palestine.

Indeed from that moment on, the priority of British authorities in the Cyprus camps was to make sure that their gradual release of Jewish inmates did not fuel the growing conflict between Jews and Palestinian Arabs. Particularly, a UN Security Council Resolution on 29 May 1948 called explicitly on all governments not to introduce fighting personnel, namely men of fighting age, in Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Transjordan and Yemen.¹¹⁴ But with the progression of the Arab-Israeli war, more and more British government departments began to call for the termination of the Cyprus camps. Anxious to release the soldiers employed in the Jewish camps, military authorities questioned the use of keeping the

‘illegal immigrants’ in Cyprus while Jews were airlifted from Europe, particularly Czechoslovakia, to Israel where they immediately integrated combat units without any apparent opposition from the UN Mediator, Count Folke Bernadotte.¹¹⁵ Writing at a time when debates over the establishment of constitutional government deeply polarized the island,¹¹⁶ the Governor of Cyprus was quick to agree, highlighting that the continued presence of Jews in Cyprus ‘raise the cost of living and prevent a return to normal price levels’ and ‘constitute a constant threat to the political tranquility of the island’. He ventured to add that the British government should not ‘worry too much about what the Arabs would say’ as they had ‘lost out any way and the Jewish State ha[d] come to stay’.¹¹⁷ On 18 January 1949, the British Cabinet took the decision to authorize the full release of all inmates in Cyprus; the last inmates were evacuated on 11 February of that year.¹¹⁸ One of the deeper, if implicit, meanings of the evacuation of the camps was that while Palestine fought its way towards an uncertain future but one independent from Britain, the British government was adamant in confirming its sovereignty in Cyprus.

Conclusion: Jewish refugees, Cyprus and cyclical lives of European migration policies

On 2 March 1943, shortly before he retired from his post as British Ambassador to Greece, Sir Michael Palairet wrote to the Colonial Office that he believed the British occupied Dodecanese should be handed over to Greece at the end of the war as ‘a reward on which Greece has set her heart and to which her gallantry and fidelity to her allies seem to entitle her’. He further added that ‘the eventual cession of Cyprus to Greece would be an act of generosity and wisdom which would (like our cession of the Ionian islands) ensure us the undying gratitude and friendship of a very gallant ally’.¹¹⁹ If Palairet’s views on the Dodecanese were unanimously shared at the Foreign Office, the idea of ceding Cyprus as well was then fast receding among officials of the British government, particularly at the Colonial Office. Indeed,

by the end of the war the island's fate had very much been sealed. This was due not so much to any official declaration to the effect that Britain would not cede the island; such a statement, in 1949 was still six years away.¹²⁰ Rather this was related to the fact that during the war Cyprus had acquired what may be termed a new imperial function linked to its geopolitical position, not yet as an operational military base but more as a convenient hub in transnational migrations and resettlement of refugees within and without the Empire. These wartime and post-war experiences were then the crucible where a new ethics of tutelage for Cyprus was developed.

The historiography rightfully highlights that the relaxation of the post-1931 authoritarian regime in the island had been made necessary by the ideals in the name of which the Allies claimed to be fighting and the Greek war effort at the sides of Britain. But this paper suggested that crucial to this change of policy was also Jewish transmigration in Cyprus which colonial authorities sought to stem by invoking the rights of Cypriots. In doing so, the Cyprus government were not advocating for the restoration of constitutional liberties in the island; as has been pointed out in the historiography of Cyprus, colonial officials in Nicosia, as opposed to some of their counterparts in London, systematically opposed such a prospect.¹²¹ Rather they were concerned not to create for themselves additional problems in an island in which they knew the political context to be tense. But by regularly transmitting to the Colonial Office press clippings illustrating local opposition to Jewish transmigration in Cyprus, they unwittingly legitimated to the islanders' political views, at least those which served their interests. As we have seen, Cypriots by and large decried the detention of Jews in their island. In doing so they invoked a wide array of arguments, from the Greek Cypriot right's ethnological preoccupations to those, more economically-minded, of the communists which in turn revealed different, and potentially competing, visions of territorial sovereignty in the island. Beyond their differences however, such visions were almost always rooted in autochthony, a fact all the more interesting

considering that the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot right were irredentist and defended the union of Cyprus with Greece or Turkey respectively.

Invoking the rights of Cypriots was also meant for colonial authorities –however paradoxical this may seem- to reassert British sovereignty on the island. Before the opening of military bases in the island was decided, Cyprus had demonstrated its indispensability in the defence of British interests in the Levant. This clarification must be seen as emerging, to some extent, through the Jewish refugee question and the organic link it created between Cyprus and Palestine. Throughout the periods under scrutiny in this article, from the interwar period to the post-war, the terms of migration of Jews in Cyprus were constantly redefined but always in a direction increasingly underscoring its temporariness: the island, a British colony, would never be but a stopover for Jews on their way to Palestine, a British mandate teetering towards an unpredictable future.

Crucial to this confirmation of sovereignty was the crafting of ever more precise instruments of classification separating people entitled to remain in the colony from those clearly pinned down as merely transiting through it. As was mentioned, the redefinition in 1939 of British nationality as applicable to Cyprus must be seen in connection not only to the local political context but also to the arrival of Jews in the island who were briefly viewed as refugees seeking asylum in the interwar period before they were designated as ‘illegal immigrants’ who had to be detained. The way this categorization of people affected Cypriots became obvious during the Second World War, when Cyprus hosted Greek and other European refugees in addition to Jews.

If official classifications may be seen as statements of policy –here the decision of the British government to retain Cyprus after the war- then this article also wanted to highlight the crucial importance of Empire for their elaboration. While the entire European continent was affected by mass refugee movements during and after the Second World War, the terminology

used to characterize people on the move was there, as opposed to the colonies, relatively simple. Colonies became the crucible where more refined distinctions were made and technologies were invented which would later be used in Europe itself. It is in effect remarkable to notice the permanency of the entire framework applicable to this day to forcibly displaced people. To ward off Jews from coming to their colonies, the governors of Cyprus, Kenya, Tanganyika, or Fiji made a point of referring to them as ‘illegal immigrants’ who would bring an unbearable pressure to bear on their limited economic resources. Occasionally they highlighted the alleged links between Jewish refugees with the terrorism of paramilitary organization such as Irgun or the Stern Gang. In devising their policies they remained at all times wary of both local reactions and their image with the international opinion, perhaps more sensitive to the predicament of refugees. The determination of refugees themselves to escape such predicament was then, as it is now, neatly illustrated in some of their practices, such as the destruction of their identity papers. Finally Jewish clandestine migration to Palestine in the immediate post-war, draws the contours of a still relevant geography of detainment of migrants, with the debate about using Lampedusa being here particularly striking. It is precisely by highlighting such permanency that this article aimed to situate not only the beginning of Cyprus’ use to the British Empire, but also its importance to the broader post-war history of migration.

¹ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 300.

² Smith and Stucki, “Concentration Camps,” 427 and 431.

³ For example, Hadari, *Second Exodus* and Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*.

⁴ Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 274.

⁵ For a very interesting discussion contrasting the designations used by British authorities on the one hand, Jewish refugees and organizations on the other, see Arrivé, “Les camps d’internement,” 18-25.

⁶ Panteli, *Place of Refuge*.

⁷ Ben-Artzi, 'Jewish Rural Settlement' and *ibid.*, "Historical Perspectives."

⁸ Kazamias and Antoniou (eds.), *Historical Perspectives*.

⁹ Arrivé, "Les camps d'internement."

¹⁰ This is the case in Branka Arrivé's work. See also Ofer, "Holocaust Survivors," and Zalashik and Davidovitch, "Measuring adaptability."

¹¹ A definition of *territorium nullius* in Fitzmaurice, *Sovereignty, Property*, 271-301.

¹² On the hopes of the British government to convert Cyprus into a strategic base upon their occupation of the island, see Yiangou, *Cyprus in World War II*, 8; Lee, *Great Britain and the Cyprus Convention Policy*, 77; Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, 272; Brunswik, *Traité de Berlin*, 122; Georghallides, *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus*, 5-6; Markides, *The Rise and Fall*, 1. See also Medlicott, *The Congress of Berlin*, 21. On the disillusion over Cyprus' real usefulness to the British Empire which swiftly replaced previous high expectations, see Varnava, *British Imperialism in Cyprus, passim*. In the same vein see Georghallides, *History of Cyprus*, 13-4 and Dodd, *The History and Politics*, 3. Heraclidou partly challenges this impression of utter uselessness in her "Cyprus's Non-Military Contribution," 194-7. On Cyprus regaining imperial value following the Second World War and in the context of British imperial retreat, see Stefanidis, *Isle of Discord*, 117; Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*, 211, 213 and 223; Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus*, 15; *ibid.*, *Blue-Water Empire*, 280, 308; *ibid.*, "Never, Never Land," 150; *ibid.*, "NATO and the Struggle for Cyprus," 35; Holland and Markides, *The British and the Hellenes*, 208; Kelling, *Countdown to Rebellion*, 72, 80; Stergiou, "British Military Bases in Cyprus," 288. On Cyprus strategic value nowadays owing to its two Sovereign Base Areas, see Constantinou and Richmond, "The Long Mile of Empire," 78.

¹³ Çiçek, *Young Ottomans*, 43.

¹⁴ Panteli, *Place of Refuge*.

¹⁵ Markides, *The Rise and Fall*, 1.

¹⁶ Danny Goldman offers a useful review of the different refugee groups that sought refuge in Cyprus during British rule, "Famagusta's Historic Detention and Refugee Camps."

¹⁷ Hook, "Mr. Fenech's Colony" and Georghallides, *History of Cyprus*, 39.

¹⁸ Demetriou, "Struck by the Turks." See also Pastie, *Faith in History*, 44.

¹⁹ Pattie, *Faith in History*, 47, 54, 60. See also Loizos, "Ottoman half-lives," 248.

²⁰ Varnava, "Imperialism First, the War Second," 535. See also Pattie, *Faith in History*, 55.

²¹ Πατρίς [Fatherland], 10 October 1922, Πατρίς, 24 October 1922, Αλήθεια [Truth], 12 November 1922.

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- ²² Georghallides, *History of Cyprus*, 231, footnote 1.
- ²³ Αλήθεια, 22 February 1924.
- ²⁴ Ben-Artzi, “Jewish Rural Settlement.”
- ²⁵ Ben-Artzi “Historical Perspectives,” 8.
- ²⁶ Mathopoulou “Pioneers,” 32-4.
- ²⁷ Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s*, 1-4.
- ²⁸ Mussolini, “Discorso”; Rappas, “The Transformation,” 482-3.
- ²⁹ Sherman, *Island Refuge*, 173.
- ³⁰ Panteli, *Place of Refuge*, 115. See also Ben-Artzi, “Jewish Rural Settlement in Cyprus,” 361.
- ³¹ Norman Bentwich, United Jewish Appeal, Joint Distribution Committee and the American Palestine Campaign, to AB Wright, Chief Secretary’s Office, Cyprus, May 1st, 1935; Colonial Secretary to Norman Bentwich, 1 June 1935; Norman Bentwich, Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (Jewish and Other) Coming from Germany, London, 28 June 1935, to Colonial Secretary, Cyprus, FCO 141/2389, The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA).
- ³² Arthur Dawe, Colonial Office, to AB Wright, 11 July 1933, FCO 141/2389, TNA. Land prices in open market ranged between £5 to £120 per acre according to soil conditions and availability of water. Same file, Brochure for Visitors and Settlers, GPO, Nicosia, February 1934, p. 3.
- ³³ The Lloyd-Triestino weekly service connected Jaffa to Brindisi and Trieste via Cyprus (Larnaca), Brochure for Visitors and Settlers, GPO, Nicosia, February 1934, p. 1, FCO 141/2389, TNA.
- ³⁴ L. Hamilton Stokes, Passport Control Office, British Embassy, Warsaw, to The Commissioner for Migration and Statistics, Government of Palestine, 24 September 1934, FCO 141/2389, TNA.
- ³⁵ Norman Bentwich, on behalf of the United Jewish Appeal of the Joint Distribution Committee and the American Palestine Campaign, to AB Wright, Cyprus, 1 May 1935, FCO 141/2389, TNA.
- ³⁶ Commissioner of Larnaca’s report, 19 July 1933, FCO 141/2389, TNA. One Ottoman dönüm equals 919.3 square meters, see Kark and Frantzman, “Abdülhamid’s Heirs,” 127-8.
- ³⁷ Panteli, *Place of Refuge*, 110-1.
- ³⁸ Acting Governor to British Consulate, Smyrna, 14 August 1933, FCO 141/2389, TNA.
- ³⁹ Nicolaos Nicolaidis, Mayor of Paphos and his council, letter to the President of the Pan-Israelitic Congress, Prague, 11 August 1933, enclosure to Commissioner of Paphos to Colonial Secretary, 14 August 1933, FCO 141/2389, TNA.

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- ⁴⁰ Illegible minute, 12 January 1934, FCO 141/2391, TNA.
- ⁴¹ Acting Director of L.R.and Surveys, minute, 24 August 1933, FCO 141/2391, TNA.
- ⁴² Editorial extract from the daily Nicosia Greek newspaper ‘Protevousa’ of 26 September 1933 entitled “A rush of Jews,” FCO 141/2389, TNA.
- ⁴³ Extract from the Press Officer’s Report Dated the 2nd September 1938 (Paratiritis 1.9.38 “The Jews”), FCO 141/2618, TNA.
- ⁴⁴ K. Siakallis, Νέος Κυπριακός Φύλαξ [New Cypriot Guardian], 8 September 1938; Κυπριακός Τύπος [Cypriot Press], 28 March 1935; Petros Liberis, Εσπερινή [Evening Standard], 25 August 1935.
- ⁴⁵ Φωνή της Κύπρου [The Voice of Cyprus], 25 March, 1933.
- ⁴⁶ Ελευθερία, 20 August 1936. An article of the same vein was published by the left-wing, Nicosia-based daily *Anexartitos* on 21 April 1939.
- ⁴⁷ Extract from the Press Officer’s Report dated 18th August 1938 Eleftheria (18.8.38) ‘The Jews’, FCO 141/2618, TNA.
- ⁴⁸ Petros Liberis, Εσπερινή, 20 April 1939. During the interwar period, and more specifically the 1930s, Cyprus hosted not only European Jews but other people fleeing the tumult of European interwar period. It is interesting in this regard to note the absence of Cypriot reactions regarding a group of Cretan political leaders who sought refuge in the island after they led a failed coup d’Etat in 1938 against the Greek dictator Ioannis Metaxas. Facing the death penalty in Greece, the coupists were allowed by British authorities to remain in Cyprus provided they signed a declaration pledging their non-involvement in politics. See Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 3 November 1938, FCO 141/2614, TNA.
- ⁴⁹ Sherman, *Island Refuge*, 6.
- ⁵⁰ Illegible minute, 20 October 1934, FCO 141/2391, TNA.
- ⁵¹ Passport Guidance for Police Officers, brochure, GPO, Nicosia, 1933, p. 2, FCO 141/2389, TNA.
- ⁵² Memorandum on possibilities of Jewish settlement in Cyprus, enclosure to Governor Palmer’s confidential dispatch to Parkinson, 2 February 1934, FCO 141/2389, TNA.
- ⁵³ OR Arthur, Commissioner, Larnaca, to Colonial Secretary, 18 November 1938, FCO 141/2618, TNA.
- ⁵⁴ Mathopoulou, “Pioneers,” 38.
- ⁵⁵ The Statute Laws of Cyprus No. 14 of 1939: A Law to Amend the Immigration Laws, 1936 to 1938, 24 July 1939, FCO 141/2552, TNA.
- ⁵⁶ Panteli, *Place of Refuge*, 117.

⁵⁷ Sherman, *Island Refuge*, 222.

⁵⁸ Memorandum dictated by Mr. J.G. Hibbert, Colonial Office, 26 May 1939, CO 67/302/14, TNA.

⁵⁹ Minute Colonial Office, D. and A., 8 June 1939, CO 67/302/14, TNA.

⁶⁰ Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 275. See also Sherman, *Island Refuge*, 235-6.

⁶¹ Irene C. Soltau, American University of Beirut, letter to Lady Astor, 25 July 1939, Enclosure to said letter: Daniel Oliver, Director of the Daniel and Emily Oliver Orphanage, Ras el Mten, Roger Soltau, professor of History, American University of Beirut, Irene C. Soltau, vice-president of the Child protection society, "Memorandum on the Frassola Refugees, Beirut, July 1939," CO 67/302/14, TNA.

⁶² JG Hibbert CO minute, 8 July 1939, CO 67/303/1, TNA.

⁶³ Secretary of State for the Colonies, Cypher Telegram, N° 508, Secret, to Governor of Cyprus, 28 November 1942, "Problem of Jews attempting to reach Palestine as illegal immigrants," CO 67/328/3, TNA.

⁶⁴ Panteli, *Place of Refuge*, 119. See also Kelling, *Countdown to Rebellion*, 58.

⁶⁵ Aktar, "Tax Me to the End of My Life!" 213-214.

⁶⁶ G. Eastwood, Colonial Office, Note on 'Cyprus Refugees', 29 March 1943, CO 67/328/3, TNA. Michael R. Marrus writes that by mid-1943, 'there were about 5,000 Greeks in Egyptian camps, 4,600 in Cyprus and others scattered about Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean. Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 272.

⁶⁷ G. Eastwood, 29 March 1943, Note on "Cyprus. Refugees," CO 67/328/3, TNA.

⁶⁸ Governor of Cyprus, Cypher Telegram, Most Secret N°505, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 20 October 1943, CO 67/328/3, TNA.

⁶⁹ Governor of Cyprus, Cypher Most Secret Telegram N° 592, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 4 December 1943, CO 67/328/3, TNA.

⁷⁰ CO 67/328/3 *Possibility of Providing Refuge in Cyprus for Refugees from Europe, 1943-1944*. Minister of State, Cairo, Immediate Cypher telegram No. 45 to Secretary of State for the Colonies (repeated Jerusalem & Cyprus), 18 December 1943.

⁷¹ High Commissioner of Palestine, Cypher Telegram to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 11 December 1943, CO 67/328/3, TNA.

⁷² Minister of State, Cairo, to Foreign Office, 23 October 1943, CO 67/328/3, TNA.

⁷³ Carabott, "British Military Occupation," 287, 293.

⁷⁴ Kelling, *Countdown to Rebellion*, 15.

⁷⁵ Major-General Atkinson (?) in charge of Administration to the undersecretary of state, the War Office, Secret, 4 November 1946, CO 537/1808, TNA.

⁷⁶ Arrivé, "Les camps d'internements," 20; Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 66.

⁷⁷ Supplement No. 2 to the Cyprus Gazette No. 3257 of 13 August, 1946: The Statute Laws of Cyprus No. 15 of 1946: A Law to Make Provision for the Detention of Certain Persons in Certain Cases, 12 August 1946, CO 537/1807, TNA.

⁷⁸ Trafford Smith, Colonial Office, to C.S. Key, War Office, 7 September 1946, CO 537/1810, TNA. For the reactions of the Palestinian Arab leadership to this decision, High Commissioner, Palestine, Telegram to SSC, 24 December 1946, CO 537/2387, TNA. The initial cost of setting up the camps was estimated at £100,000 in September 1946, although that rapidly escalated to £617,370 for the period up to 31 March 1948 to which £250,000 was to be added for works services and then £1,900,000 for the period up to 31 March 1947. See Trafford Smith, Colonial Office, to C.S. Key, War Office, 7 September 1946, CS Key, War Office, to Trafford Smith, Colonial Office, 12 September, Secretary of State, to the Governor of Cyprus, repeated to High Commissioner of Palestine, 5 December 1946, Secretary of State for the Colonies, to the High Commissioner of Palestine, 21 December 1946, CO 537/1810, TNA.

⁷⁹ Notes for an interview with the Right Hon. Arthur Creech-Jones Secretary of State for the Colonies, Friday 13th December 1946 (by Dr. Grünfeld), CO 733/467/5, TNA.

⁸⁰ Cohen, "Naissance d'une nation," 57; Ballinger, "Impossible Returns," 129 and Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 318.

⁸¹ Secretary of State for the Colonies Top Secret and Personal Immediate Cypher Telegram, to High Commissioner, Palestine, 2 March 1947, CO 537/2385, TNA.

⁸² Major-General Atkinson (?) in charge of Administration to the undersecretary of state, the War Office, Secret, 4 November 1946, CO 537/1808, TNA.

⁸³ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 302.

⁸⁴ Secretary of State for the Colonies, Top Secret and Personal Immediate Cypher Telegram, 12 March 1947, to High Commissioner, Palestine, CO 537/2385, TNA. As Arrivé points out, the clandestine immigration of Jews in Palestine was coordinated by the Mossad le-Aliya Bet (a branch of the Palestine-based Jewish paramilitary force Haganah) which was funded by the Joint Distribution Committee and the Zionist Organization. From 1944 onwards, emigration was facilitated by the Bricha (flight) network created by Polish Jewish resisters. See Arrivé, "Les camps d'internement," 12 and Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, 336-7.

⁸⁵ Top Secret. D.O. (47) 35 Cabinet Defence Committee, Palestine-Illegal Immigration, Note by the Minister of Defence, 14 April 1947, Cabinet Office, Annex to the above: Jewish Illegal Immigration. Report by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, 10 April 1947, CO 537/2385, TNA.

⁸⁶ Governor of Cyprus, telegram to SSC Confidential 9 March 1948 transmitting report on conditions of illegal immigrants, Undated, typescript report by the Commissioner of Jewish Affairs attached to the telegram titled "Jewish Refugee Camps in Cyprus," CO 733/490/3, TNA.

⁸⁷ *Κυπριακός Τύπος*, 19 August 1946.

⁸⁸ Savvas Loizides, *Εσπερινή*, 8 March 1946.

⁸⁹ Dr. Fazıl Küçük, *Halkın Sesi*, 7 March 1947.

⁹⁰ Yavuz, *Halkın Sesi*, 9 March 1946.

⁹¹ *Anexartitos*, 16 August 1946.

⁹² Fifis Ioannou, *Anexartitos*, 21 August 1946.

⁹³ Cabinet: Illegal Immigration Committee: Accommodation for Illegal Immigrants: Top Secret Memorandum, 9 May, 1947, signed J.D. Highman, secretary, CO 537/2385, TNA.

⁹⁴ High Commissioner Palestine to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Immediate Top Secret Telegram, 20 March 1947, repeated Cyprus CO 537/2385, TNA.

⁹⁵ Governor of Kenya top secret and personal telegram to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 October 1946, CO 537/1807, TNA.

⁹⁶ Governor of Kenya, top Secret dispatch to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 21 November 1946, CO 537/1808, TNA.

⁹⁷ Top Secret. D.O. (47) 35 Cabinet Defence Committee, Palestine-Illegal Immigration, F.D.W. Brown, Foreign Office, to J.D. Higham, Colonial Office, Secret Personal letter, 7 May 1947, CO 537/2385, TNA.

⁹⁸ Sherman, *Island Refuge*, 239.

⁹⁹ Palestine. Illegal Immigration Detention in Cyprus. Part I 1947, Top Secret. Cabinet Defence Committee: Minutes of a Meeting held at No. 10, Downing Street, on Wednesday, 12 March 1947, CO 537/2385, TNA.

¹⁰⁰ Governor of Cyprus, Saving Confidential telegram to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 March 1948 transmitting report on conditions of illegal immigrants, Undated, typescript report by the Commissioner of Jewish Affairs, CO 733/490/3, TNA. In 1946, a Colonial Office memo stated that the daily calorie intake of inmates was 2,667, see Notes for an interview with the Right Hon. Arthur Creech-Jones Secretary of State for the Colonies, Friday 13 December 1946 (by Dr. Grünfeld), CO 733/467/5, TNA.

¹⁰¹ Solomon Schonfeld, Executive Director, Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council (London), dispatch to Trafford Smith, Colonial Office 21 August 1946, and High Commissioner Palestine, Cypher Telegram, 23 August 1946, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, CCO 733/467/5, TNA.

¹⁰² Arrivé, "Les camps d'internements," 54-5.

¹⁰³ Top secret telegram From Commander-in-Chief Middle East Land Forces D.T.O. 13 August 1946 to Cyprus sub-district, CO 537/1807, TNA.

¹⁰⁴ Secretary of State for the Colonies to High Commissioner Palestine, repeated Cyprus, 11 August 1946, CO 537/1807, TNA.

¹⁰⁵ Major-General Atkinson (?) in charge of Administration to the undersecretary of state, the War Office, Secret, 4 November 1946, CO 537/1808, TNA.

¹⁰⁶ Major-General Atkinson (?) in charge of Administration to the undersecretary of state, the War Office, Secret, 4 November 1946, CO 537/1808, TNA.

¹⁰⁷ High Commissioner Palestine to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Immediate telegram, 13 August 1946, CO 537/1809, TNA.

¹⁰⁸ Top Secret Minute by (illegible) to Fitzgerald, Colonial Office, 28 June 1947, CO 537/2385, TNA.

¹⁰⁹ Cohen, "Naissance d'une nation," 62 and 75. See also Ballinger, "Impossible Returns," 137-8.

¹¹⁰ Governor of Cyprus, Most immediate telegram to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1 October 1948, CO 733/490/3.

¹¹¹ Top Secret. D.O. (47) 35 Cabinet Defence Committee, Palestine-Illegal Immigration, Note by the Minister of Defence, 14 April 1947, Cabinet Office, Annex to the above: Jewish Illegal Immigration. Report by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, 10 April 1947, CO 537/2385, TNA.

¹¹² Top Secret. D.O. (47) 35 Cabinet Defence Committee, Palestine-Illegal Immigration, Note by the Minister of Defence, 14 April 1947, Cabinet Office, Annex to the above: Jewish Illegal Immigration. Report by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, 10 April 1947, CO 537/2385.

¹¹³ Acting governor of Cyprus, Secret Saving Telegram to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 25 July 1947, forwarding "Commissioner, Jewish Camps, Cyprus-Draft Directive" of 23 July 1947, and Governor of Cyprus, Secret telegram to Secretary of State for the Colonies, repeated Palestine, 25 September 1947, CO 537/2386, TNA.

¹¹⁴ 50 (1948). Resolution of 29 May 1948 [S/801]:

<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/6B76F035CD9C4A36852560C200599BB7>.

Last accessed 23 April 2018. See also CO 537/3947, Top Secret Saving Telegram No. 125, SSC to Officer Administering the Government of Cyprus, 30th September 1948.

¹¹⁵ CO 537/3947, Governor of Cyprus, Secret Telegram to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 19 August 1948.

¹¹⁶ Katsiaounis, *Η Διασκεπτική*.

¹¹⁷ Governor of Cyprus, confidential telegram to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 16 August 1948, CO 537/3947, TNA.

¹¹⁸ Secretary of State for the Colonies, Secret telegram to Governor of Cyprus, 18 January 1949, FO 371/75412, TNA.

¹¹⁹ Ambassador to Greece, dispatch to Foreign Secretary 2 March 1943, FO 371/37224, TNA.

¹²⁰ Holland, “Never, Never Land.”

¹²¹ Hadjiathanasiou, “British Council in Cyprus.”

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