Reconstructing Lives, Creating Citizens[1]

The role of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) in the rehabilitation of detainees on Cyprus, 1946–49

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> Cyprus, to romantics, is the legendary island of Aphrodite Goddess of love […] Here in Cyprus, threshold to them of their Promised Land, the refugees wait until time turns them from "illegal" into "legal" immigrants. The official army term for them is I.J.I.s – illegal Jewish Immigrants.[2]

In these words, Maurice Pearlman describes the self-perception of the post-Second World War deportees to Cyprus. Pearlman, a British-Jewish journalist, joined the Ma'apilim (illegal immigrants) ship *Theodor Herzl*[3] to give a first-hand account of its journey, and found himself arrested upon arrival in Haifa and deported to Cyprus. Before securing his release by identifying himself to the British authorities as a British reporter, he took advantage of his time in Cyprus to gather impressions in order to convey to the world the experiences of those attempting to enter Palestine. In addition, he wrote a detailed report on the activities of the JDC (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) in Cyprus.[4]

During the summer of 1946, the British Mandate government officials in Palestine faced an increasing number of illegal immigrants. The previously insignificant

1 I would like to thank my team – Ayala Levin-Kruss, Elisheva Friedlander and Ori Krausher – for all their help and good work.

2 Maurice Pearlman, A.J.D.C and the Cyprus Camps, February 1948, Cyprus Collection 1945–1949 173530, JDC Archives.

3 The ship Theodor Herzl, named after the "Father of Modern Zionism," set sail on 2 April 1947 from France, carrying 2,641 illegal immigrants. Eleven days later it was blocked by the British Navy, and its passengers were sent to Cyprus.

4 Maurice Pearlman was later the first Israeli military spokesman and the Israeli ambassador to the Congo. He wrote several books and published numerous articles. Sources on the Cyprus camps are mostly in Hebrew. My research is based largely on the JDC Archives in Jerusalem, the Cyprus Collection and the Jerusalem Collection, as well as Morris Laub's oral history. All are available on the JDC website: <https://archives.jdc.org>.

illegal immigration had begun primarily as an act of protest against restrictions the British authorities had imposed on Jewish entry to the region. This had grown to such an extent that it now threatened to overwhelm Mandate Palestine (Eretz Israel – the land of Israel – in the minds of the refugees).[5] A large number of refugees from Europe and North Africa were expressing a desire to start a new life in a Jewish state that they would help to establish in the land of Israel.[6]

The migration of refugees by sea to Palestine started a few months after the end of the Second World War. Between August 1945 and July 1946, the British authorities tried to address this issue by holding the refugees at the Atlit detention camp near Haifa and in Latrun Prison near Jerusalem before eventually releasing them according to existing immigration quotas.[7] However, conditions worsened for both the inmates and the authorities as these holding areas continued to fill, so the authorities began drafting plans to send the would-be immigrants elsewhere. The first idea was to send the immigrants back to Europe, but this failed both practically and – more importantly – in the eyes of the international media.[8]

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5 For more about Displaced Persons in Europe, see, for example: Françoise Ouzan, "Rebuilding Jewish Identities in Displaced Persons Camps in Germany," Bulletin du Centre de Recherche Français à Jérusalem 14 (2004): 98–111; Avinoam Patt, Finding Home and Homeland: Jewish DP Youth and Zionism in the Aftermath of the Holocaust (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2009); Avinoam Patt and Michael Berkowitz (eds), "We Are Here": New Approaches to Jewish Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2010); Yehuda Bauer, "Jewish Survivors in DP Camps and She'erith Hapletah," in The Nazi Holocaust, Part 9: The End of the Holocaust, edited by Michael R. Marrus (Berlin – New York: K. G. Saur, 2011), 526–38; Atina Grossmann, "Remapping Relief and Rescue: Flight, Displacement, and International Aid for Jewish Refugees during World War II," New German Critique 117 (2012): 61–79.

6 For more about British anti-immigration policies, see: Nahum Bogner, The Resistance Boats: The Jewish Illegal Immigration 1945–1948 (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1993 [Hebrew]); Steven Wagner, "British Intelligence and the 'Fifth' Occupying Power: The Secret Struggle to Prevent Jewish Illegal Immigration to Palestine," Intelligence and National Security 29 (2014): 698–726.

7 For more about Atlit and Latrun, see: Yehoshua Caspi, "Prisons in Eretz Yisra'el during the British Mandate," Cathedra 32 (1984): 141–74 [Hebrew]; Mordechai Naor, Atlit Ma'apilim Camp (Atlit: Ministry of Education, 1990 [Hebrew]); Tal Misgav, Story of Latrun Internment Camp in the Mandate Period (Jerusalem: Ariav, 2008 [Hebrew]).

8 This policy was most famously implemented when refugees on the Exodus were disembarked in Haifa, loaded onto three other ships, and transported back to Marseilles. See, for example: Aviva Halamish, The Exodus Affair: Holocaust Survivors and the Struggle for Palestine (London: Syracuse University Press, 1998); Ruth Gruber, Exodus: The Ship that Launched a Nation (New York: Crown, 1999); Shai Horev, Sailors who Had Knowledge of the Sea (Haifa: Duchifat, 2015 [Hebrew]).

Figure 1: Men aboard the SS Galilah, which is flying the Israeli flag

Source: JDC Archives, Photograph Collection, NY_62672.

The decision to send illegal immigrants to Cyprus was a third blow to the Yishuv (Jewish population in Palestine) after the arrest of many of their leaders and the confiscation of weapons, including those used in self-defence. In part, this was an act of revenge by the British authorities in response to the Etzel underground's bombing of the King David Hotel on 22 July 1946, but there was also a practical aspect to the new policy: if they were in Cyprus, the illegal immigrants would be unable to elude guards and slip through barbed-wire fences into Mandate Palestine. In addition, the British hoped that ejecting those who had managed to reach the shores of Palestine might dissuade other prospective illegal immigrants from making the trip. However, the deportation of the first shiploads of refugees to Cyprus was delayed because the British were insufficiently prepared to handle uncooperative passengers, and construction of the detention centres (on the sites of former POW camps, beyond the outskirts of towns) proved to be a slow process.[9] The illegal immigrants' resistance was improvised but highly effective and continued for several days. In the

9 Dalia Ofer, "Holocaust Survivors as Immigrants: The Case of Israel and the Cyprus Detainees," Modern Judaism 16 (1996) 1: 1–23.

end, though, the Yishuv's leaders realised that they had no choice, so the illegal immigrants were forcibly deported to Cyprus.[10]

This brought the JDC into the picture, because support for the detainees was handled by the organisation's staff in Palestine. Charles Passman, a former member of the advisory committee to the JDC in Palestine and now its director for the Middle East and the Balkans, tried to extend his work into Cyprus's detention camps. He made several trips to the island in a bid to coordinate the JDC's aid operations. British bureaucracy as well as the physical and mental condition of the detainees created a heavy workload. The JDC also recruited Rose Viteles, an American-born social worker and volunteer who had participated in a number of Zionist operations after moving to Palestine in 1925, to undertake social work on Cyprus. She volunteered to assist in managing one camp, but the workload proved to be too much for her.[11] As a result, the JDC's leaders hired US-born and -educated Morris Laub, who had already worked with refugees as a member of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Refugees in the Near East (UNRRA) delegation to Greece and later as the JDC's director in northern Italy.[12] He agreed to oversee the organisation's operations on Cyprus for three months, on the assumption that the camps would not last long. Upon arrival, though, he realised that the task was far greater than he had imagined, so he offered to extend his tenure by another year, if necessary. In the spring of 1947, he brought his wife and two young children to the city of Famagusta. They would remain there until February 1949, when the last of the detainees finally immigrated to Israel.[13]

Laub's first task was to professionalise and expand the JDC's activities on the island. Shortly after his arrival, the British opened the winter camps, which increased Laub's workload, so he hired Joshua Leibner – another American who was a representative of the Kibbutz movement but only wanted to be a shepherd – as his senior

10 See Nahum Bogner, The Deportation Island: Jewish Illegal Immigration Camps (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1991 [Hebrew]), 33; Arieh J. Kochavi, "The Struggle against Jewish Immigration to Palestine," Middle Eastern Studies 34 (1998) 3: 146–67. There were limited relations with the local Cypriots, mostly in the hospitals, as well as some forms of help and the sale of food to the JDC.

11 Bogner, Deportation Island, 57.

12 During his work in Italy, Laub worked with members of the Bricha and the Mossad for Aliyah B and therefore knew the needs of the illegal immigrants and the problems of the Displaced Persons. According to Bricha people, they asked him to come. See Bogner, Deportation Island, 81.

13 For more about Laub, see his memoirs: Morris Laub, Last Barrier to Freedom: Internment of Jewish Holocaust Survivors on Cyprus, 1946–1949 (Berkeley, CA: Magnes Museum, 1985).

deputy. Leibner and his family duly moved to Cyprus from Kibbutz Ein Hashofet in Palestine.[14]

Laub's most pressing priority, which continued throughout his tenure, was to increase the budget and scope of the JDC's activities on Cyprus. In addition to improving the detainees' standard of living and addressing their medical needs, he was determined to ensure that the British fulfilled their duty of care.[15] One of the first tasks was to increase the food quota. The British had imposed strict limits on the amount of food provided to the detainees, both because they were considered prisoners-of-war and because of the economic situation back in Britain, so the JDC sought and was eventually granted permission to supplement their meagre rations.[16] The organisation was also put in charge of the detainees' welfare and medical care. Four doctors, one dentist and eight nurses were already serving in the camps by the end of January 1947. JDC staff also ran the nursery and supplemented the supply of medicines with a number of drugs that the British authorities were either unable or unwilling to provide.[17] Detainees with psychiatric problems were transferred to the government psychiatric hospital on the island.[18]

Education and vocational training

Children and teenagers were in Cyprus's camps from the very beginning. Almost every ship that made the journey to the island, starting with the *Henrietta Szold*, which left Greece on 30 July 1946, carried children and youngsters from orphanages and Kfarei No'ar (youth villages, which were actually boarding schools which functioned as kibbutz for youngsters). These passengers comprised a significant proportion of the illegal immigrants to Palestine and some of them even participated in the struggle for the right to settle there. The large number of children, and the need to provide

14 Leibner complemented Laub by reducing the latter's workload and especially by maintaining continuous contact with the Yishuv in Eretz Israel, primarily through his network of fellow-Kibbutzniks. See Bogner, Deportation Island, 82; Laub, Last Barrier, 4–5.

15 Ibid., 20.

16 The JDC did so by importing flour, thus providing extra bread. Children up to the age of seventeen, pregnant women and the sick and debilitated received a daily supplement of about 700 calories. The extra food included fresh fruit and vegetables, milk and egg powder, honey and jam. See Bogner, Deportation Island, 84.

17 A shortage of medical staff meant that eighteen detainees worked informally as unpaid physicians for a few hours a week, assisting the physicians and dentists sent from Palestine.

18 However, in 1947, when the Mandate government permitted pregnant and breast-feeding women as well as old and sick inmates to leave the camps and enter Palestine, some mentally ill detainees were sent along with them. See Rakefet Zalashik and Nadav Davidovitch. "Measuring Adaptability: Psychological Examinations of Jewish Detainees in Cyprus Internment Camps," Science in Context 19 (2006) 3: 419–41.

a tailor-made programme for them, led to the decision to establish a youth village in Camp 65 to house orphans who had arrived alone. Youth movement counsellors attempted to recruit any children who were not already members and set about building an orderly and pleasant environment for them, in contrast to the poor living conditions in the adults' camps at this time.[19]

Figure 2: A Jewish girl works at a homemade loom

Source: JDC Archives, Photograph Collection, NY_12071.

Despite approving the separation of youngsters from adults, the British authorities did not grant any special privileges to the children's camp, and it was a struggle to arrange a clean water supply, medicines and beds. Luxuries such as books and classrooms were out of the question. By the end of May 1947, the number of children had increased to over 2,000, which prompted Laub to ask the British authorities to fulfil their humanitarian obligations and take care of them. In response, the British governor insisted that the camps were not his responsibility; instead, he requested

19 Bogner, Deportation Island, 122. The teenage girls on the Katriel Yaffe carried explosives on their bodies to try to damage the deportation ship to Cyprus.

military personnel to oversee them. Nevertheless, the JDC was granted permission to import study materials in the interest of providing the children with at least some mental stimulation.[20]

Figure 3: Children in a JDC classroom in one of the detention camps

Source: JDC Archives, Photograph Collection, NY_12228.

Many of the children were illiterate because they had failed to receive a proper education during the war years. Now they demanded to be taught solely in Hebrew, so the demand for books in that language was high,[21] as was the need for classrooms. Three separate groups of children were taught by the same teachers, in the same

20 Ibid., 128.

21 An example of a list of Hebrew books sent to Cyprus: "List of Hebrew Books with Vowelization," Cyprus Collection 1945–1949 570349, JDC Archives.

classroom, with the same textbooks, each day. Knowledge of Hebrew was the most important factor when deciding which group a new student would join, followed by general knowledge and only then age. In addition to teaching standard lessons, the school promoted Zionist values and celebrated Zionist holidays.[22]

Educational programmes were also established for adults in the other camps, but the teachers were not professionals and there were sometimes no chairs –or even walled classrooms – for the students. Nevertheless, there was a thirst for the Hebrew language and Zionist knowledge,[23] as one of the detainees explained in an impassioned letter that appeared in a magazine published in Cyprus by students of the Gutenberg Teachers' Seminar:

> A few weeks ago, you asked the Yishuv to help the Cyprus detainees by sending cigarettes, packages, clothing etc. I would like to express my opinion, which is not mine only, but every youth's opinion: we do not need gifts. We are fed up with the spoiled bread of the desert and the detention. We do not need any materials. We need teachers! Send us teachers! This is a call of despair. If you do not want youth educated in the diaspora's spirit, if you want us to come with anger and agony, if you want good soldiers, there is only one answer: send us teachers! Teachers!!![24]

The children – as well as their teachers and leaders of the Yishuv – understood the need for more teachers and the importance of education as a tool. They wanted the future state of Israel to have good citizens, which for them meant eradicating the spirit of the diaspora. They expected more teachers to be sent from Palestine to help them prepare for life in Israel.[25]

Many of the young people in Cyprus had spent much of the previous decade in Europe's ghettos and concentration camps, in hiding or on the run. Most were either completely untrained or had received minimal training in skills that would be next to useless in their new homeland. Therefore, it was clear to both the Jewish Agency and the JDC that they would have to organise more practical training in various trades and agricultural work.[26] However, at least initially, the primary purpose of this vocational training was simply to keep the detainees occupied. Once again, Morris Laub

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22 "Report on Schools in Cyprus Camps," 27 September 1948, Cyprus Collection 1945–1949 562883, JDC Archives.

23 Letter No. 127 from Morris Laub to Paris Education Dept. "Re: Education and Cultural Work in Cyprus Camps," 24 May 1948, Jerusalem Collection 1944–1952 2771397, JDC Archives.

24 Letter from JDC Tel Aviv to Cyprus Refugees Welfare Committee "Regarding Joint Training Seminar in Cyprus," 28 September 1948, Cyprus Collection 1945–1949 562919, JDC Archives [Hebrew; my translation].

25 Shimon Reshef and Yuval Dror, Hebrew Education in the Years of the National Homeland (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1999 [Hebrew]), 125.

26 For more about the Jewish Agency, see: Ernest Stock, "The Reconstitution of the Jewish Agency: A Political Analysis," American Jewish Year Book 73 (1972): 178–93; Adi Pinhas and

requested support in the form of funding, some designated spaces for the workshops and help in building them,[27] but the British authorities were far from enthusiastic about his plans. The JDC staff attributed this reluctance to the fact that the military commander on the island believed that the camps would soon be evacuated, so any investment in new buildings and equipment would go to waste.[28]

Meanwhile, a series of meetings in Palestine debated the important issues of course content and funding. The Jewish Agency's staff devised various professional programmes, including training in printing, construction, shoemaking, sewing, cooking and tailoring, and formulated a work plan and estimated budget for each course.[29] There was agreement in principle that the costs would be shared equally by the JDC and the Jewish Agency. The former would be responsible for implementing the programme, while the latter would bear the costs for the content, which it would coordinate. The JDC's investment would be split into two stages: first, purchase of basic equipment and construction of workshops; then regular monthly payments to cover acquisition of further equipment and instructors' salaries.[30] In Cyprus, as in other places, the JDC was well aware of the Yishuv leadership's views on what detainees en route to Eretz Israel should be taught, and it attempted to implement them.[31]

Cultural integration: Shoshana Damari

The number of detainees on Cyprus started to increase in the months leading up to Passover 1948, so the Yishuv's leaders and the JDC organised a "Passover Package" to boost the spirits of those they considered members of their exiled family. On board the ship, in addition to holiday food and specially printed Haggadot, were the singer Shoshana Damari and the composer Moshe Wilensky. After arriving in Cyprus, the

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Ori Arbel-Ganz, "Do Institutions Matter in the Age of Governance? The Jewish Agency as a Metaphor," Israel Affairs 25 (2019) 1: 185–203.

27 Memorandum of conversation, 19 June 1947, Cyprus Collection 1945–1949 569402, JDC Archives.

28 "Vocational Training," 22 January 1948, Cyprus Collection 1945–1949 569260, JDC Archives; "Vocational Training," 22 January 1948, Geneva Collection 1945–1954 753696, JDC Archives.

29 "Vocational Training Program Agreement," 22 October 1947, Cyprus Collection 1945–1949 569383, JDC Archives; "Monthly Material Requirements for Workshops under A and Ax," Cyprus Collection 1945–1949 569314, JDC Archives.

30 Boris Joffe, "Education in Europe," 10 March 1947, Geneva Collection 1945–1954 753700, JDC Archives.

31 Meeting summary, 4 July 1947, Cyprus Collection 1945–1949 569392, JDC Archives; meeting summary, Cyprus Collection 1945–1949 569410, JDC Archives; meeting minutes, 6 August 1947, Cyprus Collection 1945–1949 569305, JDC Archives; summary, 21 October 1947, Cyprus Collection 1945–1949 569289, JDC Archives.

duo made their way to the camps and performed a series of concerts – often several in a single day – for the detainees. The set list reflected a deep understanding of the audience's composition, aspirations and tastes as it included holiday songs, Zionist songs, children's songs and even a few Yiddish songs that brought tears to the eyes of many.

After hailing Damari's visit as a cultural highlight for the camps, an article in the *Davar* newspaper quoted Moshe Brachman, director of the Committee for the Exiles of Cyprus, who claimed that the detainees had memorised every word and kept every copy of the 10,000 concert programmes the committee had printed and distributed.[32] Meanwhile, Morris Laub wrote to Charles Malamuth, the JDC's spokesman, to suggest that the organisation should make full use of Damari by sending her on a European tour. He considered the singer and Wilensky as paragons of Israeli culture.[33]

Case study: the National Security Fund

For the leaders of the Yishuv, mobilisation of the people and the economy for the war effort was paramount in a period of escalating violence and the transition from Jewish community to statehood. Financing was provided through the collection of taxes, the sale of government bonds, national loans and fundraising campaigns. For example, the economic committee, a subcommittee of the ad hoc committee founded by the Jewish Agency and the Yishuv's National Council (Va'ad Leumi), conceived a campaign to raise half a million Palestine pounds. The administrators insisted that all members of the Yishuv must participate, regardless of status or political persuasion.[34]

The resulting National Security Fund (Magbit l'Bitahon Ha'Am) targeted specific individuals with substantial capital, such as businessmen, factory-owners and bankers, as well as the general public. Volunteers, mostly youth, went door-to-door collecting between two and six Palestine pounds according to each resident's ability and willingness to contribute. By the end of the campaign, the fund had raised 350,000 pounds from affluent individuals and 150,000 from the general public. David Ben-Gurion (later Israel's first prime minister) perceived the fund's success as a testament to the Yishuv's willingness to commit to the cause following the establishment of the emergency state. Nevertheless, according to an estimate made

32 A. Kinarti, "Shoshana Damari in Cyprus," Davar, 28 May 1948.

33 Letter from M. Laub to Mr Ch. Malamuth, "Re: Mrs Shoshana Damari – Singer," 2 May 1948, Jerusalem Collection 1944–1952 2771152, JDC Archives.

34 Yitzhak Greenberg, "Financing the War of Independence," Studies in Zionism 19 (1988) 1: 63–80.

by Eliezer Kaplan (a Zionist activist and the Yishuv's treasurer who would later become Israel's first treasury minister), around 63 per cent of his compatriots avoided paying their fair share and therefore shirked what he considered their essential national duty. Consequently, the National Security Fund's executive committee explored several ways in which contributions might be increased in the future.[35]

Although fundraising for security purposes was compulsory only for residents of Mandate Palestine, the detainees on Cyprus took it upon themselves to collect donations in response to a document, written in Yiddish by the Committee for National Security in March 1948, which encouraged people on the island to make contributions in the interest of safeguarding the residents of Eretz Israel. The appeal went on to explain that the only difference between the two groups was that the latter had received a certificate to enter Palestine whereas the former were still waiting for one. It concluded: "Let us be genuine and worthy of being the last generation of prosperity and the first generation of salvation."[36] Although it had no real authority in the camps, the Committee for National Security established strict guidelines for how the donations should be collected, and the social pressure it exerted persuaded many of the detainees to hand over much of the little they had.[37] In addition to money, there were substantial donations of treasured belongings, including silver kiddush goblets, gold wedding rings and other pieces of jewellery. Of course, all of these items would have had great sentimental as well as monetary value, but the detainees were determined to give as much as they could.[38]

The camps' extraordinary generosity attracted the attention of the fundraising coordinators in Palestine, who sent a letter of sincere thanks on the eve of Passover 1948:

> With reverence and tears of gratitude we received your contribution towards the protection of the people and the land. Every penny you saved from bits of sustenance, every dismantled piece of jewellery, brought with them not only encouragement to those standing in battle but something greater than that: strengthened faith in the eternity of Israel. If, after what you have been through, you have found in the depths of your soul the courage for the establishment of a nation,

35 Moshe Naor, "From Voluntary Funds to National Loans: The Financing of Israel's 1948 War Effort," Israel Studies 11 (2006) 3: 62–82.

36 Letter from Committee for National Security in Cyprus Camps to Committee for National Security Campaign, "Summer Camps," 1 March 1948, Jerusalem Collection 1944–1952 2771063, JDC Archives.

37 Declaration in Yiddish, 2 March 1948, Jerusalem Collection 1944–1952 2771062, JDC Archives.

38 For example, see: covering letter from Camp 70 Secretariat to Central Fund for National Security, "Regarding Donations from Cyprus Detainees," 17 May 1948, Jerusalem Collection 1944–1952 2770983, JDC Archives; cover letter from I. Yaacobovsky to Magbit Habitachon Management, "Regarding Donations Account," 10 August 1948, Jerusalem Collection 1944–1952 2770938, JDC Archives.

> for public organisation and for contributions, you and we shall be blessed. We believe in complete faith: the brand plucked from the fire will be planted in the homeland and will flourish and prosper.[39]

As is clear from this letter, the Yishuv appreciated that the detainees had sacrificed a great deal to make such a substantial contribution to the cause. Moreover, it shows that they knew the camps' generosity was a manifestation of the residents' determination to make their own way to Eretz Israel. The leaders in the camps already saw themselves as integral parts of the Yishuv's institutions, while the detainees saw themselves as citizens of the future state of Israel whose arrival had merely been delayed by a set of unfortunate circumstances.

The camps officially closed in February 1949, whereupon the majority of detainees immediately immigrated to Israel. However, two groups remained on Cyprus: young men of fighting age whom the British wanted to keep away from the conflict in Israel and individuals who were too sick to travel. The British authorities subsequently repurposed most of the camps' building materials, and today only a small museum – housed in a reconstructed hut – remains on one of the sites.

Summary

Life in the tents and huts of Cyprus's detention camps was characterised by significant physical and emotional strain. The lack of privacy and the fact that the detainees were often treated as if they were prisoners-of-war made daily life unpleasant. On the other hand, many of the detainees reassured themselves that they were merely on an extended stopover en route to the Promised Land. This explains why they devoted so much time and effort to learning Hebrew, the customs of the Yishuv and even the songs of Eretz Israel. In some ways, mainly because they knew it was only a matter of time before they would become legal citizens of Israel, they even acted as if they were already residents and donated much of the little they had to the nascent state's coffers.

The refugees on Cyprus were unique because they symbolised a conflict between two opposing forces. On one side were the British authorities in Palestine – and on Cyprus – who had resolved to control the number of people entering the country and thereby its demographic composition. On the other were the illegal immigrants who viewed entering Mandate Palestine as their natural right, especially given all they had endured during the war and were still enduring as refugees in post-war

39 Thank-you letter from Magbit Hitgaisut, 19 April 1948, Jerusalem Collection 1944–1952 2770984, [Hebrew; my translation].

Europe. Thus, Cyprus's detainees were important players in an international conflict between pre-war imperialism and post-war self-determination.

Only an organisation without any political affiliation, such as the JDC, could step in to resolve the complex humanitarian crisis that had arisen on Cyprus. On the one hand, it had the means and the organisational ability to provide desperately needed basic humanitarian aid as well as cultural and educational programmes that gave the detainees' current lives some meaning and helped them prepare for their future lives in Israel. On the other hand, it was not perceived as a Zionist organisation, so the British authorities allowed its workers and teachers to enter the camps and provide these services. By operating under the British radar in this way, the JDC was able to help a group of people who had been denied the opportunity to become citizens of Eretz Israel to transform themselves into better citizens of the state of Israel.