

Misplaced British Subjects: Balkan Maltese in Transit 1941 -1949

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Abstract

The focus of this thesis is a case study of British overseas evacuation policy during the second World War: the evacuation of Balkan Maltese British subjects from Turkey by the Foreign Office and their subsequent relocations during the post-war period. This group was first evacuated to India in 1941/42 and finally accommodated at the British Evacuee Camp at Coimbatore in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. Following Indian independence they were transferred to Eritrea in East Africa in January 1948 which was under a British Military Administration. After eighteen months here the 'hard core' relocated to Cyprus where it was hoped they would resettle permanently. Including time in camps, these Balkan Maltese evacuees spent eight years in transit. Their length of time on the move sets them apart from thousands of other British subjects or citizens who were evacuated during the Second World War. Usually evacuees returned to where they had been domiciled prior to evacuation. However, the British government did not wish to send the Balkan Maltese evacuees back to Turkey if they could avoid it. Many had been living in poverty, facing destitution prior to the war as the Turkish government had essentially banned foreigners domiciled in the country from working. The plan was to resettle the group of evacuees somewhere within the British Commonwealth so they could establish new lives, be self-supporting and no longer be a financial burden to the United Kingdom. As the thesis demonstrates this was no easy task.

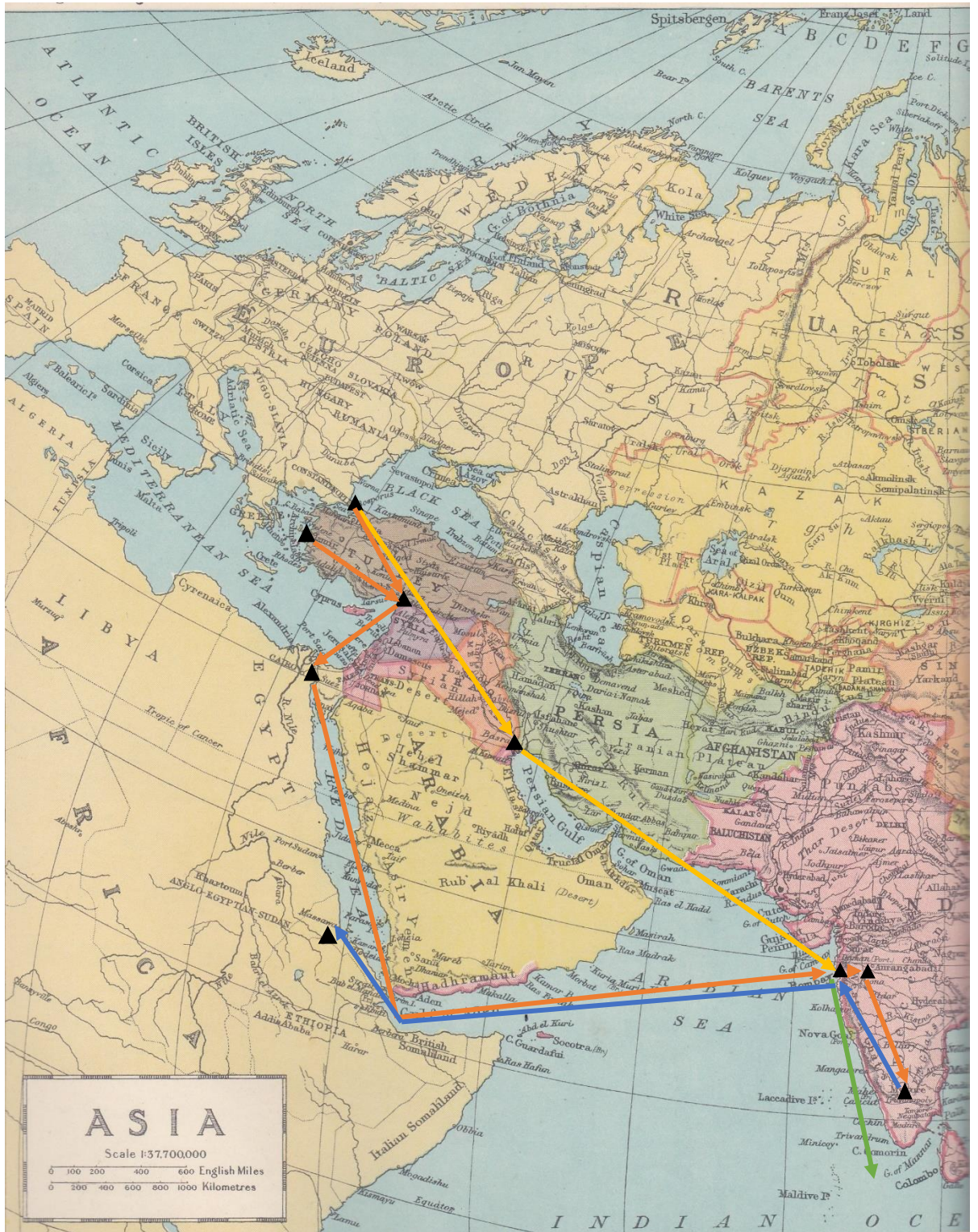
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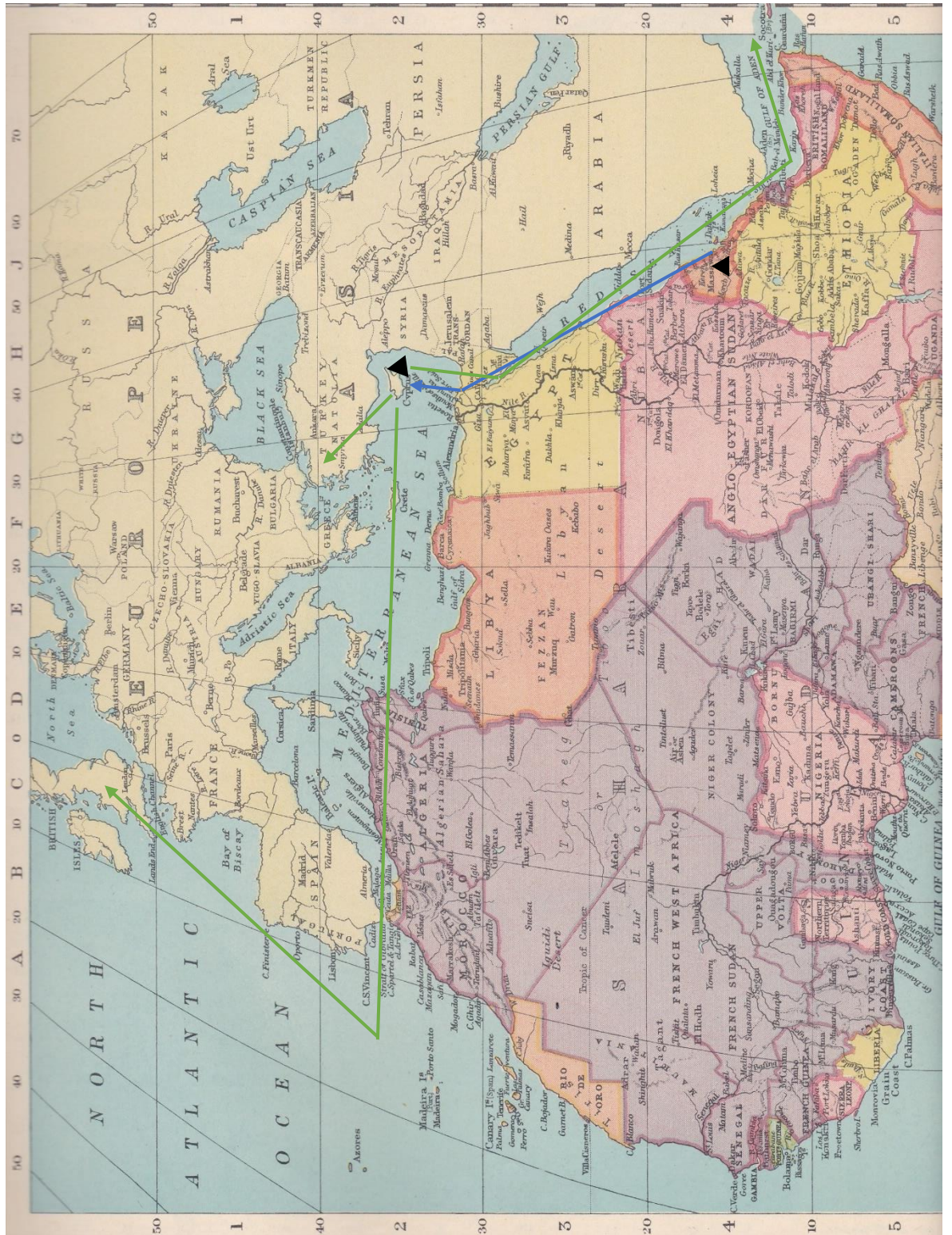
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- Istanbul – Basra – Bombay Route —
- Istanbul – Iskenderun – Port Said Route —
- Coimbatore, India to Massawa, Eritrea —
- Bombay to Australia —

Map I Transit Routes 1941 - 1948

Source: *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th Edition (London: The Encyclopaedia Britannica Company Ltd, 1929/32)



Massawa, Eritrea to Cyprus —

Cyprus – Australia, Turkey, and UK —

Map II Transit Routes 1949 and beyond

Source: *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th Edition (London: The Encyclopaedia Britannica Company Ltd, 1929/32)

Introduction

From Istanbul to Melbourne: Mrs Victoria Briguglio



The caption describing this photograph reads: ‘At left, Mrs Victoria Briguglio, of Eritrea, Africa, waves a happy greeting to Melbourne from the deck of the ship’.¹ It was one of two images used to show passengers who had recently arrived on the *Toscana* in May 1950. Although it seems posed, the attractive young woman looks happy, and was intended to represent an ideal migrant to Australia in the post-war era – a ‘New Australian’.

Mrs Briguglio had arrived with her husband and young son from Eritrea, a former Italian colony in East Africa.² As her surname suggests she was – at least by marriage – Italian, but it was not her nationality by birth. She was a former Maltese evacuee, evacuated with her family in 1941 among hundreds of members of the Maltese communities in Istanbul and Smyrna, Turkey. They were included in a precautionary evacuation of British subjects in the event of Axis forces invading. Via two routes the evacuees and other British subjects from the Balkans were transported to India and spent six years in a camp at Coimbatore. In early 1948, Victoria – now aged seventeen – was moved again with the Maltese evacuee group to another camp at Mai Habar, Eritrea.

It was here that she met her future husband, Natale Briguglio, but for the first time parted company with her family – parents Stephen and Mary Borg, and brothers George and Simon.³ In mid-1949 the Maltese evacuees were moved yet again to another camp in Cyprus. Victoria remained in Eritrea with Natale and their son John was born at Asmara in early 1950. The young family then migrated to Australia, settling in Melbourne. Mrs Briguglio duly filled in an ‘application for registration’ as required under the Aliens Act, 1947. However, she found that this was not required as she could prove British nationality

¹ ‘Everyone was so glad to arrive’, *The Argus*, 24 May 1950, p.7.

² See Incoming Passenger List, *Toscana*, 15 May 1950, National Archives of Australia (NAA): K269 Series, digital copy.

³ A record of the family is given in ‘Nominal Roll of Evacuees Mai Habar Camp’ in ‘Proposal to settle Maltese refugees in India in British Occupied Territories in Africa’, The National Archives, Kew (TNA): FO 1015/53.

with her birth certificate.⁴ (Wherever they were domiciled any person with Maltese heritage could claim British subject status, as the island of Malta was a British Crown Colony). This was her journey's end - one that had crossed several continents – but not the end of her family's story.

The focus of this thesis is a case study of British overseas evacuation policy: the evacuation of Balkan Maltese British subjects from Turkey by the Foreign Office during the Second World War and their subsequent relocations during the post-war period. As summarised by Victoria's experience, this group was first evacuated to India in 1941 and after time in several temporary camps, finally accommodated at the British Evacuee Camp at Coimbatore in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. Following Indian independence they were transferred to Eritrea in East Africa in January 1948 which was under a British Military Administration. After eighteen months here the 'hard core' was relocated to Cyprus where it was hoped they would resettle permanently. Including time in camps, these Balkan Maltese evacuees spent eight years in transit.

Thousands of British subjects or citizens were evacuated during the Second World War (see tables below), but what sets the Balkan Maltese apart is the length of their time on the move. Usually evacuees returned to where they had been domiciled prior to evacuation or returned to Britain if this was not possible. For example, civilians from the Channel Islands were sent to northern England and to Glasgow, Scotland, but returned home at the end of the war, while expatriate women and children evacuated from Hong Kong to Australia tended to return to the United Kingdom. However, the British government did not wish to send the Balkan Maltese evacuees back to Turkey if they could avoid it. Many had been living in poverty, facing destitution prior to the war as the Turkish government had essentially banned foreigners domiciled in the country from working. As 'British subjects' they could apply for relief payments distributed by British Consuls.

The plan was to resettle the group of evacuees somewhere within the British Commonwealth so they could establish new lives, be self-supporting and no longer a financial burden to the United Kingdom. As the thesis demonstrates this was no easy task for a number of reasons. In the post-war period the Balkan Maltese evacuees were small fry in a sea teeming with European displaced persons who were much more desirable migrants for countries such as Australia, Canada, the United States, and the UK itself. All wanted their pick of the best displaced persons (who were desperate to resettle) in order to boost

⁴ See 'Application for Registration' and other correspondence in 'Turkish Briguglio V. M.', NAA: BP 25/1, digital copy.

populations and provide workers to help fire up war weary economies. The Second World War had created a huge humanitarian crisis, and it was the task of the United Nations and its agencies to solve this dilemma. As British subjects, the Maltese evacuees from Turkey remained the responsibility of the UK Government.

An additional issue which is also explored, is the British subject status of the Balkan Maltese evacuees – and their dubious reputation. Maltese communities in Turkey (mainly Istanbul and Smyrna) were part of the Maltese diaspora settled around the Mediterranean seaboards. Most had been domiciled outside of Malta for several generations and had a superficial affiliation to the island, but kept a distinct cultural identity centred around the Roman Catholic faith. However, a connection to Malta – a British Crown Colony – provided a claim to British subject status, which the British Government honoured, while Malta itself, over time, refused to take any responsibility for them. They were, in a nutshell non-Malta-born, Maltese British subjects. However this did not mean that they were considered to be deserving of this status. The term ‘British subject’ was one that unified all ethnicities and nationalities within the British Empire.⁵ In this sense it described a collective identity but did it apply to those who had migrated away and settled outside its boundaries? Was it possible to differentiate between a Maltese in Malta and a member of the Maltese diaspora settled in a foreign country?

As far as the British Government was concerned, on the surface there was no difference at all, but there was resentment that non-Malta-born Maltese in Turkey claimed British subject status and through this protection of the Crown which usually meant legal defence and financial support in times of need (see below). However, if they decided not to assist them, this may have caused offence to the Government of Malta. During the Second World War when Malta (a strategic allied air and naval base) and its population were under siege from Axis forces it would have been undiplomatic to leave expatriate Maltese behind during an evacuation which ostensibly encompassed all British subjects. The Balkan Maltese were in this category, but were also a sub-class, being southern European in origin whereas British-born expatriates in the Balkans were automatically included in any evacuation plan. The discriminatory aspect of evacuation planning is explored in this thesis, and how the Colonial Office stepped in to ensure evacuation was open to all British subjects.

⁵ For discussion of British subject status within the British Empire and the notion of imperial citizenship see Daniel Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship: Empire and the Question of Belonging* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Daniel Gorman, ‘Wider and Wider Still? Racial Politics, Intra-Imperial Immigration and the Absence of an Imperial Citizenship in the British Empire’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 3:3, (2002), online at: [Project MUSE - Wider and Wider Still?: Racial Politics, Intra-Imperial Immigration and the Absence of an Imperial Citizenship in the British Empire \(jhu.edu\)](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2346444); Donal Lowry, ‘The Crown, Empire Loyalty and the Assimilation of non-British White Subjects in the British World: An argument against ‘Ethnic Determinism’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 31:2, (2003) pp. 96-120.

Throughout their time as evacuees, the Balkan Maltese acquired a disagreeable reputation and exasperated British officials charged with their care. Some were characterised as being tricky, untrustworthy, and needing a firm hand. On the other hand, mention was made of others as hardworking and reliable, so a bit of a mixed bag. However, the way in which Balkan Maltese were perceived predates their evacuation and certainly influenced those they came into contact with. In fact, ex-patriate Maltese settled within the Levant area of the Eastern Mediterranean (including Turkey) had, during the nineteenth and early twentieth Centuries, been labelled by British consuls in the area as troublesome to say the least. Such a description was directed at itinerant Maltese who washed up in the major port towns and cities of the Levant including Constantinople, Smyrna, and Alexandria in Egypt. The British Government had a responsibility to protect its imperial subjects wherever they were domiciled. Consuls had been appointed in Turkey since the founding of the Levant Company, but a more formalised system was not set up until the creation of the Levant Consular Service in 1877.⁶

During the Victorian period, their reputation cropped up in debates in the House of Commons which were recorded in *Hansard*. It is clear from remarks made by Mr Austen Henry Layard (MP) that these Maltese were an embarrassment. Layard was a Liberal politician who had spent time as an unofficial assistant to the British Ambassador in Constantinople during the 1840s. In recounting an anecdote about the Ambassador - Sir Stratford Canning – he used the word ‘rascally’ to describe an Ionian or Maltese who had been imprisoned by the Turkish police.⁷ This was a mild, even benign description compared to the comments made in a debate during 1854. Layard complained that some individuals – Ionian and Maltese – who swarmed to the Levant were ‘a disgrace to England’.

There is not a murder in Constantinople or in parts of the Levant which cannot also invariably be traced to a British subject or to a Greek, but generally to a British subject. If you send the criminals to Malta or the Ionian islands, you

⁶ See D. C. M. Platt, *Cinderella Service: British Consuls Since 1825* (London: Longman, 1971); Geoff Berridge, *British Diplomacy in Turkey, 1583 to the Present* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 2009); Despina Vlami, *Trading with the Ottomans: The Levant Company in the Middle East* (London: I. Tauris & Co, 2015); Peter Byrd, ‘Regional and Functional Specialisation in the British Consular Service’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, 7:1, 1972, pp. 127-145; Gordon L. Iseminger, ‘The Old Turkish Hands: The British Levantine Consuls, 1856 – 1876’ *Middle East Journal*, 22:3, (1968), pp. 297–316.

⁷ Sir Austen Henry Layard, *Autobiography and Letters from His Childhood until His Appointment as H M Ambassador at Madrid* (London: John Murray, 1903), p.86. Layard later served as Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs from 1861 to 1866 and was appointed British Ambassador at Istanbul, holding the post between 1877 – 1880. See John Fisher, ‘The Forward View: Austen Henry Layard and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877’ *Maghreb Review*, 47:3, 2020, available at: [The forward view: Austen Henry Layard and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 \(worktribe.com\)](https://www.worktribe.com/2020/07/20/the-forward-view-austen-henry-layard-and-the-russo-turkish-war-of-1877/)

cannot get any native court or jury to convict them ... these men are a disgrace to the protection we are called to afford them.⁸

Maltese and Ionians tended to be lumped together in the eyes of British officials. The Ionian islands off the west coast of Greece came under British protection in 1815 having been previously occupied by the Italians and French.⁹ It is evident from reading a selection of contemporary sources, including travel journals and memoirs, that both groups were viewed as an under-class. This is not to say that all Maltese domiciled in Turkey caused problems; there were those of the artisan class as well as merchants, business owners and some professionals whose conduct was good – according to British standards.

John Reid, a traveller, for example, writes about the Maltese in quite unflattering terms, stating that those living in the Galata and Pera areas of Constantinople had ‘as they have everywhere else, a notorious bad character; there is scarcely a robbery or riot in which they have not an active share’.¹⁰ Charles Macfarlane (another traveller) observed that in Smyrna:

...it is affirmed by nearly everyone here that the perpetrators of all these offences are our subjects, the Maltese, and our protected subjects, the Greeks of the Ionian Islands. Truly they are a desperate rabblement and a numerous! When they make Smyrna too hot for them, they take a run up to Constantinople; and when enquiries after them become too pressing in Constantinople, they take a run back to Smyrna. Of the two the Maltese are esteemed the greater and expert thieves and the Ionians the readier stabbers and assassins.¹¹

As Layard had pointed out during the parliamentary debate mentioned above, it was very difficult for British authorities to instil any discipline in or administer proper punishment to these two groups. This in part led to the appointment of Edmund Hornby to the position of

⁸ ‘Greek Insurrection in Turkey’, *Hansard*, Volume 131, 13 March 1854, available online at: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/>

⁹ Under the Treaty of Paris, the Ionian Islands were ceded to Britain, remaining a protectorate until 1864 when they became part of the kingdom of Greece. Like Maltese, Ionians tended to migrate around the Levant, too. See Anthony Hurst and Patrick Sammon (eds) *The Ionian Islands: Aspects of their History and Culture* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

¹⁰ John Reid, *Turkey and the Turks: Being the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Robert Tyas, 1840), p. 143.

¹¹ Charles Macfarlane, *Turkey and its Destiny, Volume I*, (London: John Murray, 1850) p. 29. See also pp. 60-61.

chief judge of the Supreme Consular Court at Constantinople in 1857, an institution created following his recommendations to the Foreign Office.¹² Despite this involvement Hornby's only remark about the Maltese and Ionians in his memoir was that they were 'scoundrelly'.¹³

Even with British consular courts dispensing justice, and the creation of the Levant Consular Service, Maltese communities within Turkey still posed a challenge. Recalling his time as Vice-Consul in Smyrna during the late 1880s, A. C. Wratislaw estimated that two-thirds of the 2,000 British residents there were Maltese, the remaining being English. The former were 'for the most part poor, and a good many of them, I regret to say, disreputable. They constantly quarrelled amongst themselves, got into trouble with the Turkish police, and in one way or another gave the consulate an infinity of trouble'.¹⁴

This situation became further complicated by the Turkish government's decision to bring in a law in June 1932 which prohibited foreign nationals from working in the country. Although it did not immediately come into effect (this was postponed until 1934), it would be the cause of increasing hardship on all British subjects domiciled in there.¹⁵ Maltese British subjects, whether hard working individuals or the rascals and scoundrels as previously described, could apply for consular support. In other words, this financial aid could be exploited.

Such evidence provides insight into how established the shady reputation of Maltese communities in Turkey was. In the main, they were an irritant and embarrassment to representatives of the British Government who felt compelled to give them support, but also to travellers touring the Levant. They were perceived as an underclass, grudgingly acknowledged as British subjects, but prone to causing trouble. As will be seen throughout this thesis, this opinion was perpetuated by British officials who came into contact with the Balkan Maltese evacuees during their time in transit. It was also shared by staff within the various British government departments involved in their evacuation and resettlement.

¹² See Sir Edmund Hornby, *An Autobiography* (Boston: Houghton Muffin, 1928).

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 79.

¹⁴ A. C. Wratislaw, *A Consul in the East* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1924), p. 71.

¹⁵ See for example correspondence in Consular Department: General Correspondence, Turkey, Code 244, 1935, TNA: FO 369/2433, K3657; also K2414.

British Overseas Evacuation Planning and Implementation

This section explores the process of how - and by whom - evacuation schemes for British subjects domiciled in foreign countries or in British colonies and territories were devised and implemented if required. It then leads into a summary of evacuations which took place both within and into the British imperial world, including the relocation of Balkan Maltese British subjects to India.

In the history of the Second World War the mass evacuation of children within Britain, known as Operation Pied Piper, has always been a dominant topic. This evacuation was part of an integrated civil (or passive) defence strategy formulated by the British Government during the 1920s and 1930s in response to the perceived greater threat of air raids and their impact upon civilian populations. During the First World War, and later more dramatically in the Spanish Civil War there had been air attacks in civilian areas including, most famously, on the Basque town of Guernica where in one day it is estimated over 1,600 people were killed (April 1937). The British government set up several advisory committees and sub-committees to devise a scheme of Air Raid Precautions measures (ARP) such as forming auxiliary fire brigades, barrage balloons and trenches (shelter from bombing), and to assess the need for evacuation of civilians to areas of safety.¹⁶ This began with the Committee of Imperial Defence which created an ARP sub-committee for this purpose in 1923 (and also one for evacuation), then after the escalation of tensions in Europe in the 1930s, the Anderson Committee was set up in 1938. Under the chair of Sir John Anderson, this group was tasked to look at the logistics of transferring people in times of war from areas at risk of aerial bombardment to reception areas. Its recommendations were then translated into a 'practical plan' by the Ministry of Health in 1938 which had itself appointed an advisory committee on the evacuation of school children and mothers and babies, the principal groups requiring relocation.¹⁷

Briefly this plan (Operation Pied Piper) covered all cities and towns classified as targets for enemy aerial attack.¹⁸ It divided the country into Evacuation, Neutral and Reception areas

¹⁶ Niko Gartner, 'Administering 'Operation Pied Piper' – How London County Council prepared the evacuation of its school children 1938 -1939', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 42:1, (2010), pp.17-32.

¹⁷ John Welshman, *Churchill's Children: The Evacuation Experience in Wartime Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.20-21; Gartner, 'Administering 'Operation Pied Piper''.

¹⁸ See for example Richard Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (London: HMSO and Longmans, Green & Co., 1950); Penny Starns and Penny Legg, *Escaping the Blitz: The Myths and Mayhem of Evacuation in the Second World War* (Devizes: Sabrestorm Publishing, 2021); Sue Wheatcroft, *Worth Saving: Disabled Children during the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

and identified the groups eligible for evacuation: school children; younger children accompanied by mothers or a responsible person; expectant mothers; adults with disabilities who could be moved. Detailed timetables were also worked out for transporting evacuees to reception areas where they were met by billeting officers and volunteers. School children travelled in their own groups accompanied by teachers and most child evacuees were accommodated in private homes although some camps were used. Registration was required to be included in the evacuation; however, this was voluntary not compulsory. The finer details of evacuation planning and implementation were worked out by local councils in both evacuation and reception areas as officials and volunteers there had the best knowledge of their own area and resources available for example transport and reception venues.

On a wider scale it is worth noting the civil defence policy developed for the United Kingdom was matched in dominions, colonies and territories throughout the British Commonwealth both prior to and after the outbreak of the Second World War and was activated as necessary. This was especially the case of colonies in the Far East after Japan entered the conflict in December 1941 for example Singapore and Malaya, both of which suffered aerial attacks. An ARP scheme was actually in place in Hong Kong by 1937 prompted by Japanese incursions in China, while India, Burma and Ceylon also had their own civil defence strategies. In Delhi measures included blackouts and ARP drills while in Bengal firefighting units, first aid posts and ambulance services were set up.¹⁹ The British naval stations of Malta and Gibraltar also had civil defence in place, essential for protecting civilian populations from aerial attacks including specially constructed shelters. All four dominions implemented their own schemes although risk of air attacks was low, apart from in the Australia. The Japanese Airforce carried out a campaign of bombing during 1942 – 1943 on targets in the north including Darwin. So in many of these locations, as is seen in the following section, evacuation was a necessary part of a civil defence strategy that was adopted and adapted throughout the British Empire.

However, the evacuation of British subjects domiciled in foreign countries or imperial colonies and territories differed fundamentally from the home evacuation scheme in that it was not about morale on the ‘home front’ which was behind Operation Pied Piper. In fact, in colonial settings, for example in Malaya and Singapore, the emphasis was often on expatriate communities staying to bolster local morale rather than leaving prematurely. The aim was to evacuate civilian men, women and children to safety – sometimes over considerable distances. However, the steps taken to organise an evacuation overseas in a

¹⁹ Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War: A People's History of India's Second World War* (London: Vintage, 2015), pp. 88 and 108.

time of conflict were very similar to the British home evacuation scheme. The list below has been compiled by analysing multiple secondary and archival sources regarding overseas evacuations of British subjects.²⁰ Briefly the following actions were taken by British officials or representatives in the colony, territory or foreign state for example from Aden:

- (1) A register of eligible British subjects compiled, transportation needs identified and a reception destination arranged. Plan circulated to British officials.
- (2) In the event of plan being put into action, British subjects warned to prepare for evacuation.
- (3) Evacuees advised to proceed to rendezvous point to board transportation.
- (4) Journey to reception location where accommodation and assistance is available.

The responsibility for British subjects requiring evacuation outside of the United Kingdom, lay with several government departments – the Foreign Office, Colonial Office, War Office, and to a lesser extent, the India and Burma Offices. In certain cases evacuation proposals, logistical issues, or when to activate an evacuation was discussed at Cabinet level acting on advice from the Chiefs of Staff, for example. This happened in December 1941 when it was recommended that steps were taken to evacuate *bouche inutiles* from Singapore.²¹ A search of Cabinet Papers indicates that discussions regarding evacuation were predominately from a military perspective, focusing on the removal of service families and civilians from strategic bases such as Gibraltar, Alexandria, Malta, Singapore, as well as from Burma, the Middle East, and Egypt where Britain also had a strong military presence.²² The rationale behind this was to clear non-combatants quickly and efficient either prior to conflict or from war zones so they were not a hindrance to military forces. Additionally evacuation prevented

²⁰ Secondary sources are footnoted in the following section. Archival sources for overseas evacuation of British subjects consulted at The National Archives and India Office include: CO 83/238/3 (Fiji); CO 54/985/3 (Ceylon); CO 825/31/12 (Singapore); CO 968/23/4 (Fanning and Gilbert and Ellice Islands); DO 35/1140 (Far East evacuees and welfare in South Africa); DO 35/722/10 (Far East Evacuees, South Africa); FO 624/22/54 (Iraq); WO 106/2515 (Malaya); IOR/R/20/B/1786 – 1790 (Aden); IOR/R/20/B/1797 (British Somaliland). Additional files are referenced in this and the following section.

²¹ See Conclusions of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at Downing Street on 22 December 1941, TNA: CAB 65/20/26.

²² Cabinet papers are held at The National Archives. See: CAB 65, War Cabinet and Cabinet: Minutes, WM (War Minutes) and CM (Cabinet Minutes) Series (digitised); CAB 78, Miscellaneous Committees: Minutes and Papers (Misc. and GEN) Series; CAB 79 and 80, Chiefs of Staff Committee.

expatriate British subjects – provided they agreed to leave - from internment by the enemy. Secretaries of State attended War Cabinet meetings, including those representing the departments listed above, for example Anthony Eden (FO) and Leo Amery (IO) and Viscount Cranbourne (CO) who on occasion presented memorandum concerning evacuation policy or implementation.²³ As the absence of discussion of other evacuation planning and implementation for British subjects residing overseas suggests, decisions regarding these were taken within the office of the relevant Secretary of State on behalf of the British Government. This is demonstrated at the beginning of Chapter One in an extract of a telegram from the Foreign Office to consuls in the Middle East in May 1941 advising them to ‘set in motion the Mackereth evacuation scheme’.

Moreover, as is shown in this thesis with the case study of the evacuation of Balkan Maltese from Turkey, the hard graft of planning and organisation lay with officials or representatives on the ground and by under-secretaries and others lower down the hierarchy within the relevant government offices. This included deciding which British subjects were eligible for evacuation schemes, finding transport, and securing agreement that groups would be accepted with proposed destinations. Planning also required cooperation between government departments to achieve a workable proposal for each evacuation. This aspect is described in the first chapter of the thesis which examines the Mackereth Evacuation Scheme

Again, by analysing information in secondary and archival sources it is possible to identify a formula that emerged for the evacuation of British subjects overseas. This could be applied in any situation (see above), and tailored to fit the actual circumstances, though it might exclude certain categories of ‘British subjects’. An evacuation from a foreign country included anyone with British subject status whether born in the U.K. or having family roots there; from a country within the Empire/Commonwealth, or married to a British national. Sometimes, British subject status was tenuous, especially when the person or family had lived abroad for many years, even generations. This was noted with the Maltese evacuated from Turkey as previously mentioned. The ability to speak English also reinforced a person’s status as a British subject but when this was limited or non-existent it raised questions about entitlement for evacuation. Reception countries such as India and Australia preferred competence in English language and literacy as it helped with employment prospects. The Foreign Office, which organised evacuation from foreign countries through its embassy and consulate staff, tended to have a generous definition of British subject status which ensured that all had the opportunity to evacuate.

²³ Memorandum are found CAB 66 Series, for example, Gibraltar Emergency Evacuation, 23 June 1941, CAB 66/17/13.

Although the Foreign Office had been authorising evacuations since the outbreak of war in September 1939, from 1940 preparations regarding British communities abroad started to accelerate and as theatres of conflict expanded arrangements were put into action.²⁴ Just one Foreign Office general correspondence file in 1940 covers evacuations from the Balkans, Egypt, Rumania, Near and Middle East, Japan, Occupied China, Greece, Spain and Portugal, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Baltic States and Scandinavia, Bulgaria and Thailand.²⁵ The Mackereth evacuation scheme outlined in Chapter One which encompassed Maltese British subjects from Turkey is just one example of how a plan was devised.

Evacuations from British colonies and territories under the direction of the Colonial Office also followed the same formula outlined previously. Notionally, the whole population of a colony, protectorate or territory was considered to have British subject status. However, evacuation planning tended to focus on certain types of British subjects; there was certainly a racial aspect as to who was considered eligible; it was not just a matter of gender and age, but also of status and ethnicity. In other words, there was an evacuation hierarchy which mirrored the colonial hierarchy with expatriate British nationals having precedence over everyone else. For example, from analysis of primary and secondary sources, an evacuation hierarchy would be as follows for a British imperial colony/territory under threat in the Far East:

- British service families (army, navy, air force)
- British civilian women and children (not engaged in essential occupations)
- British elderly men and women, and those sick or hospitalised
- European men, women and children
- Asian and Eurasian women and children (if considered eligible for evacuation or could finance and organise travel themselves)
- Asian and Eurasian men (if considered eligible for evacuation or could finance and organise travel themselves)

²⁴ See multiple files in TNA: FO 369 Series: Foreign Office Consular Department, General Correspondence, General (250) Consular: Departmental Designation K.

²⁵ See 'General: Decentralisation of Consular Service: evacuation of British communities abroad', TNA: FO 369/2554.

British men were not included, because as a rule many, whether in the colonial service or working for private firms and business, were also members of volunteer forces or A.R.P. services, so stayed put unless ordered to leave. They were expected to stand and fight alongside the regular armed forces in defence of British imperial territory or continue to maintain colonial governance and authority as long as possible. There was no compulsion to evacuate indigenous populations, nor migrant workers originating from elsewhere within the empire, for example India; their inclusion, if it happened, was dependent on the setting and circumstances of the exodus.

While the Colonial Office, like the Foreign Office was responsible for co-ordinating aspects of the evacuation process, for example securing agreement from proposed destination countries to arrange reception and accommodation for evacuees, plans were created by a colonial government or administration, and implemented by officers on the ground. Evacuations might take place in stages, with an initial relocation from areas of fighting, then a final departure. This happened in Malaya where British evacuees first travelled to Singapore from up-country, then were evacuated onwards by sea to Australia, Ceylon, and India, sometimes via the Netherlands East Indies. Preference was given to expatriate British subjects, then others including British Eurasians; However, the situation was so chaotic that many did not get away, or were bombed or captured on their journey to safety.

As with Malaya and Singapore, the main evacuation from Burma also happened in stages, but evacuees travelled south to north rather than north to south, cutting off sea routes to safety. As the administration of Burma had been separated from India in 1937, responsibility for the evacuation lay with the Burma Office, a department still within the India Office. Both shared the same Secretary of State, Leo Amery.²⁶ Although a detailed policy had been drawn which covered all British subjects, the alleged poor treatment of Indians during the evacuation overland to India, elicited considerable controversy at the time – and since. The India Office became involved when accusations of discrimination were levelled at the Burma Government. There was a similar issue when Indians domiciled in East Africa followed evacuation orders and made their way to Aden for transportation back to their home country. While expatriate British women and children in Aden (a Crown Colony) were easily despatched to India in line with the official evacuation plan, colonial administrators were reluctant to facilitate the evacuation of Indian British subjects.²⁷ Instead

²⁶ Burma Office Records, 1932 – 1948, are held at The British Library, India Office and Private Papers Collection: IOR/M.

²⁷ See IOR/M: Records of the British Administration in Aden, 1839 – 1967 at the British Library.

they were sent to transit or refugee camps, and it became necessary for the Government of India to intervene to assist the Indian evacuees to return home.²⁸

Evacuations overseen by the Colonial Office from 1939 to 1942 primarily centred on British colonies and territories in the Far East, and islands in the Pacific – any that could be potentially invaded by Japanese forces – Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya, North Borneo, Sarawak, Fanning and Gilbert Islands, Ellice, Nauru and Ocean Island.²⁹ In addition, the evacuation of Fiji was discussed and policies drawn up for areas in Africa, for example, The Gambia, Uganda and coastal areas in East Africa.³⁰ In the event, not all were required, and it is interesting to note that a plan to evacuate Fiji was discounted as there was simply too many British subjects domiciled there, the majority of whom were Indian.³¹ The Colonial Office took the view that it would be impossible to evacuate them all – including white expatriates – and an alternative suggestion for internal evacuation, i.e., away from coastal areas, was proposed. However, this did not stop a privileged minority – expatriate British subjects - to evacuate voluntarily, even if this went against official policy.

A general principal of evacuation of British subjects abroad was that service families were the first to go. This was a practical consideration as it removed the responsibility for their safety in a war zone, or potential area of conflict, from both the Armed Forces and servicemen themselves. Across the imperial world there were British military garrisons, air force bases, and naval stations set up to maintain order and defend the Empire against enemy attack, for example in Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Burma and Aden. Additionally, there was also a strong British military presence in Egypt, so an arrangement was put in place to send service families to South Africa if required (it was). As previously noted evacuations from strategic bases were discussed at Cabinet level.³² The policy was to relocate service dependents and then civilians, the so called ‘bouches inutiles’ (useless mouths); for the former it was usually non-negotiable. Exceptions were made for wives engaged in essential work, such as nursing or administration; this also extended to civilian women who could

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Many files are held at the National Archives, Kew: CO 968 Series: Colonial Office and Commonwealth Office: Original Correspondence. Hong Kong comes under CO 323 Series: Colonies, General: Original Correspondence; CO 825 Series: Colonial Office: Eastern Original Correspondence, is also useful.

³⁰ For Fiji see TNA: CO 83/238/3; Uganda: CO 536/207/15; The Gambia: CO 968/5/15 - 16; East Africa: CO 968/44/4.

³¹ See ‘Fiji: Evacuation Policy’, TNA: CO 83/238/3.

³² Files regarding the evacuation of service wives and families are found in TNA: WO 106 Series, War Office: Directorate of military operations and military intelligence: Correspondence and papers, 1837 – 1962. See also TNA: WO 201 Series, War Office: Middle East Forces, Military Headquarters Papers, Second World War, 1912 – 1947

find themselves a useful role. Once the decision was taken service families were evacuated at short notice, their departure often in the vanguard of subsequent civilian evacuation.

In conclusion, there was a formula for the evacuation of British subjects overseas which evolved during the early years of the war. It was implemented by the various government departments responsible for their welfare. However, this could be tweaked according to circumstances and as to which British subjects were eligible. This thesis demonstrates just how much power was actually on the ground, devolved to British representatives overseas in respect of this ad hoc planning. The experience gained during this period and beyond no doubt informed future evacuation policy in case of emergency situations involving British subjects abroad. For example, planning an evacuation from Egypt of the British community and other nationalities at the time of the Suez Crisis in 1956.³³ What was required however, in all cases of evacuation planning, was cooperation between multiple departments to ensure all aspects of an evacuation were arranged, from transportation to reception destinations. This is clearly shown in the following case study of Balkan Maltese British subjects evacuated from Turkey which highlights the collaboration (and sometimes conflict) between the Foreign, Colonial, India, Dominions and War Offices. The next section places their evacuation within a chronological framework of other evacuations taking place within the British imperial world. It summarises the journeys taken by different groups of evacuees or refugees with reference to historiographical and archival sources.

Placing the evacuation of Balkan Maltese British Subjects in an imperial world context

On the eve of the Second World War the British Empire was a collection of dominions, colonies, and territories under British sovereignty. Stretched across the hemispheres and continents it was instantly recognisable on world maps, coloured a muted shade of pink. Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa formed a core of self-governing ‘white’ dominions, countries which had been settled by colonists from the home nations of the United Kingdom; crown colonies, territories and protectorates were governed directly by British-staffed administrations which were directly responsible to the Westminster government. The Indian Empire, consisting of states directly under British rule and those under British protection was considered to be the ‘Jewel in the Crown’. However, during the inter-war years Britain’s standing as a great European and world power, and a supreme imperial power, was beginning to wane. Challenges to its dominance came from within the

³³ See for example files ‘Evacuation from Egypt for British Community and other Nationals’, TNA: FO 371/118891 – 118899.

empire as the dominions established their own national identities, and dissenting groups in India, Africa and Asia agitated for change and independence. Nevertheless, dominions, colonies and territories stepped forward to join the Allied cause against the Axis enemies of Germany, Italy, and Japan. As part of the imperial war effort, on the home front a core number provided a safe haven for evacuated British subjects and also for Polish evacuees coming out of the Soviet Union.

As the tables below show the evacuation of Balkan Maltese alongside other British subjects was one of a series of evacuations across or into the British imperial world. Some were precautionary evacuations, while others were reactionary, that is, taking place after hostilities had broken out. Fundamentally, there were two periods of evacuation: 1939 – 1940, and 1941 – 1942. Listed are the groups of evacuees and their destinations beginning slightly earlier to encompass civilians escaping the Nazi regime prior to the outbreak of war. British subjects (including Maltese) were evacuated from Turkey and Greece as a precautionary measure from April 1941 to December 1941 (Table II). Prior to this, evacuation had taken place from the Baltic states and central Balkan states in late 1940 (Table I). All these evacuations involved moving British subjects – men, women, and children – domiciled in foreign countries to a safer location.

After the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in the summer of 1940, British Baltic evacuees were transported during October by train through Russia to Vladivostok on the eastern coast. From here they were moved by ship to Queensland, Australia, via Hong Kong.³⁴ Simultaneously, British subjects were being evacuated from the central Balkan states – Yugoslavia, Rumania, and Hungary - to Istanbul, then onwards to Bombay via Basra after German influence in the bloc gathered pace and government hostility increased (see summary in Chapter One). Travelling in groups, they trickled into India until early 1941. The evacuation of Balkan Maltese followed on from this.

During the first period of evacuation (Table I), it was mainly British subjects in the European theatre of war who required evacuation, and also the internal movement of children within the UK to safer areas, away from potential bombing zones. Britain itself acted as a hub, gathering evacuees and refugees. Jewish children arrived from Europe on the *Kindertransport*, and civilians from the Channel Islands came following a speedy evacuation and were dispersed to northern England and Scotland for the duration.³⁵

³⁴ See correspondence in ‘North Borneo: evacuation of British subjects’, TNA: CO 968/43/9, and ‘High Commissioner for the United Kingdom - memorandum on the evacuation of British subjects from the Baltic States to Australia 1940’ in ‘Evacuation of British subjects from Hong Kong, Straits Settlements and Malayan Federated States’, TNA: DO 35/1141; M1158/1/22.

³⁵ For books about *Kindertransport* see Judith Tudor Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back: The Jewish Refugee Children in Great Britain, 1938 – 1945* (Ashland, Purdue University Press, 2014); Andrea Hammel

Gibraltar, too, was cleared of civilians, with service families taking priority.³⁶ This was a strategic British naval base at the gateway to the Mediterranean, now on a severe war footing, and the removal of non-combatants (or non-essentials) was a necessary part of this. In many instances of wartime evacuation, service families tended to leave first as this was organised by the military. Civilians came next. The re-location of Gibraltarian British subjects was convoluted, but the majority came to the UK, with smaller groups going to Jamaica and Madeira. In addition, service families from Aden returned to Britain too.³⁷

The white dominions also played their part with Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa agreeing to take British children through the CORB evacuation scheme. CORB (Children's Overseas Reception Board) organised passages for groups of children, but the scheme was short-lived and stopped after a ship carrying evacuees was torpedoed in September 1940.³⁸ Note also that Australia had taken in British evacuees from Hong Kong in a precautionary evacuation as this Crown Colony was facing increasing hostility from Japanese forces in China.³⁹ India, too, had accepted British evacuees from the Balkan states, Aden and Iraq.⁴⁰ The escalating war situation in the Middle East was also prompting

and Bea Lewkowic (eds), *The Kindertransport to Britain: New Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012); Diane Samuels, *Kindertransport* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Vera K. Fast, *Children's Exodus: A History of the Kindertransport* (London: I B Tauris, 2011). For the Channel Islands see Gillian Mawson, *Guernsey Evacuees: The Forgotten Evacuees of the Second World War* (Stroud: The History Press, 2012); Brian Aher Read, *No Cause for Panic: Channel Island Refugees 1940 -1945* (St Helier: Seaflower Books, 1995); Barry Turner, *Outpost of Occupation: How the Channel Islands Survived Nazi Rule* (London: Arum Press, 2010); Suzanne Lang, *Displaced Donkeys: A Guernsey Family's War* (New Zealand: Pinkdown Press, 2010).

³⁶ T. J. Finlayson, *The Fortress Came First: The Story of the Civilian Population of Gibraltar during the Second World War* (Grendon: Gibraltar, 1990); Nicholas Rankin, *Defending the Rock: How Gibraltar Defeated Hitler* (London: Faber & Faber, 2017).

³⁷ Ibid. See also Suzanne Francis Brown, *Mona Past and Present: The History and Heritage of Mona Campus, University of the West Indies* (Kingston: University of West Indies, 2004); Esme Brock, *an Evacuee in Jamaica, 1940 – 1954* (Buriton: Titchfield, 1990); Rebecca Tortello, 'Gibraltar Camp: A Refuge from War, [Jamaica Gleaner : Pieces of the Past: Out Of Many Cultures: GIBALTAR CAMP A REFUGE FROM WAR \(jamaica-gleaner.com\)](http://jamaica-gleaner.com) accessed on 22 June 2013.

³⁸ See, for example, Michael Fethney, *The Absurd and the Brave: CORB – The True Account of the British Government's World War II Evacuation of Children Overseas* (Lewes: The Book Guild, 1990); Geoffrey Bilson, *The Guest Children: The Story of the British Child Evacuees sent to Canada during WWII* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1990); Edward Stokes, *Innocents Abroad: The Story of British Child Evacuees in Australia, 1940 – 1945* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, 1994).

³⁹ See Caroline Wrigley, *A Weekend to Pack: The Fall of Hong Kong, 1940 – 45* (Devizes: Sabrestorm Publishing, 2021); Tony Banham, *Reduced to a Symbolic State: The Evacuation of British Women and Children from Hong Kong to Australia in 1940* (Pokfulam: Hong Kong University Press, 2017); Bridget Deane 'Lady Visitors: Evacuees from Hong Kong in Australia during the Second World War' in Ashley Jackson, Yasmin Khan and Gajendra Singh (eds), *An Imperial World at War: Aspects of the British Empire's War Experience, 1939 -1945* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2017); Bridget Deane, 'Lady Visitors: Evacuees from Hong Kong in Australia during the Second World War' (MPhil, Macquarie University, 2009) pp. 46-65.

⁴⁰ The evacuation of British subjects from the Balkans is described in Chapter One of this thesis. A starting point for information about the evacuations from Iraq and Aden are files in The National Archives and India Office Records. For example: 'Evacuation of British Subjects from Iraq Embassy', TNA: FO 624/22/54;

evacuation of British subjects domiciled here. Along with the dominions, Jamaica and India were uniting – in the spirit of imperial camaraderie - to take in evacuees from both inside and outside the empire.

As Table II outlines, another phase of evacuations occurred in late 1941 and early 1942. Many were precipitated by Japan's entry into the war in December 1941 with British imperial territory in the Far East attacked and invaded, principally Malaya, Singapore, and Burma. Again India and Australia gathered in British subjects while also fully mobilising for a war that was rapidly heading to their doorsteps.⁴¹ Both countries were also concerned with the evacuation of their own people (British subjects but also defined nationalities). India saw the return of thousands of Indians who had been domiciled in Burma, while Australia cleared Australians from Papua New Guinea and surrounding islands.⁴² It is notable that evacuations in the Far East theatre of war were marred by discrimination with priority given to British white civilians, for example, during the chaotic evacuations from Malaya and Singapore, where there were also thousands of Indian and Eurasian imperial British subjects who ostensibly should have been included. The evacuees who got away scattered to Australia, India (via Ceylon), South Africa and to the UK. South Africa also received British service families, and British civilian women and children from Egypt.

'Cost for Evacuation of Europeans from Baghdad', TNA: FO 372/24562; Evacuation of women and children from Aden, IOR/R/20/B/1179 – 80; IOR/R/20/B/1786 – 1790.

⁴¹ For accounts of the evacuation of British subjects from Malaya and Singapore see: Kent Fedorowich, 'The Evacuation of Civilians from Hong Kong and Malaya/Singapore' in Brian Farrell and Sandy Hunter (eds) *Sixty Years On: The Fall of Singapore* (Singapore: Times Media Private Limited, 2002) pp. 122-155.; Jean Teasdale (ed) *Facing the Bow: European Women in Colonial Malaya, 1919 – 1945* (Perth: the Centre for Migration and Development Studies, University of Western Australia, 1997); Joseph Kennedy, *When Singapore Fell: Evacuations and Escapes, 1941 -1942* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989). There are also personal accounts and memoirs, for example: Lorraine Stumm, *I Saw Too Much: A Woman Correspondent at War* (Cooperook: The Write on Group, 2000); Rosalind Sharbanee Meyer, *Rosie's War: The Escape from Singapore* (Sydney: Jewish Museum: Community Stories, 2007); Adrian Wood (ed) *If This Should Be Farewell: A Family Separated by War* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2003). For Burma see: Michael D. Leigh, *The Collapse of British Rule in Burma: The Civilian Evacuation and Independence* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018); Felicity Goodall, *Exodus Burma: The British Escape Through the Jungles of Death 1942* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2011); Megan Stuart Mills, 'Burma, 1942 and the Anglo-Indian and Anglo-Burmese Community' *International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies*, 8th edition, 1999.

⁴² Burma: Hugh Tinker, *A Long Forgotten March: The Indian Exodus from Burma, 1942* (London: FEP International, 1975); S. Nagajaran, 'Tamils of Burma and the Second World War', *Ajiagaka Ronso* 4:1 (1994) 85-96. Australia: Chilla Bulbeck, *Australian Women in Papua New Guinea: Colonial Passages 1920 -1960* (Alexandria: Millennium Books, 1996) Margaret Reeson, *A Very Long War: The Families Who Waited* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000); Gillian Nikakis, *He's Not Coming Home: A Story of Love, Loss and Discovery in Rabaul during World War 2* (Melbourne: Thomas C Lothian Pty Ltd, 2005); Elizabeth Osborne, *Torres Straits Islander Women and the Pacific War* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1997); Janet Dickinson, *Refugees in Our Own country: The Story of Darwin's Wartime Evacuees* (Darwin: Historical Society of the Northern Territory, 1995).

There was certainly a strong element of discrimination within the organisation of many evacuations which took place within the British imperial world during the Second World War. Although people of various ethnicities were nominally 'British subjects' in reality this status did not necessarily entitle them to evacuation, whereas to be both a British subject and expatriate gave priority. Sometimes, when it came to moments of crisis, it was a shock for people outside the expatriate communities to discover the advantages which came from being under the sovereignty of the British Crown did not apply to them; it was a transient commitment and not always reliable. However, in some cases, evacuation was all-encompassing, but this very much depended on the setting and circumstances. Maltese British subjects evacuated from Turkey fall into this category.

As destinations for groups of evacuees, both India and Australia took on the greatest responsibility for displaced British subjects; but India, along with British colonies in East Africa also agreed to accommodate Polish civilians evacuated from Russia in 1942.⁴³ This connects the movement of British subjects through evacuation to the wider context of the mass movements of people across the globe during the Second World War: service men and women, refugees, internees (civilian and enemy alien) and POWs were all, at various times, shifting within or between the various theatres of war. More often than not, the experiences of British evacuees ran parallel to those of other participants in the war and could be intertwined. The Balkan Maltese and Polish evacuees shared similar experiences during their time in camps in India. Additionally, the prolonged process of the post-war resettlement of the Polish evacuees in East Africa raises comparisons with that of the Maltese evacuees then in Eritrea. Both groups shifted from being 'evacuees' to 'displaced persons', or rather in the case of the latter 'misplaced' is a better description.

The evacuation of the Balkan Maltese is part of the historical narrative of the Second World War, but it also interconnects, and is part of other histories, most importantly as a significant episode in the history of communities of the Maltese Diaspora settled in Turkey. As previously shown their journey was one of a series of evacuations across and into the British Empire. The group's arrival in India and experiences at the British Evacuee Camp at

⁴³ For Polish evacuees in India see: Anurandha Battacharjee, *The Second Homeland: Polish Refugees in India* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications Ltd, 2012); Teresa Glazer (ed) *Poles in India, 1942 -1948: Second World War Story* (London: Association of Poles in India, 1942 – 1948, 2009); Sugata Srinivasarajau, 'Little Warsaw of Kathiawar' *Outlook India*, 20 December 2010; Jayaraj Manepalli, 'A Maharaja in Warsaw', *The Hindu Sunday Magazine*, 28 April 2012. For Polish evacuees sent to East Africa see: Barbara Porajska, *From the Steppes to the Savannah* (Port Erin: Ham Publishing Company Ltd, 1988); Curtis Abraham, 'when Europeans were Refugees in Africa' *New African*, 20th June 2012; Katarzyna Nowak, 'We would rather drown ourselves in Lake Victoria': Refugee Women, Protest and Polish Displacement in Colonial East Africa, 1948 – 1949, *Immigrants and Minorities*, 37/1-2 (2019) pp.92-117. For the movement of Polish children to New Zealand and Canada see: Stanilas Manterys, *New Zealand's First Refugees: Pahiatua's Polish Children* (Wellington: Polish Children's Reunion Committee, 2004); Lynne Taylor, *Polish Orphans of Tenguru: The Dramatic Story of their Long Journey to Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Group Ltd, 2009)

Coimbatore is a small part of India's war effort, while the transfer to Eritrea in 1948 brings them into the history of the British Military Administration there. Furthermore, in the post-war period the Maltese evacuees were on the periphery of the mass migration and resettlement of European displaced persons. Their history intersects briefly with Polish refugees in both India and East Africa, but as British imperial subjects they cannot be defined as stateless displaced persons. When they finally relocated to Cyprus, the Maltese evacuee group were an appendix to the island's agreement with the British government to accommodate Jewish detainees and other groups during the late 1940s. They also popped up as a challenge to Australia's new immigration policy in their quest to become 'New Australians' in the post-war era.

The critical literature review below examines how visible or invisible the Balkan Maltese evacuees are in the existing historiography for areas of history outlined above.

Table I		
Evacuation 1939 - 1940		
Date	Evacuation	Destination for Evacuees
Pre- 1940	European Jewish Children Jewish and other families leave Germany and Austria	Transported to Britain and other destinations <i>Kindertransport</i>
September 1939 May 1940	Mass evacuation of children across the UK	'Neutral areas' within the British Isles
May 1940	Service Families, Aden British civilians, mainly women and children but discrimination against Indian British subjects	UK India
June 1940	Civilians evacuated from the Channel Islands	Neutral areas in northern England, also to Glasgow, Scotland
May 1940 July 1940	Service Families, Gibraltar Women, children and other non-essentials evacuated from Gibraltar	UK Initially by ship to Morocco, back to Gibraltar, then London, Northern Ireland Jamaica Madeira
May – June 1940	British Women and children from Iraq	India (returned to Iraq September)
June – July 1940	French women and children from Indo-China	Australia
June – September 1940	Private evacuation organised through evacuee committees and organisations in UK.	Canada USA
June – September 1940	CORB evacuation scheme sends British children to the Dominions (Cancelled after the loss of the <i>City of Benares</i> in September 1940)	South Africa Canada Australia New Zealand
June – September 1940	Women and children evacuated from Hong Kong	via the Philippines to Australia
<i>October – December 1940</i>	<i>British subjects evacuated from Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania)</i>	<i>Overland across Russia to Vladivostok, via ship to Hong Kong, then Australia</i>
<i>October 1940 – January 1941</i>	<i>British Subjects evacuated from Balkans (Yugoslavia, Rumania and Hungary)</i>	<i>To Istanbul then overland to Basra, Iraq, ship to Bombay, India.</i>

Table II		
Evacuation 1941 - 1942		
Date	Evacuation	Destination for Evacuees
April 1941 – November 1941	British Subjects from the Balkans – Greece and Turkey including Maltese	From Greece to Egypt From Turkey to India via Egypt
By July 1941	Women and children from New Britain (voluntary)	Australia
1941	Relocation of families from Malaya and Singapore	Australia
December 1941	Compulsory evacuation from Papua and New Guinea, New Britain, New Ireland, Bougainville European women and children from Penang Voluntary evacuation continues from Malaya and Singapore	Australia By ship Via Singapore to Australia Australia South Africa
December 1941 – January 1942	Women and children from Darwin	Via ship to Southern Australia
December 1941 – March 1942	Evacuation from Pacific Islands – Nauru, Fanning, New Hebrides, Gilbert and Ellice Islands. Private evacuation from Fiji	Fiji New Zealand and Australia New Zealand
January – February 1942	“Official” evacuation from Singapore	Via ship to Australia And to Colombo, Durban and Cape Town to England India
January 1942	Solomon Islands	Australia
January – February 1942	Thursday Island (Torres Straits)	Australia
January to early February 1942	Qantas “evacuee service” from Singapore	Australia
February 1942	Netherlands East Indies Some evacuees evacuated by air	Australia Ceylon
January 1942 – March 1942	Evacuation of civilians from Burma	By sea, air and land to India
March 1942 onwards	Trek out of central and northern Burma Indian and British civilians	India
July – August 1942	British women and children from Egypt	South Africa via ship
Mid 1942 onwards	Polish civilians evacuated from Russia	Iran (under British control), then to Palestine, India, South Africa, Uganda, Tanganyika
1944	Group of Polish children	New Zealand

A Review of Literature

As the previous section outlining evacuations and corresponding historiography demonstrates several of these have received the most attention from academics and other authors. These include the Kindertransport, child evacuation within Britain and the evacuation of civilians from Malaya and Singapore. Such interest centres upon aspects such as the scale of the evacuation, the type of evacuees and their experiences, and the circumstances. In contrast, there is very little literature on any evacuations of Maltese British subjects and even literature about the Maltese diaspora as a whole is limited. This review focuses on the work regarding this diaspora which has been done to date, and areas of weakness/neglect within this scholarship. It also investigates to what extent Balkan Maltese from Turkey are represented in historiography in general, especially concerning the Second World War, and why this case study makes a significant contribution to fill these gaps by focusing on their evacuation experience.

Current scholarship about the Maltese diaspora in general covers migration from Malta, including a recently published collection of Henry Frendo's body of work.⁴⁴ According to a review of *Diaspora: Maltese Overseas Settlement*, this brings together 'papers, features, public presentations and addresses' written by Frendo over the course of his career, which 'extensively deals with colourful human stories of emigrants from the Maltese Islands, most of all those experienced by thousands that used to settle initially in the Mediterranean and later, especially after WWII in Australia'.⁴⁵ Organised in two parts (written in English and Maltese respectively), the first mainly focuses on Maltese domiciled in French colonies in north Africa, and in Egypt, and those settled in Australia. Maltese communities in Corfu, Smyrna and Gibraltar have separate chapters, but overall there appears to be no new material included, just that which is already available elsewhere. For example, in an article online Frendo gives detailed insight into the Maltese community in Turkey, particularly the evacuation of inhabitants of Smyrna in 1922.⁴⁶ He also mentions the difficulties facing

⁴⁴ Henry Frendo, *Diaspora: Maltese Overseas Settlement* (Valetta: Midsea Books, 2020).

⁴⁵ Charles Xuereb, Book Review, *Malta Independent*, 18/5/2021, accessed online at: ['Diaspora, Maltese overseas settlement' - The Malta Independent](#)

⁴⁶ Henry Frendo, 'Maltese Survivors of Smyrna', available at http://maltahistory.eu5.net.60/60_24.html (no longer accessible via this link).

Maltese after changes in Turkish employment laws, and briefly describes the evacuation of Maltese British subjects during the Second World War.⁴⁷

Charles Price and Father Lawrence Attard have also written about migration from Malta, the former on the nineteenth century and the latter on the twentieth century.⁴⁸ Published first in 1954, Price's book is an early survey of migration from Malta, while in his series of publications charting migration from 1900 to present day, Attard provides a useful overview of migration.⁴⁹ Maltese communities in Constantinople and Smyrna in Turkey are covered, and overall he gives a good summary of migration from Malta to America, Canada and Australia.⁵⁰ Additionally, Maltese migration to Algeria has been the focus of Andrea Smith and Joshua Hayes, while Nicholas Chircop had written about Maltese communities in Egypt.⁵¹ Information from these sources is used to provide a brief overview of the Maltese diaspora around the Mediterranean in Chapter One, which explains the difficult situation of Maltese British subjects in Turkey especially during the inter-war years.

In the post-war years there was a steady flow of Maltese settlers to Britain and Australia with the dominion being the preferred destination. There is a large body of literature regarding Maltese migration to the latter, including publications by Barry York, Maurice Cauchi, and Barry Coldrey.⁵² York especially gives helpful insight into post-war immigration and the Australia-Malta Assisted Passage Agreement of 1948.⁵³ However this

⁴⁷ Ibid. He quotes from J N Crawford's thesis about the evacuation: John Darrich Crawford, 'The Maltese Diaspora: the Historical Development of Migration from Malta', MA thesis (unpublished), University of Victoria, Canada, 1984.

⁴⁸ Charles A Price, *Malta and the Maltese: A Study in Nineteenth Century Migration* (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1954); Father Lawrence E Attard, *Early Maltese Migration (1900 – 1914)* (Valetta: Gulf Publications, 1981); *The Great Exodus (1918 – 1939)* (Marsa: Publishers Enterprise Group, 1989); *The Safety Valve: A History of Maltese Migration from 1946* (San Gwan: Publishers Enterprises Group, 1997).

⁴⁹ In addition, Attard has published *Profiles in Maltese Migration: A series of nineteen biographies covering the period 1792 – 2000* (San Gwann: PEG Ltd, 2003) and *Beyond Our Shores: A Panorama of Maltese Migration* (San Gwann, PEG Ltd, 2007).

⁵⁰ See *The Great Exodus* in particular.

⁵¹ Andrea L Smith, *Colonial Memory and Post-Colonial Europe: Maltese Settlers in Algeria and France* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, c2006); Joshua M Hayes, 'M'hemm l'ebela pst iehor bhad-dar (There's no place like home): Maltese Migration to French Algeria in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Maltese History*, 2:1 (2010) 33-47; Nicholas D Chircop, *A Transient Colony in the Valley of the Nile* (Bundoora: Nicholas D Chircop, 2015. Abridged version available at: [A Transient Colony in the Valley of the Nile \(maltamigration.com\)](http://A%20Transient%20Colony%20in%20the%20Valley%20of%20the%20Nile%20(maltamigration.com)))

⁵² York has written extensively about Maltese who settled in Australia and as well as conducting oral interviews with former migrants. Books include *Empire and Race: The Maltese in Australia, 1881 – 1949* (Kensington, NSW: NSWU Press, 1990) and *The Maltese in Australia* (Blackburn: Australasian Educa Press Pty Ltd, 1986); Maurice N Cauchi, *Maltese Migrants in Australia* (Victoria: Maltese Community Council of Victoria, 1990); Barry M Coldrey, *Child Migration from Malta to Australia: 1950 – 1963* (Box Hill, Vic: Tamanaraik Publishing, 1992).

⁵³ York, *The Maltese in Australia*.

only relates to Maltese emigrating from Malta, although York does mention Egyptian Maltese who mostly arrived in Australia in the 1950s.⁵⁴ Maltese coming from anywhere else, for example Maltese evacuees from India or Eritrea, do not feature. Perhaps, this is not surprising as they did not come in the numbers of Malta-born Maltese and of those from Egypt. The difficulties of arranging the resettlement of Balkan Maltese evacuees in Australia is described in this thesis, as well the Department of Immigration's reaction to the arrival of some; this will add another aspect to the existing literature on Maltese migration to the dominion.

In addition to general histories of Maltese migration to Australia there are also those which relate to individual states or communities. For example, Paul Calleja has written about Maltese settlers in Western Australia, while Albert Agius has concentrated on Victoria, and organisations established for migrants.⁵⁵ Mackay in Queensland - an area where Maltese came to work in the sugar cane industry - is the focus of a well-researched history by Carmel and Laraine Schembri, and unusually, several family memoirs.⁵⁶ It is rare to find any published personal accounts from Maltese migrants wherever they settled, therefore Australia is an exception. Both Theresa Townley and Maryann Lister have recorded their families' experiences from Malta to Queensland, and there are other written accounts from Maltese migrants in other states too.⁵⁷ So the Maltese diaspora has a strong representation in Australian historiography, a nation built initially upon British and European immigration, but this predominately encompasses those who travelled from Malta, rather than from Maltese communities around the Mediterranean including Turkey. By highlighting personal stories of Balkan Maltese evacuees, this thesis starts to address their absence in Australian immigration history. Beginning with Victoria Briguglio (see above) the experiences of both individuals and families seeking and achieving resettlement in the dominion are woven into several chapters. These have been pieced together from archival sources and contemporary newspaper reports as to date there are no evacuee memoirs to

⁵⁴ York, *The Maltese in Australia*, pp. 125-126.

⁵⁵ Paul P Calleja, *Maltese of the Western Third: a social history and commentary on the people of Maltese origin in the state of Western Australia* (Bedford, WA: Kallaya Publication, 1993); Albert W Agius, *Maltese Settlement in Australia: building a community* (Doncaster East, Vic: Albert W Agius, 2001) and *Maltese Settlement in Australia: fears, tears and cheers* (Doncaster East: Albert W Agius, 2004).

⁵⁶ Carmel Baretta and Laraine Schembri, *From Humble Beginnings: Mackay Maltese Pioneers, 1883 – 1940* (Mackay: Baretta and Schembri, 2001).

⁵⁷ Theresa Townley, *The Camilleris 'Ta' Palalu': from Mosta, Malta in 1911 to Mackay, Australia in 2004* (Mackay: Info Publishing, 2004); Maryann Lister, *Through Our Eyes: The Misfud Journey and Three Bells* (Mackay: Info Publishing, 2009); See also Spiro Tanti, *My Story* (Adelaide: Digital Print Australia, 2007) and Paul P Calleja, *Tales of Two Migrants: Biography of Felix and Rita Calleja* (Bedford, WA: P Calleja, 2010).

draw upon. Additionally, this thesis makes an original contribution to the historical literature through bringing attention to their experiences as part of the Maltese diaspora in Turkey – and beyond.

There are also a few interesting sources regarding Maltese migrants in Britain. Although these do not directly relate to the Balkan Maltese, two describe how Maltese men were regarded in the early and mid-twentieth century. In his study Simon Jenkins examines why, in the 1920s, a Chief Constable of Police (James Wilson) sought to stamp out prostitution in the Butetown area of Cardiff which he believed was being organised by Maltese café owners.⁵⁸ There were many cafes close to the docks where recently arrived sailors would gather, but exception was taken when it was found that ‘coloured’ Maltese men were recruiting and pimping local girls out to these men, particularly if they were black. The Maltese, whether involved or not, were characterised as predatory, deviant, and sometimes voyeuristic.⁵⁹ Dick Kirby has researched the Messina brothers who operated brothels and sex clubs in the East End from the 1930s to the 1950s, the most notorious of the Maltese gangsters who had set up businesses in London.⁶⁰ This criminality, particularly of the Maltese London gangsters, tainted the reputation of all Maltese migrants according to Geoff Dench.⁶¹ As has been already briefly described the Balkan Maltese were regarded as troublesome, but there is no suggestion of behaviour as described by Jenkins and Kirby although their work illustrates that Maltese from Malta had a poor reputation too. It is evident that there was a British stereotypical view of Maltese men in particular and this thesis demonstrates the negative bias of officials toward the Balkan-Maltese evacuees. Within the imperial hierarchy too as ‘poor whites’ or an underclass of British subjects, the group was seen as undesirable, a potential problem to the status and racial superiority of the British community in India. This thesis will therefore contribute a further dimension alongside the two studies mentioned above.

Turning to the histories of India in the Second World War there is little trace of the Balkan Maltese evacuees. This is not surprising as these tend to look at the Indian Army’s involvement in the imperial war effort, internal politics and the agitation for independence.⁶²

⁵⁸ Simon Jenkins ‘Inherent Vice?: Maltese Men and the Organisation of Prostitution in Interwar Cardiff’, *Journal of Social History*, 49:4 (2016) pp. 928 – 958.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ See Dick Kirby, *The Mayfair Mafia: The Lives and Crimes of the Messina Brothers* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2019).

⁶¹ Geoff Dench, *Maltese in London: A Case-study in the Erosion of Ethnic Consciousness* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

⁶² See for example, Roy Kaushik, *India and World War II: War, Armed Forces, Society* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2016); Srinath Raghavan, *India’s War: World War II and the Making of Modern Asia* (New

However, the arrival of evacuees is noted by Yasmin Khan, including the Maltese, although it is assumed they came from Malta.⁶³ A little further afield, Ashley Jackson in his survey *The British Empire and the Second World War* comments on the many evacuations taking place within the empire and explains ‘a great deal of movement was caused by people being evacuated from high risk areas by government authorities, or people fleeing of their own volition from areas likely to be bombed’.⁶⁴ In particular he notes the evacuation of women and children from Hong Kong and British evacuee children.⁶⁵ So there are traces of groups of British evacuees within histories of India and the British Empire during the Second World War, but nothing substantial about the Balkan Maltese.

There is, however, a growing literature about Polish refugees in India and East Africa during the war.⁶⁶ Anuradha Battacharjee makes some comparisons between the expenditure on camps for Polish refugees and the Balkan Maltese camp at Coimbatore, and also that the latter seemed to have better facilities.⁶⁷ While there is not the scope to investigate this further, there are references to Polish refugees and their experiences as displaced persons within this thesis. However, as a comprehensive account of the Balkan Maltese evacuees it can provide a foundation for future comparison with Polish refugees in India or in East Africa. In addition, contextual information is given where necessary to the work of the United Nations Refugee and Relief Administration (UNRRA) and the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) with displaced persons.⁶⁸ As the Balkan Maltese evacuees were never under the jurisdiction of either organisation, when their activities are mentioned, for example

York: Basic Books, 2016). Also Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885 – 1947* (Basingstoke, Macmillan Press 1989) and Janam Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine and the End of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁶³ Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War: A People’s History of India’s Second World War* (London: Vintage, 2015) p. 123.

⁶⁴ Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London: Hamledon Continuum, 2006) pp. 50-51.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 454 and p. 466.

⁶⁶ See Footnote 37. A fresh publication on this topic is Jochen Lingelbach, *On the Edge of Whiteness: Polish Refugees in British Colonial Africa during and after the Second World War* (New York, Berghahn Books, 2020).

⁶⁷ Battacharjee, *The Second Homeland*, p. 114 and p. 167.

⁶⁸ For the work of UNRRA and IRO see: Peter Gatrell, Chapter 13 ‘The Death of UNRRA: The Birth of IRO’, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); David Nasaw, Part Four: Resettlement, *The Last Million: Europe’s Displaced People from World War to Cold War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2020), pp. 251–368; Johannes-Dieter Steinert, ‘British Post-war Migration Policy and Displaced Person in Europe’ in Jessica Reinisch and Elizabeth White (eds) *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-war Europe, 1944 – 9* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) pp. 229-247.

to provide context to the difficulties faced in trying to resettle the evacuee group from Eritrea (Chapter 5), I have used information found in contemporaneous journals – *International Organization* and *Internal Affairs* – as well as other secondary sources.

It seems a little superfluous to comment on literature relating to the British Military Administration in Eritrea. The Balkan Maltese evacuees are not mentioned, and accounts tend to be quite factual, giving information about the system of military government in the former Italian colony and its achievements. As their presence, and the running and administration of the camp, was not in the official remit of its responsibilities then it is understandable the evacuees are absent. Therefore, this thesis will expose a hidden aspect of the work of the BMA while in Eritrea. Lord Rennell of Rodd gives a very factual and dry description in his book about the British Military Administrations in Africa.⁶⁹ Fortunately, there are some more engaging accounts which provide useful background material for the chapter on Mai Habar camp in Eritrea where the Balkan and Maltese evacuees were transferred to from India. These are books or articles written by Brigadier P. W. D. Dunn, Duncan Cumming and Stephen Longrigg.⁷⁰

Much of the historical literature about Cyprus in the post-Second World War period focuses on internal dissention and the question of ‘enosis’, the desire of Greek Cypriots for the island to be unified with Greece. This culminated in what has been described as the Cyprus Emergency, Revolt in Cyprus or even Civil War during the 1950s.⁷¹ When the Balkan Maltese evacuees were relocated to the island in 1949, the British Government had just failed in an attempt to bring about constitutional reform, which gave fairer representation to the Turkish-Cypriot minority but safeguarded British control. Both Stella Soulioti and Ronald Hyam give insight into the process initiated to achieve this and how it broke down.⁷² This provides useful background material about the political situation in Cyprus when the evacuee group arrived. Additionally, information about the Jewish detainment camps on the

⁶⁹ Lord Renell of Rodd, Chapters V and VI in *British Military Administration in Africa 1941 – 1949* (London, HMSO, 1948). See also G. K. N. Trevaskis, *Eritrea: A Colony in Transition 1941 -52* (London, Oxford University Press, 1960).

⁷⁰ Brigadier P. W. D. Dunn, ‘Civil Affairs in Territory under Military Occupation’ *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, 19:558 (1945), pp. 158-165; D. C. Cumming, ‘British Stewardship of the Italian Colonies: An Account Rendered’, *International Affairs*, 29:1 (1953), pp. 11-21; Stephen H Longrigg, Chapter XII in *A Short History of Eritrea* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945).

⁷¹ See for example, Robert Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus 1954 – 1959* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998) and Mark Simmons, *The British and Cyprus: An Outpost of Empire to Sovereign Bases, 1878 – 1974* (Stroud, The History Press, 2015).

⁷² Stella Soulioti, ‘British Occupation: First Period 1878 – 1954’, *Fettered Independence: Cyprus, 1878 – 1964, Volume One* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2006) pp. 21-26; Ronald Hyam, Chapter Two, *Britain’s Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation 1918 – 1946* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 19–167.

island and the removal of detainees back to Israel provides context as to why there was delay in moving the Balkan Maltese to Cyprus, and also the fractious attitude of the Cyprus Government towards the request from the Colonial Office to accommodate them.⁷³

Aspects of Research

As the literature review shows there is a dearth of secondary sources specifically about the evacuation of Balkan Maltese British subjects from Turkey during the Second World War and their time in transit in the post-war period. However, as described above there are a good range of history books, memoirs and journal articles which have provided contextual information for writing this thesis. These have been located in, or obtained from, a number of research and institutional libraries including the British Library, London; Bodleian Library, Oxford; the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; the library at the University of the West of England, and the Forum Library and Old Library at the University of Exeter. Digital libraries - the HathiTrust and Internet Archive - have been invaluable for unearthing more obscure titles and providing general access to material.⁷⁴

Archival sources, therefore, have been paramount for researching this subject which is largely absent from the historical literature. Visits to The National Archives at Kew and the India Office Records at the British Library have uncovered a core of governmental records relating to the evacuation of Balkan Maltese British subjects, their time in camps in India and Eritrea, transfer to Cyprus, and finally repatriation to Turkey or resettlement in Australia. Research was carried out in these files to answer the following questions: Who was responsible for their evacuation and why?; How was this planned and implemented? Where were they sent, and what happened to this group post-war? Therefore, I examine the evacuation of the Balkan Maltese not only from the official government perspective, but also importantly from the experiences of the evacuees themselves by using records they have left behind - such voices are so often lost to history as they not recorded in official archives, but in this instance their traces are here. Material found at The National Archives and India Office Records consists of general and departmental correspondence files, reports, minutes

⁷³ See for example: Branka Arrivé, 'Why were the Cyprus Camps for Jewish Detainees not dissolved immediately after the Independence of Israel?', *Israel Affairs* 25, no.6 (2019), pp. 980-998; Maurice Laub, *Last Barrier to Freedom: Internment of Jewish Holocaust Survivors on Cyprus, 1946 -1949*. Berkley: Jewish Magnes Museum, 1985.

⁷⁴ [HathiTrust Digital Library | Millions of books online](#)
[Internet Archive: Digital Library of Free & Borrowable Books, Movies, Music & Wayback Machine](#)

of meetings, memorandums, letters, telegrams, nominal rolls and list of evacuees. These were generated both within the (central) British government offices involved and by their representatives overseas, principally the Foreign Office, Colonial Office, India Office and to a lesser extent the War and Dominion Offices. Alongside Secretaries of State, numerous senior civil servants such as Under-Secretaries (parliamentary and permanent) Deputy and Assistant Secretaries, and FO and CO officials abroad were all participants. There is sufficient breadth and detail found in these core records of the work carried out in government offices and in the field concerning the Balkan Maltese evacuee group. An aim of the thesis is to bring forward the contribution of ‘on the ground’ officials who were more directly involved with the evacuees and their situation rather than that of Cabinet Ministers such as Foreign Secretary Sir Anthony Eden. There is no reference to the Balkan Maltese evacuees in his Private Office Papers (FO 954 Series) although the proposed evacuations of civilian from Egypt is mentioned. Additionally, for example these working files contain correspondence with the Treasury and Ministry of Transport whose involvement was peripheral, but none the less important when investigating the debate over whether the Foreign or Colonial Office was financially responsible for the Balkan Maltese evacuees, and the challenges of finding shipping to resettle some of the group from the camp in Eritrea respectively.

So communication between the periphery and centre has been very informative, as has correspondence between the government departments involved. A disadvantage of this is that material is often duplicated in FO, CO and IOR files, which could be regarded as limiting. However, it is corroborative to have these multiple sources, and files have provided nuggets of information not found elsewhere. For example, a small IOR file regarding evacuee Mr Callus which confirmed he had travelled back to Turkey before emigrating to Australia. A brief description of the function and structure of government offices involved is given below. This identifies the departments responsible for creating the documents consulted during research and the corresponding record series.

Archival Sources

As part of the British government the Foreign Office was responsible for maintaining good political relations with other countries while acting in the best interests of the nation through

diplomacy both home and abroad.⁷⁵ It was represented in countries across the world by the Foreign Service – diplomatic and consular officials such as ambassadors, counsellors, ministers plenipotentiary, consul-generals and vice-consuls. The Foreign Office itself was divided into political, functional and administrative departments, which were again subdivided. As British subjects, the welfare and administration (registration of births and marriages, passport issue) of the Maltese expatriate community in Turkey was undertaken by consular establishments there. The destitute situation of many of the diaspora here was also a concern for the British ambassador which, as this thesis explains, was a reason for their evacuation. Records concerning the Balkan Maltese evacuees are predominately found in FO 369 Series – Consular Department, general correspondence and also specifically for Turkey (Code 244) identified using the Foreign Office Correspondence Index (FO 409); FO 371 Series – Political Departments, general correspondence and FO 1015 Series – War Office and Foreign Office: Administration of African Territories registered files. Political Departments were divided into geographical area, with Turkey coming under ‘Southern’. FO 1015 Series relates to the period the evacuee group spent in Mai Habar Camp, Eritrea while the country was under a British Military, then Foreign Office administration (FOAAT) and their transfer to Cyprus.

The Colonial Office’s function was to ensure the good government and fair treatment of British overseas territories.⁷⁶ It had a home department and a colonial service abroad which appointed staff to cover all elements of administration and development such as public works, education, agriculture and medicine. Usually a governor was at the head of a colonial government supported by a secretariat and in consultation with a locally appointed executive council to advise on all matters. As such he was a key person in the relationship between British government and the dependent territory, reporting directly to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. This structure is clearly shown in negotiations about the resettlement of Balkan Maltese evacuees between the Acting Governor and Secretary of State which is explained in Chapter 6. Information is located in CO 67 Series files – Cyprus original correspondence and CO 926 Series – Mediterranean Department registered files alongside FO 369 and 1015 files. The Colonial Office was also the conduit through which colonies in East Africa were approached to see if they would take the group of Balkan Maltese evacuees.

⁷⁵ *The New Whitehall Series* covering the history, function, and structure of government offices are a good source of background information. Summary compiled from Lord Strang, *The Foreign Office* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1955).

⁷⁶ Summary compiled from Sir Charles Jeffries, *The New Whitehall Series: The Colonial Office* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1956).

Communications relating to this are found CO 968/43/7, an original correspondence file. This additionally contains comprehensive information from multiple official sources about the proposed evacuation of Balkan Maltese from Turkey which form the basis of Chapter One supported by Foreign Office and India Office Records files. The Colonial Office was involved as it bore a responsibility towards the Maltese diaspora, members of which claimed British subject status through familial connections to Malta, a Crown Colony.

The India Office differed from the Colonial and Foreign Offices in that it was a channel of communication between the British Government and the mostly autonomous Government of India.⁷⁷ At the head of the latter was the Viceroy (Governor General) supported by a complement of staff, with Executive and Legislative Councils and a secretariat. Certain departments were part of the India Office home establishment – Public and Judicial, Political (internal and external), Financial and Economic and Overseas – and matched/were parallel to departments of the Indian government. Within the latter the main branches involved with reception of evacuees and refugees were the Home Department, External Affairs, and Public Works (responsible for building camps or adapting buildings). The principle groups of files in the India Office Records in which material regarding the Balkan Maltese group is found are IOR/L/AG/40 – Accountant General Records, Relief of Distress: World War II evacuees and refugees, ex-internees and distressed Europeans in India – and IOR/L/PJ/7 – Public and Judicial Department Annual Files, 1931-1950 and IOR/L/PJ/8 – Public and Judicial Department Collections, 1922-1954. Files in IOR/L/AG/40/1 (25 – 125) cover financial aspects of the British Evacuee Camp (BEC) at Coimbatore such as allowance registers, permanent advances registers, and menial staff salaries lists for the Maltese, Singapore and Burma evacuees accommodated there. As the intention of Chapter Two is to give an overview of the Maltese Wing at the BEC information found in a correspondence file, supported by IOR/L/PJ/7 and 8 files, and FO files proved amply sufficient. In addition research time was given to a group of boxes containing correspondence about individuals, mainly Maltese maintained at Coimbatore (IOR/L/AG/40/1/192-197). These comprised a huge volume of paperwork, and there was unfortunately not scope within this thesis to do justice to the contents so these files have been drawn on for general aspects; however there is more to be done here and this could be a good topic for future research.

IOR/L/PJ/8 files were more fruitful than IOR/L/PJ/7 ones, which only yielded a limited amount of material relating to Balkan evacuees. Many of the latter were concerned with

⁷⁷ See Sir Malcolm Seton, *The Whitehall Series: The India Office* (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons Ltd, 1926).

cases of recovery of expenditure from evacuees from Burma, Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies. However, a relevant one was 'File 6732' which gave insight into the medical case of a Mrs Portelli requesting compensation after contracting Tuberculosis. Collection 110 (Evacuation 1926 -1950), IOR/L/PJ/8/381 – 451 contains a cache of files relating to groups of evacuees from Singapore and Malaya, Baltic States, Burma, Iraq, Iran, Aden and Turkey. Unfortunately two helpful files in this collection are missing (392 and 393), but other cover the periods 1941 - 1942, and 1946 – 1948 when plans were being made to evacuate the Balkan Maltese to India and their relocation to Eritrea from Coimbatore. As mentioned previously there is overlap between FO, CO and IOR files - in other words multiple sources for the same document which is indicated in footnotes. However, it has also been a bonus to find copies of reports made from 1942 to 1948 by Captain Archibald Webb (Principal Refugee Officer) for the Government of India which were forwarded to British government offices, which mention the Balkan Maltese evacuees. These pop up in various departmental records.⁷⁸

In tandem with India Office Records, there are a handful of relevant files in the digitised collection of the National Archives of India. These are correspondence, reports and memos ('home political') received by or sent from the Home Department which date from 1941 – 1942, the period when groups of Balkan Maltese were arriving in India, then sent on to camps. A few relate to the provision of accommodation in various camps for the evacuees, while most are concerned with the movement from Egypt and arrival of groups at Bombay for dispersal. This material correlates with that found in FO, CO and other IOR files and is used as supporting references, for example communications from Cairo detailing how many Maltese had sailed on a ship and their departure date (Chapter One). It was also helpful to have digital access to government files and passenger lists held by the National Archives of Australia. This enabled research into tracing Balkan Maltese evacuees who migrated to the dominion as well as the Department of Immigration's attitude toward non-Malta-born Maltese British subjects. Correspondence files accessed include those from the Department of Immigration, Central Office Series A261; A441; A997 and A12288.

Other British government departmental files were also consulted from the War Office, Ministry of Transport and Dominions Office. These yielded official reports from the British military administration in Eritrea which mentioned the [Balkan] Maltese evacuees at Mai

⁷⁸ For example, copies of Captain Webb's correspondence and reports are found in TNA: FO 369/2829; FO 371/57830 ; FO 1015/52 and 53.

Habar (WO 261 Series), and MT 73/30 which deals with postwar immigration and sheds light on the challenges of arranging shipping for Balkan Maltese hoping to resettle in Australia. DO 35 Series records give contextual information relating to the evacuation of British Subjects from the Far East to Australia and South Africa, and evacuation from various Pacific islands, including Fiji. These were reviewed during the early stages of research which also encompassed numerous Colonial Office files and some FO files relating to these evacuations and those from Ceylon, North Borneo and Sarawak for example. In addition India Office records gave insight into the planned evacuations from British territory or axis control areas in East Africa and the Middle East (Aden). This wide sweep of departmental records enabled a useful understanding of British overseas evacuation planning and implementation (as discussed above) and to form a timeline of the many evacuations which took place (Tables I and II).

Searches of newspapers from Australia, India, and Britain, have revealed contemporary reports relating to the evacuees. Australian newspapers were a particularly rich source of information including images of Balkan Maltese arriving in the country, which have been used to illustrate this thesis.⁷⁹ Articles or stories printed to inform readers about local, national or world events and happenings reveal contemporary attitudes and public opinion towards politics and government policy. For example, as will be seen with Australian newspaper articles, public figures, such as state politicians, come in for a bashing, and attention is drawn to the ‘wrong’ type of immigrants arriving in Australia. Online resources such as *Hansard* (record of the United Kingdom parliament), online national biographies, such as the Australian Dictionary of Biography have been used, too. Others (too numerous to include here) with those already mentioned here are listed as required in the secondary sources section at the end of this thesis. Lastly, it has been satisfying to trace some of the Balkan Maltese evacuees through online family history research websites, not only birth, marriages and deaths, but also to discover where they finally settled, for example, FamilySearch and Ancestry UK. This has certainly given a more personal aspect to the thesis and provided a counter-balance to the official side of the narrative.

⁷⁹ <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/>

Summary of Thesis

This case study of British overseas evacuation policy during World War II follows the journey of the Balkan Maltese evacuees from their evacuation from Turkey in 1941 to their resettlement to Cyprus in 1949 via India and Eritrea. Three major themes are explored throughout: their status as British subjects and the reputation of Maltese domiciled in Turkey; migration to Australia; and efforts of various British government departments to arrange their resettlement somewhere within the British imperial world. In connection with this it also highlights the long battle between the Colonial and Foreign Offices to actually take financial responsibility for the evacuee group. Interspersed between the ‘official’ side of the evacuation are aspects of the Balkan Maltese evacuees’ own experiences of their time as evacuees and in the post-war period as misplaced persons.

Chapter One describes the two ‘Mackereth Evacuation Schemes’ set up to transport British subjects from the Balkan states to Bombay in India where they dispersed to evacuee camps. The last section specifically focuses on how Maltese British subjects in Turkey were included in the scheme, how they spent time in transit in Egypt, and their reception in India. A short introduction to Gilbert Mackereth is also given which details how he became involved in devising the evacuation routes. The following chapter begins with a summary of how the Balkan Maltese evacuees were initially accommodated in India before being moved to the Maltese Camp at the British Evacuee Camp (BEC) at Coimbatore before describing aspects of camp life here including health matters. It also discusses Balkan Maltese involvement in the British Evacuees Association (BEA) and how a British identity was established. Captain Archibald Webb, Principal Refugee Officer, also makes an appearance, as he was in overall charge of all evacuees and refugees in India.

His involvement with the care of the Balkan Maltese evacuees continues in Chapter Three, and in Four, where he finally hands over his charges to Brigadier Francis Drew, Chief Administrator of the British Military Administration in Eritrea. Chapter Three discusses in depth the emigration/repatriation issue, that is whether to allow the evacuees to return to Turkey or arrange their resettlement elsewhere. It ends on a positive note with the arrival of a group of Maltese evacuees in Australia. A wider context is given in Chapter Four, which outlines how the movement and resettlement of European refugees and displaced persons affected efforts to resettle the Balkan and Maltese evacuees. Within the British Government,

interdepartmental deliberations began again about where to send the group as they could no longer remain in India following Independence. Although not ideal, Eritrea, at this time, seemed the best option for a temporary transfer.

Chapter Five describes the reception of the evacuee group in Eritrea and accommodation at Mai Habar Camp, near Asmara. The efforts of the British Military Administration to move on as many as possible by arranging repatriation to Turkey and resettlement in Australia are explained as well as a Foreign Office intervention to take control of this to safeguard its own concerns. The mood of the evacuees themselves is also described when a protest was mounted regarding the travel money allowance given to those leaving the camp. This led to a clash between BMA officials and Maltese representatives which reverberates to London. In the final chapter preparations began for the transfer of the group, although this is not (as ever) straightforward. Agreement was finally reached as to which department – Colonial Office or Foreign Office – is financially liable for expenditure on the Balkan and Maltese evacuees in Eritrea.

Focus returns to resettlement in Australia as a large party embarks from Massawa to the dominion. Their unexpected and unwanted arrival causes consternation and threatens to derail future migration of non-Maltese-born Maltese British subjects to the country. After a formal agreement is reached with the Cyprus Government through the Acting Governor, there is a scramble to move the remaining evacuees to a reception camp in the Crown Colony. Although Cyprus was meant to be a permanent home for Balkan Maltese, many wish to complete their ambition to migrate to Australia. An Epilogue briefly illustrates how some achieved this goal, but also how others were rejected – despite British subject status.

Chapter One

Evacuation from the Balkans: The ‘Mackereth Evacuation Scheme’

You should now advise all British subjects, with the exception of any whose presence you think useful in present crisis, to leave your district and should set in motion the Mackereth evacuation scheme. Please ask His Majesty’s Consuls at Damascus and Aleppo to do the same.

You will of course advance public funds (against undertakings to repay) only to those who cannot pay their way.

Please inform Government of India how many persons may be expected to go there and how many will need relief.

Consular staff generally should remain at their posts for the present but any non-essential or female employees should be evacuated and wives and families should be advised to go.⁸⁰

This chapter provides context to the evacuation of Maltese British subjects from Turkey. It concentrates on a series of evacuations of British subjects from the European theatre of war, this time from the Balkans, a group of states including Yugoslavia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey. The destination for these evacuees was India, via several transit routes with stopping points along the way, for example, Basra in Iraq. This was initially organised by Colonel Gilbert Mackereth, who had evacuated from Addis Ababa in Abyssinia where he held the post of Consul-General, after Italy declared war on Britain in June 1940.⁸¹ Mackereth had joined the consular service following the First World War and held posts in Morocco and Damascus prior to his appointment at Addis Ababa in 1940.⁸² At this time Ethiopia (Abyssinia) along with Eritrea and part of Somaliland was under Italian control following its invasion by Mussolini’s fascist forces in 1935. Like other consular staff, part

⁸⁰ Foreign Office to Beirut, repeated to Jerusalem and Cairo, 16 May 1941, ‘Evacuation of British Subjects from Egypt, Balkans and North Africa’, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

⁸¹ Records of British Administration in Aden, Indian Office Records and Private Papers (IOR), IOR/R/20/B/1179: File C 23/6/1 1940.

⁸² *London Gazette* announced his appointment which was confirmed on 11th March 1940: [Page 2241 | Issue 34831, 16 April 1940 | London Gazette | The Gazette](#). Bibliographic details for Mackereth are available on the Lancashire Fusiliers website: [Sir Gilbert Mackereth MC \(lancs-fusiliers.co.uk\)](#). See also Michael G. Fry and Itamar Rabinovich (eds), *Despatches from Damascus: Gilbert Mackereth and British Policy in the Levant, 1933-1939* (Tel Aviv: Daya Center for Middle Eastern and Africa Studies, 1985).

of Mackereth's duties was to arrange the evacuation of British subjects from foreign territory in the event of a declaration of war against Britain. In early June (1940) he activated the evacuation plan to evacuate British subjects via Djibouti, a port in French Somaliland, to Aden, in response to receiving official notification from the Italian administration that 'in the event of war all British subjects in Italian East Africa will be placed in concentration camps'.⁸³ Mackereth also left for Aden. Initially he was to proceed to Cairo on instruction from the Foreign Office, but he suggested instead that he should travel to 'Bombay or the Cape by first available opportunity probably towards end of month.'⁸⁴

Presumably Mackereth felt he could be of better use here. It was essential during wartime that the Foreign Office redeployed its overseas staff as soon as possible to fill in gaps left by anyone either retiring, on leave, or who had joined the armed forces. There were also occasions when a temporary post was required in response to the war situation, such as formulating evacuation routes for civilians. After his arrival in Bombay, Mackereth set about liaising with various British representatives in the Balkan states and Middle East to co-ordinate and arrange the reception and accommodation of groups of evacuees. Additionally, information and instructions flowed between the Foreign Office, Colonial Office, and India Office as officials in London, with one eye on the war situation as it encroached into the Balkans, gave the go ahead to consular staff for evacuations of British subjects to be put into action.⁸⁵

Two key areas that were subject to much discussion were who, in terms of British subjects, should be included in evacuation schemes and where evacuees should be sent. There was a range of nationalities and ethnicities all having British subject status, and many could not speak English, a stumbling block to placing them in employment or being enlisted in the Armed Forces. This led to suggestions being made that English language classes should be arranged for evacuee parties en-route or after they had arrived in Bombay.⁸⁶ Although India became the primary destination for Balkan evacuees, other locations were also considered including Ceylon and East Africa, while Jewish parties were destined for Palestine. Much deliberation involved Maltese British subjects domiciled in Turkey. Initial estimates identified between two and three thousand requiring evacuation, but the cost of building a camp in India to house them was considered too high, so alternative locations

⁸³ British Consul-General, Addis Ababa, to Sir Bernard Rawdon Reilly, Governor of Aden, 6 June 1940, 'Evacuation from Abyssinia', IOR/R/20/B/1179: File C 23/6/1 1940.

⁸⁴ Reilly to Foreign Office, 18 June 1940, IOR/R/20/B/1792: File C 23/6/1 1940.

⁸⁵ 'Evacuation of British Subjects from Egypt, Balkans and North Africa', TNA: CO 968/43/7.

⁸⁶ 'Government of Bombay to India Office, informing the latter of arrival of 55 evacuees from Romania in Bombay, 3 December 1940', Public and Judicial Department Collections, IOR/L/PJ/7/4149, File 5594.

were considered in Britain's East African colonies and even Jamaica. An appalling example of prejudice against Maltese people came from the Governor of Northern Rhodesia, who would rather they were not sent to his domain; this shocked even staff at the Colonial Office, especially since Malta was paying such a high cost for its loyalty to the British Empire.⁸⁷ In the event, the numbers of Balkan Maltese evacuees were much lower than originally predicted, and provision was made for their accommodation in India.

In summary, this chapter provides an overview of evacuation of British subjects from the Balkans during late 1940 to mid-1941, focussing on preparations made and reception of evacuees in India. It also identifies the various routes used to transport evacuees to their destination - not always a straightforward journey - and one which involved pauses at stopping points, for example, while onward transport was arranged. Transit routes sometimes passed through areas outside the British imperial sphere and it did not necessarily follow that local authorities would agree to entry of evacuee groups. British representatives therefore had to ensure they obtained permissions and visas if required. Additionally, the chapter examines the involvement of Colonel Gilbert Mackereth who superintended the evacuation scheme between the Balkans and India. His contribution was mirrored by the input of British officials across southeast Europe and the Middle East who planned and assisted in evacuations from or through the countries where they were posted. The case of Balkan Maltese evacuees gives an opportunity to investigate how a group of British subjects experienced evacuation from the Balkans, while discussion about where they might be sent for the duration, or even for permanent resettlement, highlights prejudice against them which alarmed officials in London.

The Mackereth Evacuation Scheme: Istanbul – Basra – Bombay Route

The first route set up by Mackereth to transport evacuees from the Balkans to India started in Istanbul and went via Basra in Iraq to Bombay. It was in operation from late 1940 to early 1941 with approximately 250 persons travelling by train and ship.⁸⁸ Istanbul was a natural starting point for evacuee parties as the Turkish city was regarded as the gateway between Europe and the Middle East with railway and shipping terminals there. British subjects domiciled in the Balkan countries such as Romania left their homes and businesses following

⁸⁷ See telegrams sent to and from the East African Governors' Conference, Nairobi, Kenya, August 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7. Also found in IOR/L/PJ/8/395, Coll 110/D1; TNA:FO 369/2674 and FO 369/2675.

⁸⁸ See figures given in 'Movements of British War Evacuees from Balkan and Baltic States arrived in Istanbul Oct 15 1940 – Jan 15 1941', CO 968/43/7.

an increase of German influence in the area and government hostility. At this point in the war Hitler was intent on getting control of raw materials required for the German war effort such as oil, but a full-scale invasion of the Balkan states would not be launched until the spring of 1941. According to a newspaper report, an evacuee group from Rumania travelling by steamer to Istanbul suffered the indignity of being delayed and searched by the Romanian Iron Guard (a fascist, anti-Semitic organisation) at the Black Sea port of Constanza.⁸⁹

On reaching Istanbul evacuees were placed in the care of the Reception Committee, a voluntary group chaired by Reverend Clark-Kerr, while arrangements were made for their onward journey by train, such as issuing visas as required.⁹⁰ This was the responsibility of the British representative there, T. H. Preston, who had previously organised the evacuation of British subjects evacuated from Lithuania.⁹¹ Evacuee groups then travelled by rail to Basra in Iraq, although Jewish British subjects were permitted entry to Palestine. Presumably, this was at the discretion of the British High Commissioner (Harold MacMichael) as Jewish immigration had been restricted following the publication of the British government's 1939 White Paper. This placed a limit of 75,000 immigrants over five years but did not seem to apply to the flow of Jewish refugees from Germany and Nazi-occupied territory who were searching for a safe haven.⁹² As displaced 'British subjects', small groups of Jewish evacuees travelling on a government organised evacuation scheme were acceptable for temporary entry. Up to January 1941, 67 evacuees had arrived in Palestine from Istanbul, although more were to follow later that year, particularly after the German invasion of Greece in April and May.⁹³

The bulk of British evacuees journeyed in groups by train via Mosul and Baghdad where a British official (Mr. Pott) was also on hand to supervise as they changed trains, finally reaching Basra. Here a rest house had been established by His Majesty's Consul, Weld Forester where they waited for a ship to transport them to Bombay.⁹⁴ The first party of 55 evacuees arrived here on 30 November 1940 and Mackereth reported that all were 'most grateful for arrangements made for them and to British communities in Istanbul,

⁸⁹ 'British Refugee's Hardships', *Times of India*, 17 October 1940, p.1.

⁹⁰ Mackereth to Anthony Eden, British Foreign Secretary, 2 February 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

⁹¹ Previously Preston held the post of (Minister Plenipotentiary) at Kovno. See Thomas Hidlebrand Preston, *Before the Curtain* (London: John Murray, 1950).

⁹² James Barr, *A Line in the Sand*. Ronen Yitzhak provides useful insight into the position of Jewish refugees and entry to Palestine in his article, 'Politics and Ideology: Lord Moyne, Palestine and Zionism 1939-1944', *Britain and the World* 10:2 (2017), pp. 155-69.

⁹³ 'Movements of British War Evacuees from Balkan and Baltic States', TNA: CO 968/43/7.

⁹⁴ Mackereth to Eden, 2 February 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

Mosul and Basra and to Iraqi Railways to all of whom they ask me to convey special thanks.⁹⁵ As in Istanbul, a volunteer Reception Committee was created in Bombay under the direction of the Governor, Sir Roger Lumley. Evacuees were temporarily housed in the Military Families Transit Hostel at Colaba 'kindly placed at the disposal of the reception committee by the General Officer Commanding the Bombay District', then transferred to Satara, a hill station near Poona.⁹⁶ Accommodation provided here (in a former musketry school) was basic but gave evacuees an opportunity to acclimatise to their new surroundings while finding employment and other accommodation. A total of 178 British subjects travelled to India during this first phase of evacuation, a number easily handled with regard to arranging transportation, reception and accommodation.⁹⁷ Further aspects of the evacuees' experience in India are discussed below, including what requisites they were expected to fulfil, for example, finding employment and re-paying travel expenses. Overall, as deviser of the scheme, Mackereth was very satisfied with how the evacuation had proceeded:

The Istanbul – Basra – Bombay route has proved highly practicable and has avoided any embarrassment to the Navy in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is also satisfactory to notice that there has been little or no hindrance from the French authorities in Syria. The improvised organisation, the backbone of which has been His Majesty's Consulates on the way has been flexible and has worked smoothly. With a strong Reception Committee in Bombay, it should be capable of dealing, should the occasion unhappily arise in the future, with any further evacuation from the Balkans and Middle East, with the exception of any large exodus of Maltese from Turkey.⁹⁸

As Syria was under a French mandate, and since the fall of France under the control of the Vichy government, it was highly likely that the authorities there might have blocked any travel by British subjects across the country. An attack by the British Navy on ships of the French Fleet at Mers-el-Kebir in July 1940 had especially worsened relations between the two countries. The Vichy government led by Marshal Philippe Pétain were

⁹⁵ Mackereth, c/o Chief Secretary to the Government of Bombay, Political Services Department, to L. S. Amery, Secretary of State for India, 2 December 1940, Public and Judicial Departmental Papers: Annual Files (1931-1950), IOR/L/PJ/7/4149.

⁹⁶ Mackereth to Eden, 2 February 1941.

⁹⁷ 'Movements of British War Evacuees from Balkan and Baltic States'.

⁹⁸ Mackereth to Eden, 2 February 1941.

understandably furious about the incident which cost the lives of 1,297 French sailors.⁹⁹ It is unclear quite why the Istanbul to Bombay route had avoided embarrassment to the Royal Navy: perhaps it could not guarantee safe passage to ships travelling to the Suez Canal from Turkey, or even that Mackereth believed that ships would have got through easily, despite advice to the contrary. Whichever, it appears that he was having a little gibe at the Navy's expense. And as he states, it was through the combined efforts of various British Consulates that the scheme had worked so well. Despite this successful outcome, when writing his report in February 1941, Mackereth could not have anticipated that the local situation in the Middle East would change, and that German aggression in the Balkans would necessitate further evacuation. These circumstances required a change in direction for the route of the Mackereth Evacuation Scheme and a solution to the problem of where to send Maltese evacuees from Turkey and Greece.

Istanbul – Iskanderun – Port Said – Bombay Route

As in any war situation, events can move swiftly, even in areas away from the front line. Following France's armistice with the Axis powers of Germany and Italy, and a failed attempt to break British air defences and postponement of a planned sea invasion, the Führer turned his attention to preparing for an offensive into the Balkan states. As mentioned previously, it was important for Germany to maintain a secure supply of oil from Romania, but also to consolidate its south eastern flank prior to attacking Russia.¹⁰⁰ The main objective was an invasion of Greece – Operation Marita – through Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, planned for Spring 1941. This would affect British subjects domiciled throughout the region, and also in neighbouring Turkey who might be advised to evacuate. Additionally, stability and security in the Middle East was disrupted by increasing German influence in Iraq, prompting an intervention by British imperial troops. These came mainly by ship via the Persian Gulf from India but also from Jordan. The situation, of course, made the evacuation route via Basra unusable for a time, and an alternative was put into action. Instead of travelling by train overland via Iraq, then ship to Bombay, groups of evacuees would now have to travel from Istanbul to Iskanderun (formerly Alexandretta), down the east Mediterranean coast by ship to Port Said prior to embarking again for India. This meant passing by Vichy-controlled

⁹⁹ Anthony Beevor, *The Second World War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014), pp.148-52.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p.178.

Syria and Lebanon, then landing in Egypt, which despite a strong British presence there, would require the permission of the country's government.

This change of route also precipitated an adjustment in how the evacuation scheme was co-ordinated. Mackereth remained in Bombay up to April 1941 when he was recalled to London to join the Egyptian Department of the Foreign Office as advisor for Abyssinian affairs. His departure meant that there would be no single person overseeing arrangements made for groups of Balkan evacuees, with British representatives involved despatching queries directly to the Foreign Office as well as information to the Home Department of the Indian Government. However, Thomas Preston, Consul-General in Istanbul, increasingly took a lead after he was transferred to Cairo on his appointment as one of the Counsellors at the British Embassy under Sir Miles Lampson.¹⁰¹ Not only had he liaised closely with Mackereth during the first phase, but as his memoir reveals, he was an old hand at organising evacuations:

September 1940 at Kaunas marked the fourth occasion upon which I, as the official British representative on the spot, was responsible for organising, under conditions of a certain amount of panic, the evacuation of the British colony. In fact, as a result of my past experience of Ekaterinburg in 1919, in Siberia and later (in 1926) at Leningrad, I had evolved quite a technique of my own. My plan was the simple one of chartering a train and informing all British subjects that it would leave at a given time and all who failed to be on that train by that given time remained behind at their own risk...¹⁰²

Additionally, Preston had prepared an evacuation plan for the British subjects domiciled in Istanbul at the request of his superior, Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, British Ambassador at Angora, in case Germany attacked the city.¹⁰³ Such experience made him an ideal choice to supervise the continuing evacuation from the Balkan states. This second phase of evacuation lasted until the end of 1941 as there were often lengthy delays in securing onward transportation to Bombay, particularly for Maltese British subjects. This situation was not helped by indecision and confusion over the number requiring evacuation and where to send them. At various points, British East African colonies such as Tanganyika

¹⁰¹ Thomas Preston, *Before the Curtain*.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 268.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

were explored as potential destinations for Maltese evacuees from Turkey and Greece; initially, even Jamaica was proposed.

After a lull during February and March 1941, the next period of evacuation using the second route was triggered by the German air attack on Belgrade on 6 April and simultaneous invasions of Yugoslavia and Greece. Concerned about evacuating Maltese British subjects from Turkey due to the 'new situation', Knatchbull-Hugessen asked for 'an assurance that shipping facilities from Basra to Bombay and [accommodation] would be available' from Mackereth.¹⁰⁴ The reply revealed that the evacuation route had been switched to Iskanderun which 'covers the present contingency'.¹⁰⁵ The British Ambassador had previously proposed the evacuation of unemployed Maltese from Turkey reasoning that 'given present necessity of utilisation of all available manpower it seems wasteful that these people should remain in Turkey on the dole, with prospects constituting a considerable responsibility for His Majesty's Government in the event of a German attack, instead of their proceeding to India (or elsewhere in the Empire) where they could presumably do useful work.'¹⁰⁶ While the Foreign Office concurred that this was a sensible suggestion and was prepared to ask if India would take Maltese evacuees ahead of a general evacuation, and if they could be placed in employment, the British Minister in Athens, Sir Michael Palairat, cautioned against a premature evacuation of British subjects from Greece.¹⁰⁷ He believed that Greek morale would be damaged if an evacuation of British civilians was organised as this would 'only be interpreted as evidence that we have no confidence in the powers of the Greek and imperial forces to repel the German invasion.'¹⁰⁸ (An expeditionary force consisting of British, Australian and New Zealand troops had been sent to Greece to assist Greek resistance to the German invaders.) He therefore would not issue any official instruction to evacuate, but voluntary evacuation, that is, 'individuals who wish to leave of their own accord', could do so by taking private (paid) passage on ships returning to Egypt.¹⁰⁹

In reality, it was unlikely that British subjects domiciled in Greece would be able to evacuate via Istanbul or even Iskanderun, as the German advance through Thrace and Macedonia blocked off land access to Turkey, although by sea was a possibility. Instead, as

¹⁰⁴ Angora to Flag Officer Commanding, Royal Indian Navy, Bombay, for Mackereth, 8 April 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; FO 369/2665, K3790; IOR /L/PJ/8/395.

¹⁰⁵ Bombay to Angora, 10 April 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; FO 369/2665, K3847.

¹⁰⁶ Angora to Foreign Office, 2 April 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; FO 369/6665, K 3579; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

¹⁰⁷ Foreign Office to Angora, 10 April 1941, repeated to Athens and Bombay, TNA: CO 968/43/7; FO 369/2665, K3847.

¹⁰⁸ Athens to Foreign Office, 12 April 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Palairret suggested, there was opportunity to sail directly to Egypt from southern Greece. As Artemis Cooper describes, in the event this is what happened. Egypt was initially overwhelmed by the large number of those fleeing from Greece across the sea: ‘the first refugees began to arrive in Egypt on 21 April [1941] in a motley selection of tugs, caiques and small steamers. Over a thousand were to settle on the beach at Alexandria, while the British authorities tried to speed up arrangements for their reception. Many had no papers, and most had not eaten for forty-eight hours. Four thousand were expected in the next few days.’¹¹⁰

Most of the evacuees, then, sent via the second evacuation route came directly from Turkey, or had managed to make their way to Istanbul from the other Balkan states. As this new route passed through Egypt the British Ambassador there, Sir Miles Lampson, and his staff became more involved in arrangements for the reception of evacuees and any temporary accommodation required. Egypt was heavily militarised and a crucial base for British and Commonwealth forces deployed in the North African theatre of war as well as the Royal Naval fleet operating in the Eastern Mediterranean. Additionally, control of the Suez Canal was paramount to maintaining sea links with the wider British Empire - South Africa, India and the Far East. Therefore, it was essential to retain the cooperation of the Egyptian Government, a task which fell to Lampson (later Lord Killearn) a forceful figure, who was not averse to using intimidation to achieve what was required. Despite this dominance, it was important to be mindful of how much the Egyptian Government would tolerate. The ad hoc arrival of perhaps thousands of evacuees and refugees from the Balkans, including British subjects, may well have tested this, but the British Ambassador ensured that demands on Egyptian goodwill were kept in check.

Evacuation via the second route got underway in mid-April 1941 with Preston advising that he expected to send a group of twenty British subjects from the Balkan states who would transit through Port Said to Bombay. He also warned of the possibility of evacuating the British colony in Istanbul which numbered approximately 1,800.¹¹¹ Arrangements had already been made by the British Consul at Port Said and naval authorities for the transit of British subjects ‘in consultation with Preston and Mackereth’. Lampson reminded his counterpart in Athens that evacuees should have transit visas.¹¹² In response, Preston requested visas (individual and collective) through the Egyptian Consul-General in Istanbul, but asked for ‘Your Excellency’s valuable support’ in ensuring that authorisation

¹¹⁰ Artemis Cooper, *Cairo in the War, 1939-1945* (London: John Murray, 2013), p. 79.

¹¹¹ Istanbul to Cairo, 15 April 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; FO 369/6665, K4024.

¹¹² Cairo to Athens, 13 April 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

for these was given from the Minister of the Interior in Cairo.¹¹³ In fact, approval had already been granted to issue the necessary visas to British passports and for holders of emergency certificates. However, the Egyptian authorities were averse to giving all-encompassing visas to groups of evacuees.¹¹⁴ This was understandable as there would be no control over who might enter the country, and whether they were genuinely wishing to transit or intended to stay in Egypt.

Hereafter, various groups of evacuees passed through Port Said. In May 'Evacuation No. 3' comprising of 224 evacuees, embarked on two ships at Suez for Bombay. Most were British subjects with a few European nationals in each group.¹¹⁵ Although it is not specified, they were undoubtedly Maltese, as details of how many were educated and to what level, were given as well as the number of artisans. This quirk arose from Mackereth's pre-occupation that British subjects evacuating to India should be able to speak English and have some education. This made them more likely to find employment or for men to join the armed or auxiliary forces and therefore not be a burden on government maintenance. There was also apprehension that India would not accept poor and uneducated Balkan evacuees. By specifying their academic backgrounds – higher, secondary and elementary education – it gave the impression that they were 'useful' British subjects. That said, Preston also noted that all the evacuees were destitute, and government assisted.¹¹⁶ Additionally, he disclosed that there were 1,300 refugees accommodated in a camp; and in Cairo itself, 800 were waiting for passage to India. Preston also warned that several thousand more refugees from Turkey, Syria and elsewhere were expected to arrive in Egypt.¹¹⁷ As will be revealed later, this backlog of refugees caused difficulties along the second evacuation route as Preston had limited space for those coming from the Balkan states, and became frustrated by the lack of shipping available to transport parties to India.

After transferring from Istanbul to Cairo in May 1941 after Mackereth's departure Preston took on the organisation of the reception, temporary accommodation and onward passages for evacuees from the Repatriation Office for the Middle East at the British Embassy. He was assisted in this work by a Major Green and Mrs. Were, wife of one of the Consul-Generals. All three were praised in a letter from Lampson to the Foreign Secretary,

¹¹³ Istanbul to Cairo, 15 April 1941.

¹¹⁴ Cairo to Istanbul, 21 April 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

¹¹⁵ Cairo to Home Department, Government of India, 23 May 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7. The two groups of evacuees travelled on the SS *City of London* and SS *Ethiopia*.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. The final number of British subjects evacuated to India was actually far lower than predicted.

Anthony Eden: Preston and Green for their efforts in securing shipping transport to India; and Mrs. Were whose 'untiring energy and thoughtfulness has earned the well-praise [sic] of many evacuees'.¹¹⁸ At least five groups of Balkan evacuees were successfully sent to Bombay, with sailings in May, August, September, October and November, totalling approximately 500 men, women and children. Other sailings followed in November and December, and even into May 1942.¹¹⁹ However, a continuing problem with regards to Maltese evacuees was inter-departmental dithering over where to send them. This partly arose from inflated figures given for how many required (or wanted) evacuation (from Turkey in particular) and whether, firstly that India would accept them, and secondly the cost of building a specific camp to house them there. This aspect will be discussed more fully later, but a delayed decision meant that Preston and the British Ambassador in Egypt, were required to continue holding back evacuees which prompted a telegram from Lampson to the Foreign Office: '... Maltese in camp at Cairo are becoming restive and I would be most grateful for early instructions as to their destination especially as, owing to frequency enemy air raids, difficulties of embarkation at Suez are increasing. ...'¹²⁰

The destination issue for British Maltese evacuees was eventually resolved at the end of September, when Preston received final confirmation from the Foreign Office that they could be evacuated to India and also instruction to communicate directly with the Government of India.¹²¹ At this point there were 409 Maltese awaiting evacuation in Cairo and he hoped that shipping would be available by mid-October to transport them to Bombay.¹²² In a way this confirmation only served to rubber-stamp the movement of Balkan Maltese evacuees to India, as small groups had been sent there already; but it did settle the issue of where the estimated three to four thousand would be relocated. In fact, the number of Maltese British subjects moved via the evacuation scheme was far less than predicted.

Preston had actually been under some pressure to get a decision from the Foreign Office as his telegram dated 28 September revealed: 'Egyptian authorities are refusing to lease

¹¹⁸ Lampson to Eden, 13 August 1942, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

¹¹⁹ See details of sailings with numbers and some lists of evacuees in 'The Question of Accommodating Certain Balkan Refugees of Various Nationalities from Mideast', Home Political 1941, National Archives of India (NAI): HOME_POLITICAL_EW_1941_NA_F-10-115; Also Fortnightly Reports from the Home Department, Government of Bombay to Home Department, Government of India dated 17 December 1941, found in NAI: HOME_POLITICAL_1_1941_NA_F-18-12-41; dated 16 January 1942 in NAI: HOME_POLITICAL_1_1942_NA_F-18-1; and dated first half of May, 1942 in NAI: HOME_POLITICAL_1_1942_NA_F-18-5.

¹²⁰ Lampson to Foreign Office, 11 September 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

¹²¹ Foreign Office to Cairo, 30 September 1941; Cairo to Government of India, following from Preston, 7 October 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

¹²² Ibid (7 October 1941).

refugee camps premises Cairo after 28 October. Should efforts to prolong lease fail we shall have to accommodate refugees at the Hotel, 3½ times present cost. It is therefore now of the utmost urgency to evacuate Maltese...'¹²³ Although the Foreign Office explained in reply that it was the Colonial Office that preferred the Maltese British subjects to go to India, undoubtedly keeping the cost down of temporary accommodation in Cairo and not wishing to irritate the Egyptian authorities, also played a part in coming to a final decision.¹²⁴ However, it is clear that the camp at Cairo continued in use after the end of October. In a communication with Angora from early November, Preston stated that there had been a delay in shipping the aforementioned 409 Maltese evacuees to Bombay and that until they left he only had room for another 200 refugees – either Greek or Maltese – at the camp.¹²⁵ It would appear from this that the Egyptian authorities had agreed (or had been persuaded) to extend the lease. Preston also informed Lampson of the departure of 197 evacuees to India on 29 November, and explained that the remainder would be sent 'as shipping facilities are available. The Maltese will, in future, be divided into groups of thirty, each with a leader. It is regretted that it was found impracticable to follow this system in the case of the first batch of 189.'¹²⁶ However, given the continued wait for shipping to become available, the preference was that no further groups of evacuees should be sent from Turkey to Egypt: another option was to send them via the original evacuation route through Baghdad and Basra. This option was explored by the British Ambassador at Angora, Knatchbull-Hugessen, who had become increasingly frustrated at not being able to move refugees onwards to India due to the congestion at Cairo.

Several batches of Maltese and other British subjects had been despatched from Istanbul during July and August 1941, trickling through to Cairo, but by September Knatchbull-Hugessen was requested by Preston to 'refrain from evacuating the Maltese' until their final destination was settled. This came at an awkward moment for the British Ambassador as 'gradual evacuation of British subjects from Izmir (Smyrna) has recently begun' and he felt that confusion would result if this was suddenly suspended; additionally this could well create a situation if there was a sudden threat of invasion.¹²⁷ At this point in the war, Izmir, on the west coast of Turkey looked vulnerable to Axis occupation as Germany

¹²³ Cairo to Foreign Office, 28 September 1941, following from Preston, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

¹²⁴ Foreign Office to Cairo, 30 September 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

¹²⁵ Cairo to Angora, 7 November 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

¹²⁶ Preston to Lampson, 2 December 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7. This party of 189 travelled on *S.S. City of Paris* – see Report for the first half of December 1941 from J.M. Sladen, Home Department, Bombay, dated 17 December 1941 in NAI: HOME_POLITICAL_1_1941_NA_F-18-12-41.

¹²⁷ Angora to Foreign Office, 19 September 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

had, alongside invading mainland Greece, taken control of many of the neighbouring islands including Lesbos and Chios. The latter was exceptionally close to the Turkish port and in fact the British Consul there (and also intelligence officer), Noel Rees, had evacuated from the island in April 1941 with his family relocating to Izmir where he was appointed Vice-Consul.¹²⁸ Moreover, Knatchbull-Hugessen expressed his opinion that British subjects, who in this case were banned from working by the Turkish authorities, should be sent to a permanent settlement within the Empire, the inference being that they could then find employment and not have to live on relief payments handed out by the British government.

Because of the backlog of evacuees in Egypt, those waiting in Izmir for onward transportation to Port Said continued to do so, but during November, the British Ambassador in Angora was advised by the Foreign Office to make enquiries about the Basra route.¹²⁹ The reason given was that this was the cheaper (and therefore preferred) route for evacuees to take to Bombay. It also reminded Knatchbull-Hugessen that he 'should not of course send off any refugees until there is a prospect of a clear run to India'.¹³⁰ According to Preston - in a communication with Angora - the cost of sending refugees from Turkey to India via Basra was £39 per person whereas via Egypt either by rail through Syria or by sea via İçel (Mersin) was £62 per person, although an enquiry to the British Consul regarding accommodation at Basra did not seem hopeful.¹³¹ Despite this, Knatchbull-Hugessen telegraphed the Government of India and Baghdad (for Basra) describing the problem he faced in Izmir: '... party is already awaiting departure in conditions of increasing hardship and discontent. May I begin to despatch further contingent (up to 200) of Maltese via Basra without further delay? ... I should be grateful to be informed by Consul Basra whether accommodation is available there for evacuees awaiting shipment.'¹³² Unfortunately, it seems that the evacuation route via Iraq was unlikely to be of any use as, according to Preston, at Basra it was 'impossible to accommodate any evacuees [as] all accommodation previously utilised now commandeered by armed forces'; although British military authorities hoped to be able to provide tents for temporary housing. Likewise, there was no accommodation available in Baghdad. However, on the plus side, 'shipping facilities were ample and frequent'.¹³³

¹²⁸ For further information about Noel Rees see Tom Rees, *Merchant Adventurers in the Levant: Two British Families of Privateers, Consuls & Traders, 1700-1956* (Austin, TX: Talbot, 2003).

¹²⁹ Foreign Office to Angora, 10 November 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Cairo to Angora, 7 November 1941.

¹³² Angora to Government of India, 14 November 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

¹³³ Cairo to Angora, 27 November 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

It appears that this information was intended to discourage use of the Basra – Bombay route. Meanwhile, the situation in Cairo remained as before, with irregular shipping from Suez, but more space available at the camp for refugees once the 409 Maltese had left for India. However, even this was a dubious option as Preston, once more, reiterated that ‘we do not want any more here until their acceptance by the Government of India is agreed.’¹³⁴ This was a somewhat contradictory statement as this issue had been resolved at the end of September – perhaps then the information given in this telegram to Knatchbull-Hugessen was intended to deter the British Ambassador from sending any further parties of Maltese British subjects to India. As the Axis powers had consolidated their hold in the Balkans with no incursions into Turkey, and German attention now focused on the campaign in North Africa and the proposed invasion of the Soviet Union, there was no urgent need to remove British subjects from the area. They would be a cost on the British Government whether receiving relief where they were or relocated to India, where the expenditure was possibly even higher. It was not an ideal situation but relieved the pressure on those organising the evacuation route and also on the Indian Government, which had gone out of its way to try to accommodate Balkan evacuees despite the other demands it faced.

It is very difficult to get an accurate figure for how many British subjects were officially evacuated from the Balkans to India, but totting up the numbers in archival sources gives an estimate of between 800 and 1,000, including refugees and Balkan Maltese evacuees. The latter, on arrival in Bombay were sent to temporary accommodation at Satara Camp, then relocated to Sewar Camp at Bharatpur. Finally, they were moved to the British Evacuee Camp at Coimbatore. The remainder of this chapter examines in detail the case of Maltese British subjects evacuated from the Balkan states, including the convoluted discussions about where they should be sent which, as has been described briefly above, caused lengthy delays in transporting and settling them for the duration of the war. Cost of maintaining destitute evacuees and building accommodation to house them is also discussed. Additionally, it explores whether a lack of the English language skills affected employment prospects for Maltese evacuees, and along with their destitution influenced how they perceived negatively by others. It begins with a brief history of the Maltese diaspora and the condition of the Maltese communities in Turkey prior to the Second World War.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

The Maltese Diaspora

Sitting in the Central Mediterranean, the island of Malta, which became a British Crown Colony in 1813 following its occupation by Napoleonic France, was ideally placed for its inhabitants to migrate to the sea's land borders. According to Price, 'By 1842, this emigration had been in existence long enough to produce well-defined Maltese settlements all along the Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean.'¹³⁵ Small colonies could be found in places such as Algeria, Tunis, Tripoli, Egypt (Cairo and Alexandria), Athens, Constantinople and Smyrna. This was a fluid kind of migration as expatriate Maltese would often return to their home island in times of crisis. For example, when employment dried up or wages dropped too low. Early attempts by British authorities to transplant Maltese workers further afield in organised migration schemes, to the West Indies for instance, were unsuccessful mainly due to the poor living conditions and disease, but also because the islanders felt too far from 'Home'.¹³⁶

Therefore, the small Maltese colonies made up of merchants, artisans, agriculturalists and labourers which were scattered around the Mediterranean seaboard continued to grow and consolidate, while British attempts to encourage migration elsewhere continued. By the later nineteenth century, emigration was beginning to move outwards to the United States and Australia, although an organised scheme to send Maltese labourers to the sugar cane plantations in Queensland failed when they were exploited for low wages.¹³⁷ Additionally, as Price explains, the language question, that is the ability to speak English, 'did sometimes have a direct bearing on the actual processes of emigration' for Maltese British subjects. Traditionally, the inhabitants of Malta had spoken Maltese and Italian, but for those in the professional classes, for example, who wished to find employment within the wider British Empire, to be conversant in English was essential: '...only a few Maltese doctors found their English the key to employment in the imperial service in Fiji and Mauritius.'¹³⁸ It was far more practical to emigrate to countries with languages similar to Maltese or where Italian was spoken.

Hence there was a drive to have English included in the education system to help widen opportunities, although this was not a popular policy with many traditionalists, including some Maltese politicians, who wished to preserve ties to Italy and hinder

¹³⁵ Charles A. Price, *Malta and the Maltese: A Study in Nineteenth Century Migration*, (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1954), p. 60.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-86.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 178-84.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

emigration. The ‘Language Question’, that is whether English or Italian should be the dominant foreign language in Malta became a hotly contested political issue for decades until the 1920s when, as Attard comments, the rise of the Fascist Party headed by Mussolini rather tainted the Italian connection, especially when it laid claim to the island ‘as part of unredeemed Italy’:

Such irredentist claims were ignored by most Maltese. When sustained efforts were made to educate the masses the people wanted to study their own Maltese language. They also preferred to learn English because it was the language used by most Maltese emigrants and it had an international status. ...¹³⁹

Following the First World War there were further attempts to encourage the inhabitants of Malta to emigrate to the wider British Empire to relieve the overpopulation and unemployment problems that the island was experiencing post war.¹⁴⁰ There was tentative settlement in Canada and Australia during the 1920s and 1930s; but, as before a significant number of migrants returned home or migrated elsewhere. Migration to the United States of America was more successful, particularly in Detroit where Maltese men found work in the car industry.¹⁴¹ An essential part of any Maltese community was a church and Roman Catholic priest, as religion was a cornerstone of their culture, so colonies with spiritual guidance thrived better than those without. The immigration policies of the British white dominions also played a significant role in how many Maltese were admitted, with both Canada and Australia having tests in language competency, which often excluded or discouraged migrants from settling there.¹⁴² Endemic racism was evident, too: despite Malta being part of the British Empire, its inhabitants, being southern European, were not the archetypal Anglo-Saxon settlers preferred by the white dominions. Unfortunately, immigrants (in general) were often judged on racial stereotypes ascribed to them – lacking intelligence, inability to adapt, lazy, unhygienic – which had a negative impact on their reception. Limited English language skills also indicated their foreignness and cast doubt on their status as British subjects. As is shown later, this prejudice had a direct impact on the lengthy discussion on where to send Maltese evacuees and how they could be useful to the Imperial war effort.

¹³⁹ Attard, *The Great Exodus*, p.8.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, pp.9-33.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

¹⁴² Ibid, Chapters 5 and 6.

Despite the challenges of organised migration elsewhere, during the interwar period the Maltese diaspora along the fringes of the Mediterranean continued to thrive and even expand, for example in the French colony of Algeria and also in Egypt.¹⁴³ However, an exception to this were the small Maltese enclaves in Istanbul and Smyrna which especially suffered during the Greco-Turkish War (1919-22) and under the rule of Mustapha Kemal Atatürk, first president of modern Turkey (1923-38).¹⁴⁴ Under the terms of the post-war settlement between the Allies and Ottoman Empire (Treaty of Sevres, 1920), Greece had been given administration of the port of Smyrna and the surrounding area. Additionally it was ceded most of Thrace, while an international garrison remained in Constantinople.¹⁴⁵ However, Greece had pre-empted the treaty by launching a military occupation of the port prior to the signing of the treaty, which considerably rankled Turkish nationalists. Further offensives into Ottoman territory during 1920 and 1921 prompted a forceful response from the Turks. Greek forces were driven back to Smyrna from where they successfully evacuated, but thousands of Greek civilians were left behind.¹⁴⁶ The Maltese colony there became caught up in the Turkish retribution that followed which included setting the city alight and terrorising the Armenian and Greek inhabitants. Approximately 80 Maltese managed to evacuate alongside other refugees on the hospital ship, RFA *Maine*, to Malta in September 1922, finding themselves in a ‘home country they generally did not know and whose language they did not speak’.¹⁴⁷ Many families in Smyrna had lived there for several generations and consequently were more fluent in languages such as Greek and Italian; they also continued to retain their British passports – a symbol of their citizenship of the Empire, and a tie to their homeland of Malta.

For those Maltese who chose to (or had to) remain in Turkey, life was precarious: ‘... after 1922, most were now destitute. As amply shown by the copious pathetic, Maltese petitions from Smyrna begging Britain for help transmitted via the British consulate to the Foreign Office, most Maltese were living in misery, some were on the verge of starvation.’¹⁴⁸ The solution to this predicament was to issue relief allowances to those in need, but as Frendo explains ‘generally these were the barest minimum to keep body and soul together.’¹⁴⁹

¹⁴³ Chircop ‘A Transient Colony in the Valley of the Nile’.

¹⁴⁴ Attard, *The Great Exodus*, p. 23.

¹⁴⁵ See Matthew Stewart, ‘Catastrophe at Smyrna’, *History Today* 54:7 (2004), pp. 27-33. The garrison at Constantinople consisted of French, British and Italian troops, but the city remained under Ottoman control.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Henry Frendo, ‘Maltese Survivors of Smyrna’.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.367.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Numbers of Maltese still living in Istanbul and Smyrna were approximately 1,500 - not a large number - and while many were destitute, others were able to continue in employment.¹⁵⁰ However, the situation worsened for all Maltese expatriates in 1932 when the Atatürk-led government placed restrictions on anyone holding a foreign passport from working. This was followed two years later by a law which only allowed permanent settlement in Turkey to those of Turkish culture and descent.¹⁵¹ Yet again the Maltese found themselves in another wave of poverty. Relief allowances available to them in the late 1930s consisted of a 50% - 50% arrangement between the British treasury and the government in Malta.¹⁵² While their British passports gave access to assistance from the British government, it also severely limited their quality of life. This was the situation left to Knatchbull-Hugessen when he took over the position of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Turkish Republic from Sir Percy Loraine on the eve of the Second World War.¹⁵³

Maltese British Subjects and the Mackereth Evacuation Scheme

The evacuation of Maltese British subjects has already been touched upon earlier in this chapter, but the complexity of how this was approached by British representatives in the Balkan states, Egypt, India, and by government departments in London requires further unravelling. It is clear from archival sources that while expatriate Maltese were regarded as British subjects wherever they lived, and therefore under the umbrella of the protection of the United Kingdom, they were perhaps considered second class citizens of the Empire. The question of where to send them – that is, to India where other British evacuees from the Balkans had been sent – at first seemed a straightforward solution, but it rapidly became a protracted and frustrating process. This was in part due to the originator of the evacuation scheme, Gilbert Mackereth, who with no doubt with the best intentions, encouraged the Foreign Office and his diplomatic colleagues to consider alternative destinations. As the Government of India maintained throughout, it was happy to accommodate Maltese

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. Frenzo estimates that around 500 were living in Smyrna.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p.366.

¹⁵² Ibid, p.367.

¹⁵³ Knatchbull-Hugessen was appointed in 1939 following recuperation from injuries sustained during a Japanese air attack in China where he was serving as British Ambassador. For insight into Knatchbull-Hugessen's career see his memoir *Diplomat in Peace and War* (London: J. Murray, 1949) and G. R. Berridge, *British Diplomacy in Turkey: 1583 to the Present. A Study in the Evolution of the Resident Embassy* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2009), pp. 168-203.

evacuees for the duration, and build a camp to do so if funded, but there were limits as to how many it could take.

What emerges is an underlying, but well-meaning agenda: an opportunity to relocate Maltese British subjects who were living in straightened circumstances and subsisting on relief allowances to another location where there was potential to settle permanently after the war had ended. This was certainly the opinion of Knatchbull-Hugessen, but not necessarily shared by others. During 1941 it was not a priority either. The pressure to evacuate British subjects from Turkey following Germany's invasion of Greece reduced considerably when it became clear that the country would not be attacked by the Axis powers preferring to remain neutral. However, British subjects who had fled the Balkan States required evacuation through Turkey via the organised scheme; this included Maltese, particularly those domiciled in Greece. Therefore, there were two distinct groups: Maltese 'evacuees' – those living in the Turkish Republic, and Maltese 'refugees' – those who arrived from the Balkan States now occupied by Nazi military forces. This is indicated by a subtle change in the terms used in official telegrams. There is no indication that any of these Maltese had come from Malta itself, which was more or less under siege conditions. Literature about the island during the Second World War relates that British service families and other civilians were evacuated to the United Kingdom, but there is no mention of any other official or even voluntary evacuation elsewhere. For example Bradford notes that wives and children of service personnel were evacuated, but then explains: 'It had always been the practice in the past to remove as many non-combatants as possible before the gates closed and the real trial began; but in this case the children and old people among the islanders could not be taken to safety, since such an exodus would have required a vast assembly of merchant ships'¹⁵⁴

In fact an evacuation was considered for inhabitants of Malta which would have sent them to Jamaica, but this appears to have fallen flat due to Maltese indifference to the proposed destination. Further discussion of this scheme follows in this chapter. It is possible however that some Maltese left to escape the heavy bombing and poor living conditions, heading for the north Mediterranean coast, although a government organised scheme moved vulnerable members of the population to safer areas within Malta.¹⁵⁵ According to Khan some made it further afield. In her history of India's Second World War experience she writes: 'About 600 Maltese arrived in India. They had travelled through Turkey, escaping

¹⁵⁴ See Ernie Bradford, *Siege: Malta 1940-43* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2003), p.21; See also David Wragg, *Malta: The Last Siege* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2003).

¹⁵⁵ Ian Hay, *The Unconquered Isle: The Story of Malta, G.C.* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1943), p. 103.

their besieged island, which as caught in a protracted struggle between Allies and Axis.’¹⁵⁶ No records accessed at The National Archives, Kew during research have stated this and there is no indication of the source Khan gets the figure quoted and information from. As is shown in Chapter Three in the section about the British identity of the Balkan-Maltese evacuees, it is a common misconception among historians that this group originated in Malta.

So what ensued for the best part of a year, was an around-in-a-circle exchange between the Foreign Office, Colonial Office and India Office to try to pin down firstly, who would bear the cost of funding accommodation and where was the best place to send the Maltese evacuees, initially and then long term. This was accompanied by a to-ing and fro-ing of telegrams from British representatives in the field, the various government departments involved, the East African Governors’ Conference, and the Home Department of the Government of India. The whole process became unnecessarily lengthy not least because a discussion about a proposal that Maltese refugees be sent to British East Africa did not take place until August 1941, at the Governors’ Conference. Even then, it was still not clear where the remaining Maltese refugees might be sent. The Foreign Office continued to favour settlement in British East Africa, whereas the Colonial Office preferred India as a destination. It is hardly surprising, then, that Knatchbull-Hugessen in Turkey where a majority of Maltese evacuees were congregating prior to evacuation, declared in a telegram to the Foreign Office in September that the ‘question of the fate of the Maltese has been actively discussed for nearly a year and it surely now time it was settled. ...’¹⁵⁷

The British Ambassador was correct. As far back as November 1940 Mackereth had begun to suggest that both Ceylon and Tanganyika could be considered as destinations for large numbers of Maltese British subjects should they need evacuating from the Balkans.¹⁵⁸ Although there was accommodation available at Satara (the evacuee transit camp) - as long as the Government of India agreed to its continued use - for a small number of ‘semi-permanent destitutes’, he thought it prudent to explore other options.¹⁵⁹ During the summer in India when the heat became unbearable on the plains, British expatriates and other Europeans decamped to the hill stations where it was much cooler; such was the demand, there would be little free accommodation available. Therefore, the Government of India was willing to receive further Balkan evacuees on a temporary basis with the prospect of them

¹⁵⁶ Khan, *The Raj at War*, p.123.

¹⁵⁷ Knatchbull-Hugessen to Foreign Office, 19 September 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

¹⁵⁸ Government of Bombay to Secretary of State for India, following for Foreign Office from Mackereth, 7th December 1940. This mentions earlier correspondence regarding Mackereth’s proposal. Mackereth to Foreign Office, 9 January 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

¹⁵⁹ Mackereth to Foreign Office, 9 January 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

moving elsewhere, unless the British government agreed to fund the building of a hutment camp specifically for the Maltese.

An enquiry from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office regarding Ceylon and Tanganyika brought the reply that 'politically and for climatic reasons it is considered undesirable that such persons should be sent to Tanganyika', but if an estimate was given of those requiring accommodation it would be sent on to Andrew Caldecott, the Governor of Ceylon.¹⁶⁰ This was quite a blunt response which indicated that 'politically', perhaps, it would damage prestige to have destitute British subjects arriving in the African colony. However, it may also relate to the fact that Tanganyika was receiving both Italian POWs and Italian internees from Abyssinia. Unsuitable climate – hot and humid weather – was considered detrimental to the health of white European colonial settlers, but having lived in countries such as Greece and Turkey, Maltese British subjects were no doubt more hardy. Whatever their ultimate destination, they would have to live in a tropical climate. The suggestion of British East African colonies, including Tanganyika was re-visited at least twice more, as described later.

In the meantime, the discussion over various destinations meant that Maltese could not be moved from Turkey until this was resolved. Mackereth informed Knatchbull-Hugessen that 'destitute Maltese cannot be accommodated in India and should not be evacuated at Government expense', which was not strictly true.¹⁶¹ He, in turn, expressed his concerns to the Foreign Office over what he considered to be discrimination against this group of British subjects. The reply was conciliatory: 'I entirely agree with you that no avoidable discrimination should be made in the matter of evacuation but if arrangements cannot be made for the reception of certain classes of British subjects they clearly cannot be moved.' While space could be found for British civilians, who could be absorbed into colonial society, it was more problematic for those who were not British by birth and who spoke little or no English. The Foreign Office then introduced the idea of sending Maltese evacuees to Jamaica, explaining that it was understood there was adequate accommodation available there and was asking if it could be used and whether shipping might be obtainable for transport.¹⁶²

The Caribbean island was certainly much further away than East Africa or India, but there was a sound reason for making this suggestion: when the evacuation of sections of the civilian population of Malta had been considered and planned for, it was proposed to send

¹⁶⁰ George Hall, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies to Foreign Office, 2 February 1941; Foreign Office to Hall, 21 January 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

¹⁶¹ Mackereth via Governor of Bombay, to Angora, 24 February 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

¹⁶² Foreign Office to Angora, 7 March 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

evacuees to a specially constructed camp in Jamaica, along with civilians from Gibraltar. While approximately 2,000 Gibraltarians arrived in May 1940, as Bartrop explains, the Maltese ‘failed to appear’ and the compounds allocated to them were left empty.¹⁶³ Although Bradford infers that lack of merchant shipping was the reason the Maltese were not evacuated, Tortello makes the following comment: ‘The Maltese never came in large numbers. A Maltese delegation that visited the island was said not to have liked it and they did not wish their families to be placed under the rule of black and coloured people’.¹⁶⁴ Whatever the reason, there was ample accommodation waiting to be filled.

Mackereth obviously put some thought to the idea of Jamaica as a destination. In two telegrams from April 1941 he expressed his opinion with enthusiasm, while pointing out the disadvantages of sending Maltese evacuees to India:

I fear very few Maltese from Turkey and Greece would be employable in India, firstly because of inadequate English, secondly their industries are already overcrowded by Indian craftsmen, thirdly the Army appears unable to absorb them. My fancy is that only group settlement in British territory will provide permanent solution of the problem of Eastern Mediterranean Maltese, because of their lack of English.¹⁶⁵

Although the Government of India had offered to build semi-permanent accommodation if required, Mackereth proposed that ‘if permanent establishment in Jamaica seems probable’ then temporary accommodation could be provided – ‘but tents would be impossibly hot on the plains during May and June’ - until the evacuees could be moved on.¹⁶⁶ Luckily, he was able to provide a solution to this problem in his next communication to the Foreign Office:

Since Maltese would in any case travel *via Iskanderun* and Suez Canal I suggest that opportunity be taken to initiate *radical solution of group settlement by* utilization of shipping space available in American (...) or other military store-carrying vessel returning from the canal to the American continent sending them directly to Jamaica rather than India as a stepping stone elsewhere. As the opportunity offered other unemployed Maltese now

¹⁶³ Paul R. Bartrop, ‘From Lisbon to Jamaica: A Study of British Refugee Rescue During the Second World War’, *Immigrants and Minorities* 13:1 (1994), p. 54.

¹⁶⁴ Bradford, *Siege: Malta 1940 - 1943*; Rebecca Tortello, ‘Gibraltar Camp: A Refuge from War’.

¹⁶⁵ Bombay to Foreign Office, 11 April 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395; FO 369/2665, K3944.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

on the dole in Greece might follow, I am persuaded this would be advantageous economically in the short term as well as long run. ...¹⁶⁷

While placing the Jamaica proposal in a good light, from a logistical perspective, it was questionable whether shipping would be available with adequate accommodation for groups of evacuees; additionally, it entailed a lengthy sea voyage through dangerous stretches of ocean patrolled by German U-boats. It was a case of solving the problem of moving unemployed, non-English speaking Maltese from their homes in Greece and Turkey en masse to an island (with a tropical climate), presumably with the intention that following the war they would be encouraged to settle elsewhere in the empire. However, despite Mackereth's keenness the proposal was never put into action, nor was the alternative which he put to Sir Miles Lampson, British Ambassador in Egypt: that Maltese evacuees could be accommodated there. The free accommodation in Jamaica was used instead to house 500 Jewish refugees who were required to move on from Lisbon in Portugal. After an appeal to the British Government for help in finding a refuge, they were granted entry to the Caribbean island and transport arranged, arriving in early 1942.¹⁶⁸

At the same time (early January) as the Foreign Office was looking into the viability of Jamaica as a destination, Mackereth contacted Cairo:

As I am meeting with almost insuperable obstacles in arranging accommodation for Maltese should events dictate their evacuation from Greece and Turkey it occurs to me that in the event of such an emergency and in view of the existence of large Maltese community in Egypt ... it might be economical and feasible to make arrangements for their temporary accommodation in Egypt ... on the understanding that His Majesty's Government would remove them after the war...¹⁶⁹

Presumably the 'insuperable obstacles' stemmed from getting agreement from the Foreign Office for funding the construction of a camp for this group of evacuees with the estimated large number requiring accommodation (approximately 3,000). Mackereth also assumed that the Egyptian Government might be more amenable to providing accommodation as

¹⁶⁷ Bombay to Foreign Office, 13 April 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

¹⁶⁸ See Bartrop, 'From Lisbon to Jamaica'.

¹⁶⁹ Flag Officer Commanding, Royal Indian Navy, Bombay, to Foreign Office, 8 March 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395; and Mackereth to Foreign Office, 20 March 1942, TNA: CO 968/43/7; FO 369/2664, K3199; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

there were Maltese already living and working in the country. This would be a cheaper option than another destination.

There were several well-established Maltese communities in Egypt – in Alexandria, Cairo, Suez, and Port Said – many of whom had migrated to find employment in the port cities and from the mid-nineteenth century onwards with British forces stationed in the country. According to Attard: ‘Most of the immigrants from Malta earned their livelihood in the construction business as masons, carpenters, smiths and glaziers. Their British employers found them useful because some Maltese knew English and were able to pick up Arabic much faster than other European workers.’¹⁷⁰ Settlers ensured that their children gained a good education at catholic schools to help advance their employment prospects, particularly by learning and becoming fluent in a variety of languages such as English, French, Arabic and even Italian: ‘This flair for languages made them a useful asset to the British authorities who very often employed the Maltese in their consular offices throughout Egypt. European companies operating in the Canal Zone found the polyglot Maltese very useful.’¹⁷¹ Moreover, these communities had their own churches, clubs and societies, and voluntary organisations. In the mid-1920s a Central Community Council was set up which linked all the Maltese colonies together. Yet, while it had become a more cohesive expatriate community, represented in all strata of society, in a way the Maltese diaspora was under the patronage of the United Kingdom, rather than the Egyptian Government.

As explained earlier in this chapter the British Ambassador had to gain the cooperation of the Egyptian Government for British subjects evacuated from the Balkans to pass through or remain temporarily in the country. It took a month for Lampson to reply to Mackereth’s suggestion of Egypt as a destination for Maltese evacuees:

It would be possible to find temporary employment as auxiliaries to British forces for skilled Maltese artisans of any kind, and Egyptian Government would probably admit them on undertaking re. subsequent repatriation. It is doubtful if wives and families of artisans would also be admitted. May I have an estimate of the numbers with special qualifications.

Apart from this, Egyptian Govt. will never agree to the addition of Maltese to Egyptian labour market. Their presence would also complicate our own

¹⁷⁰ Attard, *The Great Exodus*, p. 24.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*.

evacuation scheme. Evacuation to Egypt should definitely be restricted to persons actually to be employed by British forces.¹⁷²

It is clear that Lampson did not want Balkan Maltese sent to Egypt, excepting only those who were useful to the imperial war effort. This introduced the possibility of families being split up, if husbands decided to take employment; their loved ones would have to continue to a further destination. Additionally, in the event of evacuation of British subjects from Egypt itself should Axis forces successfully invade the country, it would increase the numbers requiring relocation.

This exchange between Mackereth and Lampson took place before the second phase of the evacuation from the Balkans got going, which, of course, saw evacuees and refugees transiting through Egypt, with a camp set up as temporary accommodation. This arrangement was rather convenient as it meant that Maltese men passing through could be selected to join or work for the British military. A telegram from Preston in Cairo to the Foreign Office reveals that from a group of 89 Maltese who had arrived from Istanbul, 27 were 'earmarked for enlistment in His Majesty's forces and remainder with Anglo-Saxon refugees will be accommodated in our refugee camp until shipping facilities are available for their transportation to India.'¹⁷³ A list of Balkan Maltese recruits who joined the Armed Forces in Egypt during 1941 gives their names, any dependents of married men, and which corps or branch they joined. Most went into the Pioneer Corps, others to RASC, RAOC, Army, or RAF, while one was employed at GHQ, and three in British Ministerial Departments.¹⁷⁴ In effect this meant that authorities could cherry-pick the best candidates, while the less desirable, i.e. those with no relevant employment experience, or perhaps limited or no English language skills, were then sent onwards. Further evidence of this policy is found in communications regarding the expectation that evacuees who found work were expected to pay back travel and maintenance expenses to the British Government which had funded the Mackereth evacuation scheme.

A telegram from the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, to the War Office suggested that, in order to encourage men to join the army in either Egypt or India that 'money sent by officers and other ranks to their families under Mackereth scheme may be used by families for their own benefit and a token payment only be made to the scheme'.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Lampson to Bombay, following for Mackereth, 7 April 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; FO 369/2665, K3815; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

¹⁷³ Cairo to Foreign Office, 8 July 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

¹⁷⁴ List of British Maltese who have joined H.M. Forces, TNA: FO 369/2727, K588.

¹⁷⁵ Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, to War Office, 11 June 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; FO 369/2674, K8976.

This proposal was forward to the Foreign Office, which then contacted the Treasury, explaining that Eden was disposed to agree, 'more particularly as in the majority of cases it is unlikely that repay on expenditure in question would in any event be possible'. It further recommended that claims for reimbursement of charges mentioned should be waived 'in cases where evacuees join His Majesty's forces say, by 31st October or within two months of their arrival in India.'¹⁷⁶ This inducement applied to all men evacuated from the Balkans who, no doubt, would have welcomed opportunities to earn money to support their families and contribute to the Allied war effort; but it also hints at a coercive measure to recruit men into the British armed forces in the Middle East and India, at a time when they were greatly needed.

With options of Jamaica and Egypt as destinations for evacuated Maltese British subjects now dead in the water and the East African colonies out of the running, India continued to be the best option. However, a surprising voice of dissention came from the Viceroy of India (Lithlingow) who raised his concerns about the increasing burden which India was being put under with regard to accepting refugees and prisoners-of-war. Although he reiterated that the country was 'anxious to help', he pointed out that there were limiting factors to the amount of people they could accept: 'difficulty of providing accommodation, water, appropriate amenities, etc.' if the war was to take a 'bad turn'.¹⁷⁷ The Viceroy's main concern was that India could not absorb a flood of European POWs and refugees which 'would present us with most serious problems and one which I am reluctant to take on.'¹⁷⁸ This was understandable given that the country had by now agreed to take an additional 3,000 Maltese refugees, and had already given refuge to evacuees from the Balkans and Middle East. It was also anticipated that Indian British subjects domiciled in the empire would be evacuated back to India if required, for example, from Burma should Japan enter the war. He therefore 'strongly urged in these circumstances that you should bring all possible pressure to bear in the direction of diverting refugees and prisoners or war as a far as practicable to alternatives such as South Africa, Rhodesia, and possibly Australia, and leave our lands as clear as practicable here.'¹⁷⁹

In a covering letter to Eden, Leo Amery, Secretary of State for India and Burma, felt sure that the Foreign Secretary would give 'due weight' to the Viceroy's apprehensions 'before putting forward any further substantial demands on India'. He also suggested that it

¹⁷⁶ A. B. Hutcheon, Foreign Office, to Treasury, 21 August 1941; C. E. Key, War Office, to Mackereth, 14 August 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; FO 369/2674, K8976.

¹⁷⁷ Viceroy of India to Secretary of State for India, 18 April 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

would be helpful if he could inform the Viceroy of the current situation regarding alternative destinations he had suggested for refugees and POWs.¹⁸⁰ Eden's reply acknowledged the burden which India was being asked to shoulder but stressed the relatively small number of evacuees/refugees currently accommodated who were 'being maintained there at the cost of the Treasury.'¹⁸¹ He did confess however, that the India Office had recently been asked 'whether they would, if necessary, accept some 9,000 Maltese from Egypt if evacuation had to be carried out there.'¹⁸² This was a somewhat presumptuous request given that India had made it clear it was struggling with appropriate accommodation, and the Foreign Office had yet to reply to its offer to build a hutment camp. He also reported that, as before, Northern Rhodesia was fully occupied with Italian POWs and civilians: 'The Colonial Office told us that it would be useless to ask them now to take the Maltese from Egypt as well.'¹⁸³

Therefore, Eden was most anxious that the Government of India accept this group of Maltese evacuees on the proviso that they 'may later be transferred to colonial territory' - an option that would be discussed at a suitable time in the future:

You will no doubt appreciate that we regard it as a matter of the highest importance that we should do everything possible to remove British and loyal allied subjects from countries under threat of enemy domination, and I feel sure that I can rely on you to do all you can to allay the viceroy's qualms and persuade them to provide a refuge for these people.¹⁸⁴

In the event, it was not necessary to evacuate Maltese communities from Egypt, but it was hardly fair to apply pressure on the Government of India through the Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy to obtain agreement for an additional 9,000 evacuees. As highlighted previously, lack of suitable accommodation was a prime reason why the New Delhi government could not accept unlimited numbers.

It is also remarkable that at a meeting held at the end of April 1941 to discuss the evacuation of Maltese from Greece, Turkey and Egypt that representatives of the Treasury, Foreign Office and Colonial Office were present, but none from the India Office.¹⁸⁵ During

¹⁸⁰ Amery to Eden, 29 April 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

¹⁸¹ Eden to Amery, 16 May 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Note of a meeting held in the Treasury on 30 April 1941, to discuss evacuation of Maltese from Greece, Turkey and Egypt, TNA: CO 968/43/7. See also TNA: FO 369/2667, K5172; FO 369/2666, K4672.

the discussion it was agreed that the Maltese in Egypt ‘should join their compatriots in India’ should the need for their evacuation arise.¹⁸⁶ While officials from the Colonial Office were able to voice their opinion that East Africa was off limits at the present time, representatives of the India Office were not given an opportunity to respond, or it seems, even attend the meeting. Perhaps, this was because the Government of India had by now already agreed to take 3,000 Maltese from Greece and Turkey, but it was rather high-handed for the government departments present to take this decision. And while no progress was made on whether a hutment camp should be built or not, it was agreed that ‘the cost of evacuation and maintenance in all cases would have to be a charge on the Foreign Office Votes.’¹⁸⁷ In other words, it would have to pay for the building of a hutment camp.

Another interesting aspect of the meeting was the covert discrimination towards Maltese British subjects domiciled in Turkey and Egypt:

It was agreed that our Ambassadors ... should point out to the Maltese that their destination would probably be a hutment camp in India where they might have to remain without occupation until repatriated at the end of the war. In these circumstances, if any of the Maltese were willing to stay in their own homes in the event of evacuation, it was obviously unnecessary and indeed undesirable to encourage them to change their minds.¹⁸⁸

It would certainly make any evacuation easier if fewer people were involved, and reduce the costs of transportation and accommodation, but this policy of discouraging Maltese to apply for evacuation by emphasising the living conditions they might expect in India can be viewed as discrimination. Additionally, it contradicted a further statement which reiterated ‘the principle which had been laid down in the past ... that any decision as to evacuation must apply equally to all classes of British subjects and there must be no question of discrimination between e.g., “Anglo-Saxons” and “Maltese”’.¹⁸⁹ Clearly, there was.

Obviously, the Government of India was not keen to agree to accept the additional 9,000 Maltese British subjects from Egypt, as by the beginning of July it still had not replied to a request to do so made through Amery.¹⁹⁰ The Foreign Office had also realised the enormous cost involved in building a hutment camp for such a large number of evacuees: an

¹⁸⁶ Note of a meeting held at the Treasury, 30 April 1941.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Allchin, Foreign Office, to Hall, 2 July 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

estimate of £250,000 had been given for housing 3,000, so in total (including the Maltese evacuees from Turkey) the amount would be nearer £1,000,000.¹⁹¹ Fortunately, Eden's department was, in a sense, let off the financial hook after the Cabinet considered what advice should be given to British subjects domiciled in Egypt regarding evacuation: '... it was decided that they should be told that there was no question of the evacuation of British communities from that country since it was the policy of His Majesty's Government to defend Egypt with all their power.'¹⁹² It was acknowledged however, that some women and children might have to be evacuated if they were living in areas subject to heavy bombing and could not find accommodation elsewhere.¹⁹³ This gave some clarity to the situation regarding Maltese evacuees. However, in reality this digression had only hindered the arrangements being made for Maltese from Turkey to be transported and settled there, as has been previously outlined.

Moreover, the Foreign Office continued to prevaricate, still keen for surplus Maltese and other British evacuees to go to East Africa - an advantageous option apparently for both the Government of India and the Treasury that would be of little inconvenience for the colonies involved.¹⁹⁴ This would be the third time that this option was put forward and it coincided with an East African Governors' Conference being held in Nairobi (August 1941). It was also opportune as it meant that governors from the colonies involved - including Tanganyika and Northern Rhodesia - were all present. However, the re-introduction of the East Africa destination once again caused confusion, not least because British government departments, the Government of India and British representatives in Egypt were sometimes following their own, rather than a co-ordinated course of action.

A major requirement was that agreement was needed from the colonial governors for the Maltese British subjects to be sent there. It was, of course, the Foreign Office's responsibility to authorise evacuation from countries outside the British Empire, but it could not impose where evacuees were sent. This required negotiation through the Colonial, Dominion and India Offices. Another was that the costs of building a hutment camp to accommodate evacuees had to be kept as low as possible. As previously noted, it was felt that the original estimate for accommodation in India was far too high, therefore there was now scope to make enquiries elsewhere and hopefully find a cheaper solution. Finally, there needed to be a final reckoning of how many Maltese British subjects in total were expected

¹⁹¹ Allchin, Foreign Office, to Hall, 2 July 1941.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

to be evacuated from Turkey via Egypt. It took the best part of two months to reach the decision that India would be their destination and temporary home for the duration of the war.

Despite the Viceroy's protestation regarding India's capacity to accommodate refugees, the Home Department was as helpful as possible in providing estimates and alternative suggestions for housing Maltese evacuees. Since the original figure of £250,000 for a purpose-built camp was rejected, efforts were made to reduce the net cost per person – an average of £66. However, this only made a small difference with accommodation for 3,000 Maltese estimated at just under £200,000.¹⁹⁵ Although not luxurious, some thought had gone into the design of the huts which consisted of cubicles (bed-sitting room) each with a bathroom attached (a consideration for family occupancy), and verandas around the outside to provide protection from the sun. Camps could be constructed at Coimbatore and Satara.¹⁹⁶ A less expensive option was also put forward: 'We have now obtained offer from Bharatpur State of certain buildings capable of accommodating about 1,000. Cost of making habitable estimated roughly £10,000.'¹⁹⁷ Although, as the Home Department pointed out it would be particularly hot in May to June in Bharatpur, this was the easiest and cheapest solution, and would provide enough accommodation for Maltese evacuees currently en-route to or waiting in Egypt.¹⁹⁸ Whatever the decision – hutment camp or conversion of existing buildings – work could be put in hand.

However, this revised estimate had come via the India Office, which in a covering letter to the Foreign Office emphasised the high estimate for accommodation while favouring the East Africa option as a destination for Maltese evacuees.¹⁹⁹ It was understandable that the India Office would want to lessen the country's burden, but skirting over the second option did not put off the Foreign Office, which, having revised the figure of Maltese evacuees to below 1,000, replied that '...it seems to us that it would be quite a good idea to put them in the buildings at Bharatpur. The Maltese are not the sort of people to object to the hot weather and we have no doubt, that the Treasury would raise no objection to the relatively small cost of adapting the buildings.'²⁰⁰ It was also mentioned that the East

¹⁹⁵ Government of India, Home Department, to Amery, 7 August 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; FO 369/2674, K8920; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. See also memorandum regarding request to Central Public Works Dept. from Home Dept. for plans and estimates for their approval for temporary hutment camps at Satara, Coimbatore and Hazaribagh [parole camp], dated 1 June 1941, NAI: HOME_POLITICAL_EW_1941_NA_F-30-96.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Wallis, India Office, to Allchin, 9 August 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

²⁰⁰ Letter from Allchin, Foreign Office to Wallis, India Office, 14 August 1941, IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

African colonies had been asked to accept 1,000 refugees and this proposal was under consideration at the Governors' Conference.

In parallel to telegrams and letters going between India, the India Office and Foreign Office, communications were passing to and from the East African Governor's Conference and London (Colonial and Foreign Offices), but also Cairo. In fact, it appears that Lampson had been in contact with Nairobi for quite some time, referring to a telegram from G.C. Allchin (Foreign Office) that noted 'our Ambassador in Cairo appears to have been in direct touch with the Government of Kenya about sending British subjects there from the Balkans and Egypt to that colony. We did not know about this and are accordingly asking Lampson to explain...'²⁰¹ Perhaps the intention had been to try to speed up the decision of where to send Maltese evacuees by circumventing the middle men in London. However, this obviously went against the usual protocol! For British representatives in Cairo it was clear that having Maltese in transit there for an undefined length of time was a problem: 'It is of course essential to find a destination for these British subjects. They cannot stay in Egypt,' wrote Preston to the Foreign Office in early August.²⁰²

The gist of telegrams which circulated between Nairobi, Cairo, the Foreign Office and Colonial Office was that the colonies approached to take Maltese evacuees – Northern Rhodesia and Tanganyika - had several queries. Who was liable for the expense of housing and maintaining the evacuees? Would expenses incurred by the colonial administration be reimbursed? And would refugees be removed after the war?²⁰³ A speedy reply from the Foreign Office gave the reassurance that His Majesty's Government would fund maintenance at minimum rates (on the proviso that evacuees would undertake to repay this) and undertake to remove refugees if necessary post-war, 'but it is hoped that facilities would be given for them to be absorbed at an early date into local employment.'²⁰⁴ However, estimates of costs were required as well as consultation before any capital expenditure was incurred.²⁰⁵ In other words, no arrangements were to be made until authorised. This put the process firmly in the control of the Foreign Office, which, as usual, had an eye on the budget.

As mentioned previously, the Colonial Office had rejected any possibility of Northern Rhodesia and Tanganyika taking Maltese evacuees as both colonies had already committed to take Axis POWs, Italian civilians as well as small groups of refugees from

²⁰¹ Allchin to D. G. Watherspoon, Colonial Office, 3rd July 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

²⁰² Cairo to Foreign Office, 12 August 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

²⁰³ Ibid. Cairo to Foreign Office, following received from Governors' Conference, Nairobi, 12 August 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

²⁰⁴ Foreign Office to Cairo, 14 August 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; FO 369/2674, K8822; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

elsewhere. For example, Tanganyika had agreed to take a total of 500 refugees including British subjects and Jews from Cyprus while Northern Rhodesia had been asked to accommodate Poles and evacuees from Cyprus.²⁰⁶ It was even pointed out that if Maltese British subjects were sent there a 'special camp would be necessary as is being done for other refugees. There are no provisional arrangements which any territory could make short of constructing camps.'²⁰⁷ Additionally, the Government of Northern Rhodesia had indicated that 'while prepared to accommodate genuine evacuees from Malta, is disinclined to accept the types of persons described', although it would consider accepting them if it was 'urgent and necessary'.²⁰⁸ This obviously referred to the destitute and unemployed Maltese refugees from Turkey who Knatchball-Hugessen was anxious to move even though the Axis military threat had receded. Despite this unpromising response, the Governor of Northern Rhodesia was requested to provide an estimate for building a camp, which was messaged to the Colonial Office at the end of August. This time it was made perfectly clear that this British territory would not accept any Maltese:

Capital cost of the camp would not be less than £15,000 and this figure would be exceeded if expensive water connections were found necessary. Maintenance would not be less than £6 per head per mensem. I gather that Maltese are most undesirable immigrants. They could not be absorbed into local employment to any appreciable extent and I regret therefore that I would not willingly accept any of them.²⁰⁹

It was perhaps at this point that the Foreign Office should have let the matter go, accepting that East African colonies could not be used as destinations for Maltese refugees, but decided to take a typically blinkered approach to the problem. Quite rightly, in a letter to the Colonial Office, Allchin condemned the outright prejudice shown by the Governor of Northern Rhodesia, but it also revealed that the Foreign Office had not been put off by the quotation for constructing a camp:

²⁰⁶ Cairo to Foreign Office, 12 August 1941, following received from the Governors' Conference, Nairobi, (30th July), and telegram from the Chief Secretary, East African Governors' Conference to Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 13 August 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

²⁰⁷ Chief Secretary, East African Governors' Conference, to the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 13 August 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7.

²⁰⁸ Cairo to Foreign Office, 12 August 1941.

²⁰⁹ Chief Secretary, East African Governors' Conference, to Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 30 August 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

... I do not know whether anything could now be said to the Governor of Northern Rhodesia, but I dare say you were, if anything, worse shaken than we to see that he refers to the Maltese as ‘most undesirable “immigrants”’. You know better than we that they are a patriotic and painstaking people. Moreover we are not so much alarmed as the governor expects us to be by his figure of £15,000 for a camp (presumably for about 1,000 people) or by his estimate of £6 a month for the cost of maintaining each refugee. Maintenance in India would cost at any rate as much, and as you know, the Government of India quote something like £250,000 as the cost of constructing a camp for 3,000 Maltese i.e. over £80 a head as against the Governor’s £15. A further point is that ... the Maltese would stand a smaller chance of being absorbed into employment in India than in Northern Rhodesia.

If you can do anything to allay the qualms of the Governor we should be most grateful.²¹⁰

The reference to Maltese British subjects as ‘immigrants’ reflected the proposal that refugees from Turkey could potentially move and permanently settle somewhere in the British Empire, rather than returning to a life on subsistence payments in Turkey after the war. However, the Governor’s reaction raises the question of quite what he had heard about this group of refugees. A likely source would be telegrams sent directly from Cairo to Nairobi, but as has already been noted, the Government of India also had an issue with destitute and uneducated Maltese evacuees being sent there. Despite being British subjects, they were not viewed as ideal settlers for the East African colonies.

Although the Foreign Office reacted positively to the estimates for building a camp and maintenance allowance per person, comparing them to the higher quotes from India, the presumption was made that the figures given referred to accommodation for 1,000 people: this was mistaken, as a letter from the Colonial Office revealed. This was written on behalf of Lord Moyne who asked for it to be pointed out ‘that the figure of £15,000 quoted by the Governor of Northern Rhodesia as the cost of constructing a camp was based on an estimate of not more than 445 refugees, (Cairo telegram No. 2353 of 29th July) and that the cost per head consequently works out at over £30 whereas the cost for 1,000 at Bharatpur would

²¹⁰ Allchin to A. B. Acheson, Assistant Secretary, Colonial Office, 9 September 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395

work out at only £10 per head...²¹¹ It was politely suggested that India should again be considered as a destination for both Maltese evacuees on hold in Egypt and any still waiting to leave Turkey.²¹² Furthermore, the commitments of the East African colonies were again reiterated as was the proposal for Maltese evacuees to move there from India by next spring was also addressed:

Lord Moyne does not wish to rule out the possibility of considering the matter further at a later date when the position regarding the reception of other refugees in the East African Territories may be clearer in various respects than it is at present, but he is unable to give any undertaking that Maltese who are evacuated to India now can be accepted into East Africa next Spring. Moreover, such a procedure would appear to be expensive and upsetting to the refugees themselves...²¹³

The last sentence is perhaps the most important as for the first time someone had actually considered how the process of evacuation might affect those being relocated. Furthermore, it pointed out the additional cost involved which would, no doubt, alert the Foreign Office - ever keen to keep expenses to a minimum.

While the Foreign and Colonial Offices had been engaged in an interdepartmental discussion regarding the destination of Maltese British subjects, the India Office acted upon the update it had been given at the beginning of August, advising the Home Department that efforts were being made for Maltese refugees now in Egypt and from Turkey to be sent to East African colonies, but no more than 1,000 were likely to reach India: 'I trust you will be able to arrange accommodation as economically as possible. If number does eventually approach this figure Bharatpur would seem suitable, but any works on buildings should be confined to that necessary to accommodate the number you know for certain is coming.'²¹⁴ It was also noted that the intention was to move evacuees to the East African colonies by next spring. In turn the Home Department contacted Cairo asking for approximate numbers of Maltese now waiting in Egypt, how many were expected there, and how many would require 'temporary' accommodation in India, so that accommodation could be prepared. The

²¹¹ Calder to Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 22 September 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid

²¹⁴ Amery to Government of India, Home Department, 16 August 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395 (draft telegram).

intention was to have enough housing ready rather than organise too much.²¹⁵ All that India required were up-to-date figures so that preparations could be made accordingly.

As mentioned earlier, Preston was having difficulty finding shipping to take parties of Maltese refugees to India and was under increasing pressure to remove them from Egypt as quickly as possible. After Lord Moyne had firmly put his foot down, India once more became the preferred destination and Cairo was informed accordingly at the end of September.²¹⁶ Shortly afterwards the number of Maltese awaiting evacuation (409) was communicated to the Government of India.²¹⁷ However, in mid-November the Home Department sent a lengthy and terse telegram to the India Office which outlined all the measures it had offered to accommodate evacuees (tents, specially constructed camps, adaptation of buildings at Bharatpur and Indore), the aggravation caused, and that it could now offer only to house evacuees in a hutment camp: 'In the circumstances, we regret inability to accept any more Maltese except in the camp in circumstances to be specifically constructed at cost of about 1,000 [?] per person accommodated. We should require at least 4 months to construct the camp.'²¹⁸

A major complaint which led to this decision was not receiving definite information regarding the number of evacuees which led to 'make-shift arrangements at Satara to relieve Egypt of the party of 409 Maltese and 56 Greeks at short notice'.²¹⁹ Additionally the Home Department believed it had been misled about the social status of evacuees from Turkey:

When agreeing to accept Balkan evacuees, we understood them to be European British subjects of respectable artisan class. In fact a large proportion were British only in name and some have been detained as suspects. Maltese we understand from reports of their character and status are likely to prove even more difficult and we are now advised against accommodating them in Bharatpur or any other state. ...²²⁰

²¹⁵ Government of India, Home Department, to Lampson, 24 August 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

²¹⁶ Foreign Office to Cairo, 30 September 1941; Hall to East African Governors' Conference, 7 October 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

²¹⁷ Cairo to Government of India, 7 October 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

²¹⁸ Government of India, Home Department, to Amery, 19 November 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

This prejudicial view could only have been formed by information coming from those who were organising their evacuation and transportation. Preston noted that Maltese in the holding camp were becoming ‘restive.’ This is unsurprising considering how long they been held up in Egypt and the continuing uncertainty about where they were going. It was not an ideal situation for anyone involved, whether those organising the evacuation or those being evacuated. Also, it should be remembered that Foreign Office officials in London tended to stress Maltese loyalty to the Crown and Allied cause as an over-riding reason why they should be evacuated, glossing over evacuees’ lack of English-speaking skills and destitute condition, knowing this would not appeal to potential destinations within the British Empire. Although the discrimination shown by the Home Department was deplorable, it obviously felt misled by information provided by the Foreign Office.

A copy of the telegram was forwarded to the Foreign Office, accompanied by a letter from the India Office which summarised the points made, and asked for questions to be answered:

Mr Amery would be glad to learn whether it is intended that the evacuees already on the way to India should remain in that country for the duration of the war, or whether they will be moved to the East African Colonies or elsewhere in the Spring as was originally suggested, and if it is desired that they should remain, whether the Government of India may be authorised to proceed with the construction of a semi-permanent camp on the basis stated. He will also be grateful to receive definite information regarding the further numbers of Maltese for whom accommodation in India is requested and probable length of stay.²²¹

These were, of course, the burning questions which had been going around in circles for over a year. The answers, and what did happen, was that Maltese British subjects evacuated from Turkey, were sent to and remained in India for the duration – and beyond. As the next chapter describes despite its frustrations and reluctance, the Government of India provided a temporary camp at Satara, then utilised buildings at Sewar in Bharatpur for their accommodation, before moving the Maltese evacuees to a wing of the British Evacuee Camp at Coimbatore. This was an official camp established by the Home Department of the Government of India to permanently house evacuees who were unable to support

²²¹ Gibson, India Office, to Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 28 November 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395 (draft copy).

themselves. The main part of the camp was occupied by British subjects evacuated mostly from Burma, Malaya and Singapore. India also took in thousands of Polish civilians evacuated from the Soviet Union in mid-1942, as did Tanganyika, Northern and Southern Rhodesia, Uganda and South Africa. So, the East African colonies did fulfil their obligation to take refugees from an Allied country in much larger numbers than any groups of Maltese evacuees which potentially could have been sent.

From an official perspective, it was interdepartmental to-ing and fro-ing between the Colonial, Foreign and India Offices which hindered the process of evacuation. At the head of these were three strong personalities – Lord Moyne, Anthony Eden and Leo Amery – each with greater responsibilities due to the war situation, and each protecting the interests of their own departments. However, it certainly appeared that the Foreign Office attempted to impose its authority with regard to the destination for Maltese evacuees, but did not succeed in promoting Tanganyika or Northern Rhodesia as the best choice. Even in December 1941, Eden was still directing the Colonial Office to consider up to 1,000 Maltese refugees being sent to the East African colonies by the spring.²²² This was apparently in accordance with the decision reached at the interdepartmental conference on the subject which was held at the Treasury on 30 April 1941. However, this was not an accurate reading of the meeting as it was only proposed that Tanganyika and Northern Rhodesia could be destinations. In addition, the Colonial Office had made no commitment at the time, and certainly not since.

What was directing Eden's persistence was an underlying agenda – the suggestion made by the British Ambassador, Knatchbull-Hugessen, that destitute and unemployed Maltese evacuated from Turkey should be sent to destinations within the British Empire where they could settle permanently. After all, why not kill two birds with one stone? This was a laudable plan, but had several flaws. Initially, it was the right decision to evacuate Balkan Maltese as the British Government had a responsibility to assist all British subjects to leave areas threatened by Axis invasion. However, when this danger had passed there was no obligation to continue the evacuation of entire Maltese communities from Turkey. Instead, these communities were fractured by a partial evacuation. With the global war situation escalating as Japan entering the conflict it was simply the wrong time to implement a full resettlement scheme for everyone. Therefore those remaining in Turkey and living in poverty continued to be supported by relief payments paid through the Foreign Office.

A second flaw was that the Balkan Maltese were far from the ideal type of British settlers. Although of European origin and having British subject status they were seen as 'poor whites' and therefore unwanted in potential destinations within the British Empire.

²²² Hutcheon, Foreign Office, to Hall, 19 December 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

Discrimination against Balkan Maltese focused on their lack of English language skills and their personal circumstances (destitute and unemployed). It made the task of finding a permanent place of settlement incredibly difficult, as British colonial authorities found a variety of reasons to reject settlement proposals. This rejection was used as a lever by the Foreign Office to coerce the Government of India into accepting the Balkan Maltese evacuees already in transit:

Mr Eden is most appreciative of the agreement of the Government of India, in spite of serious local difficulties, to accept Maltese refugees, and on a semi-permanent basis, if no other haven can be found for them. This has prevented the occurrence of unfortunate discrimination against these colonial British subjects. Mr Eden is, however, satisfied that their reception in colonies would provide a far better solution of the problem and strongly hopes that it will be possible to arrange this.²²³

As is seen in later chapters, despite repeated attempts, British government departments struggled to find a location for their permanent resettlement in the post-war years, while return to Turkey was actively discouraged.

Confusion arose over the number of Maltese British subjects requiring evacuation. Initially the estimate was around 3,000, later rounded down to 1,000. However, the Foreign Office appears to have accounted for a further 1,000. This included refugees from Turkey who were in addition to the original number, for example, a group of Maltese from Izmir, who Knatchball-Hugessen was anxious to evacuate.²²⁴ This was further complicated when the Foreign Office requested that India might take 9,000 Maltese British subjects in the event of Egypt being evacuated. Although this was later dismissed, at the time it put additional pressure on the Government of India. It is important to note, too, that arrangements had been made for British civilians domiciled in Egypt, in particular service families, to be accommodated in Palestine or South Africa, yet this did not extend to 'colonial' British subjects such as the Maltese communities. Another example, perhaps, of the selective discrimination which characterised evacuation plans in general.

The financial aspect of the evacuation of Maltese British subjects also influenced decisions taken. All evacuees had to sign an undertaking to repay the cost of their transportation, maintenance and accommodation when in a position to do so. It was an

²²³ Hutcheon, Foreign Office, to Hall, 19 December 1941.

²²⁴ Angora to Government of India, 14 November 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7; IOR/L/PJ/8/395.

advantage, then, if men in particular could find employment as soon as possible to support their families. A solution was to ‘encourage’ Balkan Maltese to join the armed services or find work in supporting trades, such as carpentry, but their inability to speak English might be a drawback in securing work. Yet as has been shown opportunities were found for these Maltese in Egypt where the best candidates were creamed off. Sir Miles Lampson reported that the number of evacuees waiting in Cairo had altered from previous telegrams as some had obtained employment locally, while others had enlisted in His Majesty’s Forces or in labour battalions.²²⁵ That said, it was pointed out that in potential destinations, such as India and Northern Rhodesia, there would be few employment opportunities for Maltese evacuees whose presence would be seen as a threat to local workers. Was this just another reason to discourage evacuees being sent there?

The cost of building a hutment camp or adapting existing buildings to house Maltese evacuees was a financial aspect that also pre-occupied the Foreign Office. As has been discussed, the Home Department of India did its utmost to provide accommodation as cheaply as possible and gave several options. The Foreign Office was shocked at the estimates and looked elsewhere for a less expensive alternative in Northern Rhodesia. However in reality there was not much difference between the cost, whether camps were constructed in India or the African colony. By dithering, Eden’s department effectively lost out on the cheaper alternative – conversion of existing buildings at Bharatpur – when the India Office put its foot down. In fact, as is shown at the beginning of the next chapter, this option had to be used for the Balkan Maltese group which needed to be moved on from Satara, and yet again to Coimbatore where they stayed until the end of 1947. Effectively this meant funding renovation or construction costs for three camps – all additional expense.

And what of the Maltese British subjects themselves evacuated from Turkey – how did they view their evacuation? Their voices are not necessarily heard in official documents and there is only the occasional mention of their collective reaction to being marooned en-route in Egypt. Nor are there any memoirs or personal accounts written by former Balkan Maltese evacuees. However, a source that can yield some insight are files in the India Office Records, regarding the British Evacuee Camp (BEC) at Coimbatore held by the British Library. Their experiences and opinion are revealed in correspondence and reports relating to the BEC, although generally articulated by an official voice. However, the interests of the Maltese evacuees was represented by a specially formed association which was very vocal in expressing their grievances and demands. There are a good selection of their protest

²²⁵ Cairo to Foreign Office, 11 September 1941, TNA: CO 968/43/7: IOR/L/PJ/8/395. See also List of British Maltese who have joined H.M. Forces, TNA: FO 369/2727, K588.

letters or petitions to draw on. In the following chapters, these sources are used to reveal the impact of evacuation on a more personal level, and provides a contrast with the administrative or official perspective which more often than not overlooked the human element.

The next chapter begins with an overview of evacuee and refugee camps in India and the setting up of a dedicated office within the Government of India Home Department to administer those accommodating certain British subjects. It also details the camps used for the Balkan Maltese evacuees and identifies the main reason they had to be moved several times – their ongoing difficult behaviour – as well as environmental factors. The majority of the chapter then focuses upon the Maltese wing at the British Evacuee Camp, Coimbatore including camp organisation, the role of the British Evacuee Association, and health matters.

Chapter Two

British Evacuee Camp, Coimbatore, India

Evacuee and Refugee Camps in India

The Home Department maintains two camps, one at Coimbatore in the Madras Presidency (with a Wing at Ootacamund) and the other at Naini Tal in the Himalayas. Broadly speaking those permitted to enter these camps are European British subjects of the artisan class who are unemployable and have no knowledge of India. Those desiring accommodation in either of these camps should apply to the Commandant of the camp concerned.

The Government of Burma has opened a camp at Chunar for the settlement of Anglo-Burman refugees in India. The camp is intended primarily to provide accommodation for Anglo-Burman evacuees who have no means; and those who would otherwise be in receipt of evacuee relief, and whose circumstances are such that they cannot be expected to find employment, such as elderly or invalid persons or women with families whose husbands are in Burma...²²⁶

The camps mentioned in this extract from *Resume of Instructions Concerning Assistance to be Given to Evacuees in India* issued jointly by the Home and Overseas Departments, were not the only ones to be opened in India during the Second World War. During 1942 – 1943 accommodation was also provided for Indians from Burma, and Polish refugees evacuated from the Soviet Union via Iran. Temporary transit camps were set up close to where evacuees or refugees entered the country. As mentioned previously Satara, near Bombay was used for British evacuees from the Balkans and Maltese from Turkey. There was a transit camp at Quetta for parties of Polish children who then moved to a reception camp at Bandra, Bombay.²²⁷ Another at the Country Club, Karachi, provided a place to recuperate for Polish civilians travelling onwards to refugee camps in East Africa while Malir housed those

²²⁶ *Resume of Instructions Concerning Assistance to be Given to Evacuees in India: For the Use of District Officers, Second and Revised Edition, 1943*, p. 12. 'Resume of Instructions Concerning Assistance to be Given to Evacuees in India', IOR/L/PJ/8/382: Coll 110/A1/1.

²²⁷ Battacharjee, 'Arrival: Arrival in India', *The Second Homeland*, pp.69-82. Further reading is listed in Footnote 36.

destined to go to a purposed built camp at Kolhapur (Valivade).²²⁸ Polish children later moved to their own establishment at Balachadi, hosted by Maharaja Jam Saheb Digvijaysinghi.²²⁹ Towards the end of the war they were relocated to Valivade. These arrangements were organised through the Home Department's refugee office, on behalf of the Polish Government-in-exile, then UNNRA which both provided funding. The children's camp was financed by charitable donations from within India.²³⁰

Reception camps for Indians, Eurasians and Europeans escaping overland from Burma into India during 1942 were more ad hoc, but provided emergency relief before evacuees moved onwards via rail or road. Basic rest camps were set up by The Indian Tea Association to help those who had recently crossed over the border into India.²³¹ There were larger camps at Dimapur and Imphal but with overwhelming numbers of refugees arriving conditions were grim; Indian voluntary organisations assisted at another camp at Silchar.²³² Evacuees then travelled down to Calcutta from where they dispersed. Small camps sprung up throughout the Himalayan foothills for European and Eurasian evacuees which provided a place to recuperate and settle into their new situation.²³³ It is difficult to find information about provisions made for Indian refugees, but according to Tinker, Indians born in Burma were accommodated in camps arranged by the Indian Overseas Department.²³⁴ Records of this department are held by the National Archives of India; generally it was responsible for Indians and Anglo-Indians evacuating from the Far East.²³⁵ Presumably, Indians with family ties in India simply made their way to their home province. In addition, the Government of Burma, now in exile in Simla, created an Evacuee Welfare Department to assist its evacuees, while a Malayan Representative was appointed to look after the needs of those from Malaya and Singapore who arrived during the early months of 1942.

²²⁸ Battacharjee, 'India Years: The Transit Camps and War-duration Domicile', *The Second Homeland*, pp.150-172.

²²⁹ Battacharjee 'Arrival: Arrival in India'.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ See A. R. Tainsh, *And Some Fell by the Wayside: An Account of the North Burma Evacuation*, Bombay: Longman Orient, 1948. Further reading about the Burma evacuation is listed in Footnote 35.

²³² Tinker, *A Long Forgotten March*, p.13

²³³ Leigh lists some in a footnote in his book *The Collapse of Civilian Rule in Burma*, however a comprehensive list of Burma evacuees and the camps they stayed at is given here: <http://www.angloburmeselibrary.com/lists.html>

²³⁴ Tinker, *A Long Forgotten March*, p.13.

²³⁵ The National Archives of India has an online catalogue, but files regarding Indians Overseas are not yet digitised: [Abhilekh Patal \(abhilekh-patal.in\)](http://abhilekh-patal.in)

The service (or ‘machinery’) set up for the welfare of all evacuees in India is comprehensively outlined in *Resume of Instructions* which ran to several editions.²³⁶ Briefly, the country was divided into four zones – northern, western, eastern and southern – covered by a network of refugee officers and assistant officers appointed by the Government of India. Welfare Officers recruited by the Burma Government also operated in each zone. Two offices in Bangalore and Bombay were under the direction of the Malayan Representative mentioned above.²³⁷ Their role was to liaise with provincial governments, chief commissioners and district officers over the care of evacuees, particularly assisting with financial concerns.²³⁸ Ideally the best outcome was for evacuees to become self-supporting, however provision was made for those who were unable to do this – the camps at Coimbatore (and Anandagiri), Naini Tal and Chunar. Those requiring permanent accommodation and financial support were gathered together in these official camps rather than being distributed far and wide. Table III at the end of this section provides a snap shot of numbers of evacuees in each camp at the end of 1942. There appears to have been close cooperation between the Home Department and Indian Overseas Department regarding accommodation for Eurasian evacuees as the closure of Sewar described below demonstrates. The Balkan Maltese evacuees were eventually sent to their own wing at the British Evacuee Camp at Coimbatore while the main part was home to Europeans (including Balkan evacuees), Anglo Indians, and Anglo-Burmans.²³⁹

At the centre of the Government of India’s response to the sudden influx of evacuees and refugees was the Home Department. While it had co-operated with British government departments over the question of accepting British subjects evacuating from the Balkan States, as explained in the first chapter Mackereth, a senior consular official recently evacuated from Ethiopia, was appointed to oversee arrangements. He relocated to Bombay and set about devising an evacuation scheme which worked smoothly for the first batches of evacuees. There was an understanding by the Government of India that Mackereth would continue in this supervisory role for any future groups. However, when he left India in April 1941 and did not return, the vacuum of responsibility had to be filled by the Home Department.²⁴⁰ In September that year it was decided to establish a dedicated office with an

²³⁶ Editions for 1943 and 1944 are found in IOR/L/PJ/8/382.

²³⁷ *Resume of Instructions Concerning Assistance*.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *Ibid.* See also multiple files at the British Library for example, ‘British Evacuee Camp Coimbatore: Burma and Singapore evacuees, IOR/L/AG/40/1/49 – 58.

²⁴⁰ See letter from H.J. Frampton, Joint Secretary to the Govt of India to Under Secretary of State for India, 19/8/1942, TNA: FO 369/2738, K14160.

officer on Special Duty in charge who would oversee the ‘whole subject’.²⁴¹ It proved a struggle to find anyone to take on this role until:

Finally, the arrival of Maltese evacuees at much less notice than was hoped necessitated the immediate establishment of a tented camp at Satara and Captain A.W.T. Webb, a retired officer of the Bombay Political Service, was appointed on 1st December 1941 as Special Officer to make arrangements for the establishment of this camp in the first instance, and then, on the completion of this duty, to take over immediate charge of all work connected with evacuation. ...²⁴²

The burden of this work proved greater than ever anticipated. Within days of Webb’s appointment as Principal Refugee Officer there was a major change in the war situation as Japan commenced hostilities in the Far East. Tens of thousands of evacuees and refugees poured into India. It is to Webb’s credit that he remained in this post which transferred to the Office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in September 1947, until he had overseen the repatriation or resettlement of those under his charge.²⁴³ So it was actually the imminent arrival of the Balkan Maltese evacuees that led to the creation of a special office within the Home Department. The organisation of a tented camp at Satara was the first of many challenges that the Principal Refugee Officer experienced with this evacuee group during their time in India.

Satara Camp (near Poona) had been used as a reception camp – accommodation for British evacuees while they found their feet in India. However Webb rapidly assessed that this intention ‘was found to be impracticable in the case of evacuees of the artisan class who had no knowledge of this country. Satara therefore advanced from a Rest to Refugee Camp.’²⁴⁴ Although buildings had already been utilised there, accommodation had to be expanded to house the Balkan Maltese evacuees. Tents were a practical and temporary solution while other options were explored. During 1942 the group was moved to Sewar,

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid

²⁴³ See Letter from A.W.T. Webb, Office of the High Commissioner of the UK, to Deputy High Commissioner, 29 October 1947, IOR/L/PJ/8/391.

²⁴⁴ Report from Captain A.W.T. Webb, Home Department to The Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, ‘Maintenance of Evacuees Accommodated in India’, dated 19 August 1942, TNA: FO 369/2738, K14160.

Bharatpur; Satara then transformed into a family internment and parole camp.²⁴⁵ This was used for detained enemy aliens such as German and Italian nationals.

Although the Home Department had expressed doubts in November 1941 about placing Maltese evacuees in a camp at Bharatpur in repurposed buildings (just prior to Webb's appointment) options were limited. Concerns then had centred on their status as poor whites, their general behaviour, and whether they could cope with the extreme heat during summer months. However, it was easier to utilise an existing proposal than start again from scratch, and kept the Balkan Maltese separate from other evacuee groups.

There was a general process followed for construction of camps. Once a budget for works required was agreed, building commenced, furniture and fittings were obtained, and a core of senior and administrative staff appointed. This included a commandant (or superintendent) and deputy commandant, medical staff and clerks. Evacuees were encouraged to take roles too, from teaching and office work to nursing. Most camps had a hospital, kitchen and dining hall, and schools were established for children of all ages. However, at Bharatpur the Balkan Maltese were not keen on communal messing, so allowance was given to each evacuee which covered food among other necessities and family units cooked for themselves.²⁴⁶ Lastly, all evacuees housed in the formal camps – wherever they had come from – were helped to find employment and become self-sufficient: 'At the time of writing, a Recruiting Officer is at Sewar Camp endeavouring to fit as many Maltese as possible into military units'.²⁴⁷ Not only was there an urgent need to utilise as much manpower as possible for the Allied war effort, but it would also relieve some of the financial obligation of the British Government if male evacuees could support their dependents.

Unfortunately, the move from Satara to Sewar was not a success, and despite expressing some sympathy, their conduct here no doubt cemented in Webb's mind that the Balkan Maltese were troublesome and difficult to deal with. This is evident in his report of December 1942, where he acknowledged the challenges these evacuees had faced, but was critical of their response.²⁴⁸ Both Sewar Camp and the Polish Children's Camp at Balachadi were affected by severe Monsoon flooding, and a malarial epidemic followed.²⁴⁹ Both the

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. This is discussed later in this chapter – also see Table IV.

²⁴⁸ Report from Captain Webb to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 1 December 1942, 'Maintenance of Evacuees Accommodated in India', TNA: FO 369/2829, K5715.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

Maltese evacuees and Polish children suffered badly, but the latter recovered well following assistance from the Malaria Institute of India, under the direction of the Deputy Director, Major Jaswant Singh.²⁵⁰ The outcome was not the same at Sewar Camp, however:

At Sewar Camp the Maltese also suffered severely from Malaria. Col. Covell, the Director of the Malaria Institute of India went to the camp and drew up a programme for the anti-malarial campaign. Sprayers and stocks of kerosene and pyrethrum were provided. Unfortunately the Maltese showed great reluctance to co-operate in these operations. The result is that malaria is still rampant in the camp. The medical report for October shows 195 first attacks and 152 relapses. The advent of the winter, however, may be relied upon to end the epidemic, at least for this year.²⁵¹

It appears that the Maltese evacuees objected to being involved in carrying out preventative measures or blocked access to the camp. Prevention required spraying breeding grounds for mosquitos who carried the disease – areas of stagnant water for example (such as those left after flooding) - as well as maintaining good sanitation. Webb noted the Malaria epidemic, which had been preceded by an ‘unusually severe summer’ had given the Maltese evacuees ‘an excuse to be even more intractable.’²⁵² Furthermore they had written letters of such an objectionable tone to friends and relatives back in Turkey, that a warning was given that anymore posted would be stopped from leaving India. Webb did believe, though, that many of their gripes stemmed from struggling to adjust to rural living in India having been used to the amenities and bustle of town life.²⁵³ In his eyes, bar the period of hot weather, Sewar was ‘climatically perfectly suited as a camp for Europeans’, it was just a matter of adapting to the heat: ‘The Maltese suffered unnecessarily by declining to take advice as to diet or to sleep in the open. They alleged fear of tigers. There is no tiger to be found probably within a hundred miles of Sewar,’ he commented.²⁵⁴ In reality, the camp environment and the

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Report from Captain Webb, 1 December 1942.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

Maltese evacuees were fundamentally incompatible, and their complaining was casting a bad light upon the Government of India's provision for evacuees.

In late 1942, the decision was taken to move the Maltese evacuees to Coimbatore. The reason given by Webb was a practical and financial one. Firstly, the Indian Overseas Department were 'willing to take over Sewar Camp as a home for Anglo-Indians and Anglo-Burmans' who were currently housed at Naini Tal and Coimbatore. This camp would then no longer be a financial responsibility for the British Government, while only evacuees under the care of the Home Department would be located at Coimbatore.²⁵⁵ Unfortunately, Maltese evacuees had also been writing to friends (probably among the Balkan evacuees) at Coimbatore Camp giving 'Sewar such a bad name that the Anglo-Indians and Anglo-Burmans presented an ultimatum to the Government of India flatly refusing to be sent there' reported Webb.²⁵⁶

Whether unintentionally, the Maltese had thrown a spanner into the re-organisation of official evacuee camps. It is unclear if Sewar was utilised for Eurasian evacuees, but it is not mentioned in *Resume of Instructions* published in 1943.²⁵⁷ In this year, the Government of Burma had opened an evacuee camp at Chunar, near Allahabad in northern India. Gerard Lobo, who moved to the camp in 1946 recalled that there were 300 Burma evacuee families living there. After evacuation his family had lived in several locations across in India while his father worked and joined the Indian Navy Volunteer Reserve.²⁵⁸ They stayed at Chunar until it closed in mid-1947, then returned to Burma; it was the place, Lobo recalls, that 'saw some of the happiest days of my fractured childhood'.²⁵⁹ It is more likely that Sewar was permanently closed after the Balkan Maltese moved to Coimbatore. Located in Southern India, the climate and surroundings here would hopefully be more conducive, and less likely to provoke complaints. Their time at the British Evacuee Camp is the focus of the next section of this chapter.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ *Resume of Instructions Concerning Assistance*.

²⁵⁸ Gerard Lobo, 'Our Burma Heritage, My Recollections', in Yvonne Vaz Ezdani (ed) *Songs of Survivors* (India: Goa 1556, 2007) Chapter 15, pp.157 – 193.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

Table III PRESENT STRENGTH OF EVACUEE CAMPS (maintained by the Home Department) December 1942	
Camp	Number of Occupants
Sewar Camp [Balkan Maltese]	513
Naini Tal [mixed]	223
Balachadi [Polish children]	384 children 30 adults 1 priest
Coimbatore [mixed]	691
Anandigiri [mixed]	125
Rajkot Camp [British Chinese – maintained on behalf of the India Overseas Dept.]	42
Total	2009
Source: Report from Captain Webb to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, 1 December 1942, 'Maintenance of Evacuees Accommodated in India', K5715, TNA: FO 369/2829.	

British Evacuee Camp: The Maltese Wing

The British Evacuee Camp (BEC) at Coimbatore within the grounds of the Madras Forestry School had three parts: the main camp, the combined hospital, and a Maltese wing. Additionally, there was a satellite camp at Anandagiri, Ootacamund. From information given in budget estimates for 1945, this housed an asylum for evacuees, overseen by a 'lady superintendent' assisted by a clerk, a part-time medical officer, and servants to undertake tasks in the 'Mental Establishment'²⁶⁰. The main camp, situated in RS Puram, a suburb of Coimbatore, had a larger complement of staff including Camp Superintendent (Mr. W.N.

²⁶⁰ Budget Estimates (to take effect from January 1945) sent from Captain Archibald Webb, Principal Refugee Officer, Department of Commonwealth Relations, Government of India, to the Commandant, British Evacuee Camp, RS Puram, Coimbatore, 16 December 1944. 'Correspondence: Evacuees Files, maintained at the British Evacuee Camp, Coimbatore: BEC/B 9-10', IOR/L/AG/40/1/183.

Datta), clerks, room boys, sweepers and a debugging squad. For education, there was a Camp School subdivided into high school, middle, primary schools and a kindergarten.²⁶¹ A medical officer was employed to oversee the Combined Camp Hospital supported among others by an assistant, matron, three qualified nurses and two dhobis.²⁶² There was an isolation ward and a Maltese ward within the hospital (each with own nurse), the latter suggesting that Maltese evacuees were treated separately from evacuees in the main camp. While all the camp's inhabitants were 'British subjects' those in the main camp (evacuees from Hong Kong, Malaya and Burma) were expatriates and Eurasians who had been domiciled in British colonies: the Maltese had lived in foreign countries (Turkey and Greece) and were generally non-English speaking. This segregation hinted at their 'otherness.'

The Maltese Wing at Coimbatore was in effect a camp within a camp. It was run by an assistant commandant, Mr. Cowasji, supported by a 'ministerial establishment' comprising a head clerk, clerks, storekeepers and a record sorter.²⁶³ Like the other camp sections it had a complement of menial workers including two chaprassi (office messengers), five watchmen, a white ant squad of four labourers, and 50 sweepers. White ants (termites) were the bane of the British colonial establishment, as they destroyed wooden structures and paper alike – not ideal for buildings or record keeping. As Roy describes, much time and effort went into finding the most effective chemical or botanical concoctions to deter the pesky insects. Between the 1880s and 1900s:

paper was routinely smeared with a range of chemical entities referred to variously as Mr Woodrow's solution, kerosene oil and 'spirituous solutions of corrosive sublimate.' In the same period, kerosene emulsions, tobacco decoctions, and strong soap solutions were applied to plants to 'dislodge' white ants. Similar practices survived until the 1940s when surfaces of wood were brushed with chemicals including coal-tar creosote, and solutions of zinc chloride, arsenic and chlorinated naphthalene.²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Budget Estimates, 16 December 1944, p. 8.

²⁶⁴ Rohan Deb Roy, 'White Ants, Empire, and Entomo-Politics in South Asia', *Historical Journal* 63:2 (2020), pp. 420-21. Possibly the 'debugging squad' in the main camp was also controlling white ants, or mosquitoes and bed bugs, etc.

The presence of a white ant squad points to the fact that the Maltese evacuees were housed in wooden accommodation blocks. A useful description of the construction of the camp comes from ‘Brahmanya’ who lived in the local area:

For this purpose the then British Government closed down the Madras Forest College and cleared several acres of forest land, west of the college. Initially they put thousands of tents in the open area across the Tadagm Road to accommodate the British refugees from their European Colonies like Malta and other islands. Then rows and rows of small tenements were built for them in the space cleared in the Forest College Campus.²⁶⁵

It is also interesting to note that ‘expenses of charpoy dipping, tank fuel and labour’ were also budgeted for in ‘Contingencies’ for the main camp.²⁶⁶ Charpoys were bed frames, so it is likely that they needed to be disinfected or treated on a regular basis for infestations. The budget also shows that Kitson lamps were used for lighting in the Maltese Wing, suggesting that it was not connected to the electricity supply: ‘free issue of kerosene oil to evacuees in lieu of electric light.’²⁶⁷ This makes sense as the camp buildings were of a temporary nature.

In addition to the sixty-eight sweepers employed in the main camp, fifty sweepers were required to keep the outside spaces of the Maltese Wing clean. Sweepers (both men and women) were drawn from one of the lowest castes in the Indian caste system, but their work was essential, clearing rubbish and removing night soil from latrines.²⁶⁸ Good sanitation measures helped to prevent outbreaks of diseases such as cholera and maintained a high standard of hygiene. It appears that sullage – wastewater from sinks, baths and showers – was also taken away for disposal as repair charges for sullage carts are mentioned alongside those for night soil and rubbish in the budget under ‘non-recurring expenses.’²⁶⁹ Contaminated water was a breeding ground for mosquitoes, so this was a sensible course of action, as there was no sewage system in the Maltese Wing. Lastly, a Sanitation Inspector was employed to oversee this work.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁵ ‘Brahmanya’, ‘My Coimbatore’, posted 13 August 2012: [My Coimbatore | Brahmanyan \(wordpress.com\)](http://www.mycoimbatore.com)

²⁶⁶ Budget Estimates, 16 December 1944.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Amna Khalid, ‘Unscientific and Unsanitary: Hereditary Sweepers and Customary Rights in the United Provinces’, in Ryan Johnson and Amna Khalid (eds), *Public Health in the British Empire: Intermediaries, Subordinates, and the Practice of Public Health, 1850-1960* (New York: Routledge, 2012), Chapter 2.

²⁶⁹ Budget Estimates, 16 December 1944.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

Although this seems like a plethora of servants and workers, this was the usual arrangement in British colonial India. Specific household tasks were performed by a range of servants: sweepers, dhobis, ayahs, cooks and gardeners for example, while manual work was undertaken by labourers and skilled artisan/craftsmen. Indians or Anglo-Indians were employed in business, industry, and within the Indian Civil Service as clerks, and office assistants and in lower management positions. It was an exploitative system with Europeans firmly at the apex of colonial society. While this must have been another adjustment to make in this very foreign country, there is evidence that some Balkan-Maltese took advantage of this unequal system. A remark which hints at the reaction of Maltese evacuees to life in the Coimbatore camp comes from the Chief Administrator, British Military Administration, Eritrea following a visit to the British Evacuee Camp at Asmara. He noted: 'It is understood that certain [Maltese] evacuees in India were in gainful employment and did not draw their allowances. The vast majority drew their allowances, employed servants and did nothing...'²⁷¹ Additionally, some families received payments for an ayah to help with children, understandable when there were domestic difficulties, such as a parent experiencing mental health issues. Such a case is highlighted later in this chapter.²⁷²

There is limited evidence of how the Maltese evacuees spent their time in the camp, but they must have been occupied with daily routines. Some were employed as camp staff assisting with administration and store keeping, and also in the school which had a head teacher, three further teachers, and an additional mistress.²⁷³ A list of evacuee names and occupations reveals that Alfred Buttigieg worked as a teacher and then became assistant headmaster.²⁷⁴ Education in the Maltese Wing school was most likely conducted in Turkish and English as the former was the first language for most evacuees. A monthly contribution was given towards the main camp school indicating that some children must have moved across – perhaps to improve their English and so they could gain qualifications.²⁷⁵ An approximate tally of children up to the age of fifteen living in the camp is one hundred and sixty. This figure comes from information collated from the questionnaire completed by evacuees in 1946 which states their age.²⁷⁶ This was quite a large number although it

²⁷¹ Notes by CA [Chief Administrator] following visit to Mai Habar Camp, 28 January 1948, TNA: FO 1015/53. The Maltese Evacuees at Coimbatore had been moved to another camp at Asmara, Eritrea, arriving early January 1948.

²⁷² See correspondence in IOR/L/AG/40/1/196.

²⁷³ Budget Estimates, 16 December 1944.

²⁷⁴ List of Maltese Evacuees proceeding to Eritrea, TNA: FO 1015/53.

²⁷⁵ Budget Estimates, 16 December 1944.

²⁷⁶ Questionnaire summary lists attached to letter from Webb to R. N. Gilchrist, India Office, 9 May 1946, TNA: FO 371/57830, WR 1575.

includes those too young to attend school. In addition, there were roughly forty teenagers between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. In the mid twentieth century, having completed a basic education, most children left at the age of fourteen to take up manual work, apprenticeships, or to start at the bottom of the ladder in clerical work. Those with academic ability stayed longer to complete examinations which were a gateway to professions or university entry. Therefore, any children over the age of fourteen would have expected to start learning a trade or go into employment – not easy in the situation. However, there were opportunities for some young Balkan Maltese to attend the British Institutes of Engineering Technology or Commerce and Accountancy in Bombay to acquire qualifications and skills.²⁷⁷

Apart from Alfred Buttigieg, there were other Maltese evacuees involved in the life of the camp and those who were employed elsewhere. Information about them is found in the lists of evacuees going to Eritrea. This was probably compiled by the Principal Refugee Officer, Captain Archibald Webb, who made comments about the occupation, abilities and character of individual evacuees or family groups. Henry Pellegrini worked in a camp office while Mr. P. J. Shannon was a hospital clerk and also scout master. Scouting was a popular pastime for boys since its founding in the early twentieth century and would have kept them occupied during leisure time learning new skills; it also created a sense of identity and was a way of maintaining some discipline. Miss A. Ronzavelle worked in the hospital as an interpreter while Miss G. Ellul was a nurse there. It was commented that the latter was ‘inclined to be cheeky and undisciplined.’²⁷⁸

With a large number of cotton mills situated there, Coimbatore was known as the ‘Manchester of South India,’ so there must have been employment opportunities in the local area. Many of the Maltese men were listed as crafts or tradesmen, for example, carpenters and electricians, whose skills could be put to good use if required. All those who found refuge in India were encouraged to find work, not only to help in the Indian/Imperial war effort but also to repay maintenance allowances. Maltese evacuees named as working outside of the camp are Joseph Bugeja a mechanic, Jules Bugeja a carpenter, and George Borg who was employed in a workshop. Balkan evacuees also found employment: Mr. Wilson, a Romanian evacuee is recorded as ‘an exceptionally nice old man, has worked throughout as a postman - very reliable and hardworking’ while Mr. Muscovitch was ‘a

²⁷⁷ For example see correspondence file ‘Anthony Portelli’ in IOR/L/AG/40/1/195.

²⁷⁸ List of Evacuees proceeding to Eritrea (Balkans) and list of Maltese Evacuees proceeding to Eritrea, TNA: FO 1015/53.

hardworking professional tinsmith'.²⁷⁹ Not everybody capable of working did so, and there were a number of shady characters in the camp who Webb generally described as being 'crafty' or, 'crude'. He warned in particular of the behaviour of a few men, one of whom was 'extremely polite – a blood sucker who skins the other evacuees on some pretext of another' while two brothers were 'not straight in business' and had both broken prohibition laws.²⁸⁰ However, for the most part evacuees and their families, were noted as being 'decent,' 'nice' or 'quiet' whatever their employment status.

There were several military establishments in the vicinity of Coimbatore - HMS *Garunda*, a Royal Navy Air Yard, and later HMS *Vairi*, a Naval Aircraft Storage Depot. Both played important support roles in the Burma Campaign, and were staffed by Allied personnel, including members of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps (ROAC) and the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME). In addition, in 1942 the Madras Regiment was reformed with its regional centre at Madukkarai near Coimbatore, while a contingent of the Madras Guard, an Indian auxiliary unit was based in the town. Nominal rolls and other lists of evacuees give insight into the war service of Balkan Maltese in addition to those recruited in Egypt. Without their official records it is difficult to pinpoint where they served, but it is probable that many were recruited shortly after arrival in India or from the evacuee camp at Coimbatore.²⁸¹

Men served with the East Yorkshire Regiment, RAOC, REME, Royal Army Service Corps (RASC), and Madras Guards for varying lengths of time (see Table IV) at end of chapter). Several transferred between units, for example from the East Yorkshires to the Royal Engineers. Many received training as motor mechanics/drivers or joined the ranks serving as a private, and only saw service in India. A few men travelled further afield: Basil Millevoij joined the RASC serving for over five years in the Middle East and India, while Leonard Portelli of the ROAC and REME, saw action at both Tobruk and Mersa Matrah in North Africa.²⁸² One evacuee, serving with the East Yorkshire Regiment was attached to a POW Camp. There were a number of these set up in India to take Italian POWs captured in the Middle East and North Africa. Khan explains that POWs arrived at Bombay and were dispersed to various camps in both the north and south of the country.²⁸³ Locations included

²⁷⁹ Ibid. Mr. Wilson was a Balkan evacuee, originally from Romania.

²⁸⁰ List of Maltese evacuees proceeding to Eritrea.

²⁸¹ All records of service from the 1920s onwards are still held by the Ministry of Defence and therefore are not yet open to access, although ex-service personnel and their families can apply to have records released.

²⁸² List of persons who served with HM Forces during the war, compiled by British Evacuees Association (BEA), Mai Habar Camp, TNA: FO 1015/53. Only Millevoij appears on the list of British Maltese who have joined H.M. Forces in Egypt, FO 369/2727, K588.

²⁸³ Khan, *The Raj at War*, p. 78. For further information see Bob Moore, 'Enforced Diaspora: The Fate of [Italian Prisoners of War during the Second World War]', *War in History* 22:2 (2015), pp. 174-90; also Bob

Poona, Ramgarh and Bairagarh near Bhopal.²⁸⁴ Only one woman is listed as serving with the Women's Auxiliary Corps (India) (WAC(I)) – Catherine Damato. Formed in 1942, it recruited both British and Indian women who worked in support roles with the Airforce and Army. Khan describes how 'they worked in anti-aircraft direct finding and plotting, parachute inspection and packing, as cipher clerks and operators, as well as the more traditional roles of catering and housekeeping duties ... barely remembered by history, these women plugged the gaps in skilled labour and performed urgent and essential tasks'.²⁸⁵ However, it is recorded elsewhere that two other girls from the BEC also joined the WAC(I) - Josephine and Catherine Cagliarini.²⁸⁶

A few names included are just described as having done 'war service.' This may mean that they served in civilian roles within army and air force bases and did not actually join up. What is clear from the various nominal roll lists is that other men aside those mentioned in the table have the occupation of motor mechanic or driver/mechanic, which indicates that a wider number were mobilised for the war effort. As is discussed later, ex-servicemen and those who had done war service hoped to use recognition of this to aid their applications to emigrate to Australia and elsewhere. Trades learnt and skills acquired during military service and the fact they had served for 'King and Country' made them more desirable applicants - at least it should have done. It would have no doubt worked in the favour of the young, single, Cagliarini sisters who Webb noted wished to settle in the dominion, but that their mother 'a very difficult lady' was 'determined to get them back to Turkey.'²⁸⁷

Even while some Balkan Maltese found regular employment many were without regular daily occupation. With evacuees living closely together in the camp this led to inevitable tensions. Volatile behaviour and even brawling involving both men and women was recorded although this was not only attributed to Maltese evacuees, but those from the Balkan States.²⁸⁸ This could cause welfare issues as the sad case of one family shows. Complaints were made about the behaviour of Salvo Portelli who was identified a drunkard and trouble maker, while his wife (Mary) was described as a 'mental case'; the children were

Moore and Kent Fedorowich, *The British Empire and its Italian Prisoners of War, 1940-1947* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

²⁸⁴ Khan, *The Raj at War*, p. 78. Additionally German and other Axis civilians domiciled in India were interned for the duration of the war.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p.154. .

²⁸⁶ List of Evacuees proceeding to Eritrea (Balkans) and Notes on Individual Cases – Mrs M. Cagliarini, TNA: FO 1015/53.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ See correspondence in IOR/L/AG/40/1/197.

noted as ‘neglected’ and spent some time in the care of a local convent.²⁸⁹ At one point Portelli was sent to jail for attempted murder, but his release was secured by the commandant at the BEC. Webb’s assessment of him in the list of evacuees proceeding to Eritrea was that he drank heavily but was not a bad character - indicating that alcohol was the root of the problem.²⁹⁰ The family was still together at this point, including Mary (‘unbalanced’) and six children, the two eldest of which were now working.²⁹¹ Perhaps this eased some pressure from their parents, but life in the BEC during their time there must have been very difficult for them all in these circumstances.

Health Matters

As already described above there was a well-staffed hospital at the British Evacuee Camp, which saw to the medical and health needs of all the evacuees. The isolation ward here was needed for treating those with tropical infectious diseases such as malaria, dysentery, cholera and tuberculosis (TB).²⁹² Correspondence regarding a claim for compensation by a Maltese evacuee – Mrs Mary Portelli – that she had contracted TB as a result of her evacuation as well as malaria, show how prevalent these diseases were.²⁹³ According to her statement, Portelli had spent seven months in Egypt before travelling by sea to India. At the temporary evacuee camp at Satara she developed tubercular pleurisy (April 1942), then suffered repeated attacks of malaria at Bharatpur. After transferring to Coimbatore in 1943 she was treated for pulmonary tuberculosis; X rays taken over several years showed that she had signs of TB in both her lungs: ‘... there is a slow but steady advance of the disease...’ although her symptoms were not severe.²⁹⁴ Despite this evidence Webb, felt that ‘it would be a most dangerous precedent ... to accept any definite claim for compensation’ in the case of Mrs Portelli; in other words, he did not want a rush of claims from other evacuees.²⁹⁵

²⁸⁹ File of correspondence ‘Salvo Portelli’ in IOR/L/AG/40/1/195.

²⁹⁰ List of evacuees proceeding to Eritrea, FO 1015/53.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² For further information see Sandhya Polu, *Infectious Diseases in India, 1892-1940* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

²⁹³ Copy of report on Mrs M. E. Portelli by the District Medical Commissioner, Coimbatore, 16 May 1946; ‘Repatriation of Balkan and Maltese evacuees in India, September 1945-June 1946’, IOR/L/PJ/7/10109: File 6732.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Webb to Gilchrist, 5 June 1946, ‘Repatriation of Balkan and Maltese evacuees’, IOR/L/PJ/7/10109: File 6732.

This was a highly possible outcome as there were, according to a list of long term invalids, seven other individuals suffering from TB in the Maltese wing at Coimbatore.²⁹⁶ There were also a number of evacuees with high blood pressure/hypertension, several mental cases, a woman with chronic malaria and five married ladies described as 'neurotic'.²⁹⁷ It is most probable their conditions were caused or exacerbated by their experience of evacuation - general living conditions and the war situation impacted on everyone's health. Certainly, correspondence between the Medical Officer at the British Evacuee Camp, the Commandant and Principal Refugee Officer reveals concerns about the wellbeing of **all** evacuees at the camp, in particular that the food allowance per person was not adequate, leading to cases of malnutrition.²⁹⁸ In November 1944, Dr M. Narayanan, Medical Officer, wrote to Commandant Datta asking that the present maintenance allowance per month of Rs.45/- be increased by Rs.15/- for 'food which I think will relieve the evacuees to a great extent of their health and food problems'.²⁹⁹ Food prices had increased dramatically during the war so at that time evacuees were unable to purchase enough to maintain a healthy diet. Narayanan also described the state of those in his care:

From my observation of the evacuees coming to the hospital and in the blocks and from the nature of their illness I find that the general health of these people is poor. They have chronic malaria, gastric troubles, heart troubles, and a major proportion of them suffer from nervous diseases. A great percentage of them are anaemic.³⁰⁰

He also suggested that the Commandant ask for an opinion from the Senior Medical Officers at the General Hospital in Coimbatore who visited the camp every week. This would give further weight to Narayanan's request, and back up his observations. A quick and blunt statement was received from Dr G. Scudder, the District Medical Officer:

I have been informed with the state of general malnutrition and the effects of vitamin deficiency and undernourishment prevalent amongst the evacuees at the British Evacuee Camp for the past two years. It is practically impossible to supply an adequate European diet on Rs.45 per mensem under present

²⁹⁶ 'List of Long-Term Invalids', by N. K. Sampath, Camp Medical Officer, BEC, Coimbatore, TNA: FO 1015/53.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ See correspondence in IOR/L/AG/40/1/183.

²⁹⁹ Dr M. Narayanan to the Commandant, BEC, 6 November 1944, IOR/L/AG/40/183.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

conditions. I have repeatedly spoken of the necessity for increasing the allowances for food. If it is not done it is inevitable that chronic disease, malnutrition, and poor health will prevail. I therefore entirely agree with the suggestion made by the Medical Officer of the British Evacuee Camp Dr. M. Narayanan.³⁰¹

All this information was then forwarded to Webb at the Department of Commonwealth Relations by Datta. The commandant fully supported the medical opinion.³⁰² However, this issue continued into 1945. The inhabitants of the BEC were by no means the only people affected by food shortages and poor diet in India. Starvation and malnutrition were rife in the country for the whole population, particularly in famine-hit Bengal.³⁰³ Perhaps the evacuees at BEC were more fortunate in that they received a steady supply of rations for their 'European diet', even if it fell short. The Department of Commonwealth Relations, however, was irritated by the facts and figures put forward, and demanded that further statistics regarding food availability and dietary requirements were given to them. In the meantime, 'in view of the medical opinion,' the Government of India sanctioned the implementation of a malnutrition allowance per month of Rs.15 which was 'admissible only to those evacuees who are certified by the Medical Officer of the Camp to be suffering from malnutrition' and an increase of the maintenance allowance by Rs.7 for those not receiving this.³⁰⁴

This was progress, but having investigated thoroughly the escalation in food prices of items suitable to a European diet, the commandant wrote again to Webb in March 1945 asking that the malnutrition allowance should go up: 'I beg to request that as matters have become rather acute and the evacuees have to starve themselves during the latter half of each month, early orders of the Government of India sanctioning additional allowance may please be obtained and conveyed to me...'³⁰⁵ According to a summary of standard rations for 'European Internees' compiled by Datta, the cost of these per person was approximately Rs.45 per month.³⁰⁶ This took up the entire maintenance allowance as quoted above. At the

³⁰¹ Statement by District Medical Officer, Coimbatore, 9 November 1944, IOR/L/AG/40/1/183.

³⁰² W. N. Datta, Commandant, BEC, to Principal Refugee Officer, endorsement No. 7010/44, 11 November 1944, IOR/L/AG/40/1/183.

³⁰³ Khan, *The Raj at War*, pp. 200-19.

³⁰⁴ Department of Commonwealth Relations, Government of India, to Commandant, BEC, 25 February 1945, IOR/L/AG/40/1/183.

³⁰⁵ Commandant, BEC, to Webb, 23 March 1945, IOR/L/AG/40/1/183.

³⁰⁶ 'Summary of Standard Rations for European Internees', supplied by the Camp Commandant, Coimbatore, attached to letter from Commandant, BEC, to Webb, 23 March 1945, IOR/L/AG/40/1/183.

BEC evacuees (single, couples and families) prepared and cooked their own food from rations (including firewood) issued to them on a daily basis. Therefore, while basics such as bread, meat, tea and flour or rice were available, other produce such as fresh vegetables and fruit were more difficult to come by. Perhaps, it was more the case of not having a balanced diet that caused health problems.

Additionally, if the figures given by the Commandant are correct, a comparison with rationing amounts in the United Kingdom show that some food items were more generous. For example, the evacuees were issued with 16 ounces of beef or other meat per day, while in Britain only 4 ounces of bacon or ham were available per week; sugar was 2 ½ ounces/day (17 ½ /week), compared to 8 ounces per week in Britain. On the other hand, small amounts of cheese, butter, and margarine were available in the U.K. as well as milk, but not mentioned for the evacuees at Coimbatore. On the Home Front amounts of essential food items rationed fluctuated during the war and were supplemented by what could be bought through the points system, and also what was garden grown. There is no evidence that the evacuees at Coimbatore grew their own produce, but potatoes and onions were included in the standard daily ration issue. Depending on availability other comestibles were added.³⁰⁷ It would be fair to conclude, that evacuees had a generous daily ration, although not a nutritionally balanced one.

The inadequacy of the food allowance continued to be a source of complaint right up until 1947, with the President of the British Evacuees Association writing to Webb, to express gratitude for a further increase, but that this ‘represented a drop in the wide ocean and was not adequate with the actual cost of living’. It also seemed to apply only to bachelors and couples, but it was felt it should be ‘extended to all the evacuees, because food prices and the general cost of living are arising daily and we have to pay much more for all the articles of first necessity.’³⁰⁸ As already commented, escalation in food prices hit everyone in India, but the Indian Government also had a responsibility of making sure that the expenditure they made on behalf of the British Government for the maintenance of evacuees was kept to a minimum. There is, in the correspondence coming from the Principal Refugee Officer on a number of issues, an undertone of intolerance and prejudice, not only towards the evacuees themselves but towards the Camp senior staff – all Indian. British colonial power was on the wane, but the white superior attitude was still very much in evidence.

In conclusion, the Combined Camp Hospital was well organised to provide health and medical care to evacuees including pregnant women - judging from dates of birth and

³⁰⁷ ‘Summary of Standard Rations for European Internees’, 23 March 1945.

³⁰⁸ Copy of petition, 5 July 1947, from John Conzuch, British Evacuees Camp, to Webb, IOR/L/AG/40/1/183.

ages listed in nominal rolls many children were born at the camp!³⁰⁹ Treatment appears to have been free but medication was not. In his notes about the budget, Webb issued a reprimand about giving out patent medicines at half cost: this ‘can or should be supplied if the medical officer certifies them, as necessary. When such a certificate is given and the Commandant is satisfied that the cost cannot be met by the evacuee, he can give a special advance and debit it to the evacuee’s individual accounts.’³¹⁰ Dental treatment was available too, although this was listed under ‘Contingencies.’³¹¹ Evacuees in need were also provided with false teeth and hearing aids.³¹² It was the norm to pay for treatment of any kind in this period. In Britain fees were charged for calling the doctor, and charges were made for visits to hospital although depending on personal circumstances this could be free of charge. People joined insurance schemes to be able to pay when needed. An exception were the families of service personnel who came under the umbrella of military medical and dental care. The British Government accepted the responsibility and funded the medical care at the British Evacuee Camp for the Maltese and Balkan evacuees, albeit with the Refugee and Relief Office from the Government of India keeping a firm eye on the budget.

The spiritual welfare of the Balkan Maltese evacuees was also taken care of. Roman Catholicism had a central role in communities of the Maltese diaspora and a connection was quickly established with the Church of St John de Britto in RS Puram, Coimbatore, close to the BEC: ‘[During the Second World War] ... refugees of Malta (All Catholics) were given shelter at the Forest College Campus; hence Sunday Mass was said at the college. Fr. M. Savarimuthu (later Bishop) as Procurator was their Chaplain. With the help (manual labour) of the Maltese evacuees he constructed the Grotto in honour of Our Lady of Lourdes in 1943, which became a popular shrine...’³¹³ No doubt the chaplain was involved in the many baptisms, marriages and some burials which took place involving Balkan Maltese evacuees (incorrectly described as refugees from Malta). Church records can be found at the British Library, India Office Collection, but are by no means complete. These cover Anglican, Roman Catholic, and other Christian denomination registers and are also available online through various genealogy websites. Table V (at end of chapter) lists details of marriages

³⁰⁹ Nominal rolls and information lists for Maltese and Balkan evacuees found in TNA: FO 1015/53.

³¹⁰ Budget Estimates, 16 December 1944.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Information found in ‘Six boxes of correspondence about individuals, mainly Maltese, maintained at Coimbatore Camp, IOR/L/AG/1/192 – 197.

³¹³ <https://www.coimbatore-diocese.org/st-john-britto-church.php> Note that the evacuees are assumed to have come from Malta.

which took place in Coimbatore.³¹⁴ Some of the names are latinised which indicates that weddings took place at the Catholic Church. For many, the bride and groom were both Maltese evacuees, marrying within their own community. However, a number of young women married British servicemen who were stationed in the area. It has been possible to trace their move to the United Kingdom with their husbands, and by using their maiden names to identify from the civil registration the birth of any children.³¹⁵ Marriages took place elsewhere, too: Polycarpu Portelli and Maria Buttigieg wed in July 1946 at Bangalore (still in the Madras Presidency). A monetary allowance was available for evacuees planning to marry to cover the cost of wedding outfits, as well as other payments for baby clothes and equipment, and for mourning dress.³¹⁶ An indication, perhaps, that the authorities recognised the religious and social importance of these events within the Balkan Maltese community, as well as the lack of personal funding.

It is not surprising that couples married in India went on to have children there. Birth records are patchy but, for example, Charles and Yolanda (Cagliari) Caruana had a daughter, Mary, born in 1947.³¹⁷ Henry Salvatore, son of Erick and Josephine Kristall arrived in September 1946. His parents married the previous October. Erick Kristall was an Estonian who had served with the Royal Sussex Regiment in India, having fled from Estonia to India via Afghanistan. On finishing his service in January 1945, he was sent with fellow Estonians to the British Evacuee Camp, Coimbatore, where he met his future wife, Josephine, daughter of Salvatore and Ursula Callus.³¹⁸ An additional record of children born to Maltese evacuees in India comes from the nominal rolls which give birth dates. The community certainly expanded during this time especially in the years 1946 and 1947. Offspring arrived at both at Sewar Camp, Bharatpur, and then at Coimbatore.³¹⁹

Julius and Josephine Bugeja's family grew by four during their time as evacuees. Their eldest son, Felix (b. August 1940) accompanied his parents to India. He was followed by Jeanette (b. October 1942), Antoinette (b. October 1943), Francis (b. May 1945) and

³¹⁴ Compiled from India Marriages, 1992-1948, available on the Family Search website: <https://www.familysearch.org/en/> India Baptism and Burial records available from the same source are limited, with restrictions due to privacy laws.

³¹⁵ Accessed online at <https://www.freebmd.org.uk/>

³¹⁶ See correspondence in IOR/L/AG/40/1/192-197.

³¹⁷ 'India births and baptisms 1786 -1947, accessed online at <https://www.familysearch.org/en/>

³¹⁸ Kristall, E, 'Correspondence Files. multiple number series, Class 13 [Migrants H-K]', NAA: A441, 1951/13/9206, digital copy. Erick served from May 1944 to January 1945 with the Royal Sussex Regiment.

³¹⁹ A few records are found in 'India births and baptisms 1786 – 1947' for Bharatapur online at <https://www.familysearch.org/en/>, and even less for Coimbatore. The nominal roll for evacuees in Mai Habar Camp gives the most complete information about children's dates of birth, however this does not cover any who left the BEC prior to the move to Eritrea, TNA: FO 1015/53.

Marcel (b. July 1947). Likewise, Spiridon and Clementine Vella had four children arrive between 1942 and 1947, the youngest of which was born only a few months before the Maltese evacuees transferred to Eritrea in January 1948.³²⁰ As a consequence of all the various relocations, many siblings were born on different continents and in various countries: Turkey (Europe or Asia), India (Asia), Eritrea (Africa) and even wherever their parents finally settled (i.e. Australia). Parents with children who were teenagers or young adults when first evacuated in 1941/42 from Turkey, saw some of them marry and begin families of their own. In a sense this was the beginning of the fragmentation of this displaced Maltese community. A process which accelerated once applications for emigration began to bear fruit as young families sought new opportunities.

Deaths were an inevitable part of the Balkan Maltese evacuees' experience while in India. Again, the burial records appear to be patchy, and it requires a protracted search of the online registers by location and years to identify any evacuees who died. Similar to marriages and baptisms there are three possible locations: Satara (Bombay Presidency), Bharatpur (Rajasthan) and Coimbatore (Madras Presidency), all camps which accommodated the evacuees. A number of deaths occurred during 1942 including those of Sophia Camilleri and Felice Bugeja at Bharatpur, the latter being over sixty years of age.³²¹ There was a small graveyard close to the British Evacuees Camp, Coimbatore, and a description of the funeral of a young Maltese man is found in *Chowkidar*, the journal of the British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia. It was provided by a Camileri family descendant who visited to find his grave – unfortunately now lost due to forest regeneration:

Nineteen years old Michael Camileri was with friends in a jeep which drove into an unmarked hole near the Evacuees Camp. His friends escaped unharmed but Michael died instantly, probably from a broken neck. A Catholic priest came from Coimbatore to conduct the funeral, and Michael was buried a short distance from the camp in a small burial ground. His coffin was carried to the plot by his friends and many more joined the funeral procession. A headstone was erected later that year ...³²²

³²⁰ Nominal roll for evacuees in Mai Habar Camp.

³²¹ India Deaths and Burials 1719-1948, accessed at <https://www.familysearch.org/en/>

³²² Summary of a visit to India of Lauren Patey from Australia, *Chowdikar* 13:6 (2014), pp. 126-7: Michael is listed with his family in the evacuee questionnaire summary: Josephine Camileri (mother), and 3 siblings. TNA: FO 371/57830, WR 1575.

It was an unexpected and tragic death of a young person which was obviously felt deeply by the Maltese community at the BEC who paid their respects alongside his friends and family. It is interesting to note that the burial ground, which appears to have just served the camp, is described as ‘small.’ This indicates that there must have been a low number of deaths during the period the British Evacuees Camp was in operation.

Although the Maltese evacuees were a close-knit community, as has been established above, members did work outside the camp and as marriages between young women and British servicemen indicate obviously had contact with the world outside of the British Evacuee Camp. It was certainly not isolated from Coimbatore and ‘Brahmanya’, a resident of the town, describes how a bus route was set up between the BEC and the bazaars and cinema halls so they could visit.³²³ Football matches arranged between the Maltese evacuees and the local team were the only ‘interaction between the people of the town and the evacuees’ although he goes on to explain ‘it was not uncommon to see minor friction between locals and inmates’.³²⁴ The source of this friction is unknown; both the camp administration and district authorities would not have tolerated any tension which could have undermined British superiority and control. There may well have been curiosity on both sides or perhaps some high-spirited behaviour which caused upset. Coming from outside the British colonial establishment Maltese evacuees would not have been aware of ‘appropriate’ (racist) behaviour for British Subjects. It appears that controlled excursions from the BEC (Bus trips, football matches) were used to regulate contact between the local community and evacuees in general. By mostly staying within the camp confines, inappropriate fraternisation (in the eyes of British authorities) was less likely to occur.

The ‘British Evacuees Association’: Establishing a British Identity

A committee was formed – ‘The British Evacuees Association’ – which liaised with the camp commandant and Maltese wing commandant over issues concerning the evacuees such as living conditions and finances. Those named as the committee in July 1947 were: John Conzuch (President), Michael Cauchi, Francis Pellegrini, Antony Spitteri, and Julius Portelli, described as ‘the Leaders of the Maltese Evacuees’.³²⁵ For the most part Webb made favourable comments about these men, finding them reliable and trustworthy, except

³²³ Brahmanya, ‘My Coimbatore’.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Copy of a petition, 5 July 1947, Conzuch to Webb, IOR/L/AG/40/1/183.

for Spitteri who, along with his son, would need to be ‘watched carefully’.³²⁶ There is no further information on why Spitteri required watching, and he was one of several men who Webb warned against.³²⁷ However, he must have been well liked by his fellow evacuees to be elected as a leader. Although titled ‘The British Evacuees Association’ it is unclear whether it represented the whole of the Coimbatore Camp or just the Maltese Wing. At the end of the war, other groups (those from Malaya, Hong Kong, Burma) were progressively repatriated, until it was only those from the Balkans and Maltese evacuees from Turkey left at the camp. The Association certainly provided a means of voicing concerns to the authorities, particularly when it came to monetary issues and also of asserting their status as British subjects. This included petitioning politicians, senior government officials and public figures in the United Kingdom regarding their unsatisfactory situation, for example Prime Minister Attlee, Winston Churchill, Creech Jones (Colonial Office) and even King George VI.³²⁸

The identity of this group of evacuees, particularly to those not directly involved in their care, became rather muddled. A natural assumption was that as they were ‘Maltese’ they must have come from Malta. This made more sense than the evacuees having been domiciled elsewhere; the island fortress was a crucial Allied base in the Mediterranean and it was logical that some of the beleaguered population would be evacuated. As Malta was part of the British Empire its inhabitants were automatically classed as British subjects. Although some civilians were evacuated from Malta to England, and there was a plan to send some to Jamaica, there is no evidence that any were sent to India. Most remained on the island, evacuating from the port towns which received heavy aerial bombardment to rural areas. Additionally, shipping was under continual attack, so it was simply not safe to remove people even if there was a suitable destination within easy reach.

Lord Wavell, during his time as Viceroy, visited Madras Province to meet Collectors [District Officers] in February 1944.³²⁹ He noted in his diary: ‘I spent a long day at Coimbatore on February 22, full of surprises and problems...’³³⁰ His packed itinerary ended with ‘a drive through Coimbatore’ through streets lined with crowds, stopping at a rationing centre, the town council and agriculture college ‘... and then, suddenly, at a Refugee Settlement, of refugees from Malta, Burma and other portions of the British Empire, where

³²⁶ List of Maltese Evacuees proceeding to Eritrea. This does not include John Conzuch who must have left the camp prior to this.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ See correspondence including telegrams in IOR/L/PJ/8/391, Coll 110/C/1/3.

³²⁹ Penderel Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 57-8.

³³⁰ Ibid, p. 57.

one had a most loyal reception, and had to inspect Boy Scouts, a canteen, a living quarter, etc and to listen to another speech of welcome.³³¹ The whole day must have been a bemusing experience for Wavell, although exciting for the inhabitants of the BEC to have such an important visitor. There was no reason why the Viceroy would have known where the Maltese evacuees had come from, so Malta was the natural assumption to make.

The Collector of the District, Roger Bell, has a slightly different recollection. In his memoir he describes Wavell's visit to Coimbatore which in his opinion: '... went off well. The brightest feature was when the Viceroy visited the camp for refugees, largely occupied by Maltese and others who had been evacuated from Cyrenaica. These gave a very emotional and affecting welcome to the soldiers who had delivered them from Italian prison camps.'³³² Written in his retirement in the 1950s, it is understandable that Bell's reminiscence gives different details to that of Wavell. As Collector of the Coimbatore District he would no doubt have been aware of the Evacuee Camp, but not heavily involved. He did know that the Maltese were not from Malta, but states (ambiguously) that they 'and others' came from Italian prison camps in Cyrenaica – a province in the Italian colony of Libya. It takes time to unravel an explanation (or explanations) for this: as mentioned in a previous chapter, while the Maltese evacuees were in a transit camp in Egypt, efforts were made to recruit men into service with the British Army. Perhaps some of them ended up in prison camps in Libya as control of North Africa oscillated between Axis and Allied forces. Tens of thousands of prisoners of war were captured, with both sides shipping these men to other places. Allied POWs were transported to Italy, while Axis POWs, especially Italians were sent primarily to the United Kingdom, India, South Africa and Australia.³³³ However, it is possible that some were liberated from holding camps in Cyrenaica prior to the end of the war when Allied forces recaptured lost territory in 1942 - 1943. Men then found their way to the camp at Coimbatore to join their families there.

Another explanation is that Maltese and other Allied civilians interned in Italian prison camps were, at some point in the North Africa Campaign, freed and relocated to India. As the Maltese diaspora domiciled in Libya mostly identified as 'British subjects' they would have been classed as enemy aliens by the Italian authorities. This, however, is unlikely as the Maltese community in Tripolitania - another Libyan province- was transported in 1942 en masse to internment camps in Italy for the duration of the war.³³⁴ Therefore, any in

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Alexandra and Mae Tanner (eds), *Roger Bell, Recollections of an Indian Official, 1928-1949* (Kingston, Tasmania: A. and M. Tanner, 2015).

³³³ Moore, 'Enforced Diaspora', p. 175.

³³⁴ Romeo Cini, *La Nostra Storia*. <http://www.maltamigration.com/history/romeo-cini%27s-tripoli.shtml> The Maltese were repatriated to Libya from Italy following the end of the war. See also: 'Malta: Maltese removed

Cyrenaica may have shared the same experience. Additionally, there is no evidence found in official records that any British civilians interned in Libya came to India.³³⁵ However, it is most likely that Bell just misremembered information he had received about evacuees at Coimbatore Camp and was trying to find a connection which justified the enthusiastic welcome given to Lord Wavell who had been Commander-in-Chief, Middle East (then India) prior to his appointment as Viceroy in September 1943. The Maltese at the camp came from Turkey, while other evacuees who he fails to mention came from Burma, Malaya and Singapore.

Contemporary sources wrongly identified the origin of these Maltese evacuees. This mistake has been overlooked in more recent writing. Even Winston Churchill himself, answering a question from a Conservative MP in 1943 asking what help the United Kingdom had given to refugees, replied that India ‘... has also received large numbers of evacuees from the Balkans, Malta and other areas, covering many nationalities.’³³⁶ It was more logical that ‘Maltese’ evacuees came from the courageous Mediterranean island, and did it really matter that whoever prepared information for the Prime Minister’s statement made this assumption? Alternatively, it neatly circumvented the fact that, as it turned out, an unnecessary evacuation had taken place from a neutral country of people with a dubious ‘British subject’ status.

In the last decade, historians writing about evacuation to India or India’s experience during the Second World War have mentioned the evacuees ‘from Malta’ or simply the ‘Maltese’ in passing. These include Leigh and Khan.³³⁷ This group is not the focus of their work, so it is not surprising this has happened; they are simply on the periphery of research into Polish evacuees, evacuees from Burma, and India’s war experience. Therefore, a more detailed study confirms their real origins and places their story alongside that of other groups of evacuees and refugees. The Maltese at Coimbatore were living in close proximity to evacuees from Hong Kong, Burma and Malaya, all ‘British’ subjects. Yet they were placed in their own wing, separated from fellow Britishers, their appearance and language marking their otherness. Although clearly a homogenous (yet ‘foreign’) group - mostly respectable

from Tripoli and interned in Italy’, Foreign and Commonwealth Office papers (FCO), TNA: FCO 141/9583; ‘Maltese community in Tripoli: loss of property suffered during wartime internment’, TNA: FO 371/97327, JT 1483.

³³⁵ If any British civilians were evacuated from Libya, they would have gone to Egypt. In turn civilians evacuated from Egypt tended to be sent to South Africa. See, for example, ‘Near and Middle East: Evacuation of Families’, TNA: DO 35/1009/7.

³³⁶ Written statement by Prime Minister in answer to question raised by Samuel Hammersley, MP. Copy of *Hansard*, vol. 388, 7 April 1943, ‘Assistance given to refugees by UK now in India, Colonial and Mandated territories’ TNA: FO 371/36721, W 5560.

³³⁷ Leigh, *The Collapse of British Rule in Burma*; Khan, *The Raj at War*.

with the usual sprinkling of reprobates that all communities have - they would have been classed as 'poor whites' in the British colonial system. This process of segregation was endemic in imperial India and extended to this evacuee camp, and no doubt others, too, where white British expatriates from Hong Kong, Malaya and Burma settled adjacent to (but not necessarily mixing with) Eurasian evacuees. Racial barriers maintained white superiority and authority; even in a situation where social levelling may have expected to take place. Evacuees, wherever they had arrived from were dependent on financial handouts, in the form of maintenance allowances funded by the United Kingdom Government.

As the title of the camp committee suggests, the Maltese evacuees defined themselves as 'British,' a status that related directly to their Maltese heritage. The British Evacuees Association was their voice and ensured that they remained visible to the authorities responsible for their care. It reinforced their legitimacy as British subjects, while perhaps glossing over the ambiguity of their evacuation from Turkey in the first place. It must have been a bizarre experience, living in India with camp servants performing menial tasks, after subsisting on British consular relief. Did traits of colonialism rub off on them? What is clear is that while their identity expanded from 'Maltese' to 'British,' ties of kinship and community strengthened for this group of around six hundred evacuees. Their departure from India when it came – did not necessarily mean repatriation to Turkey. For many it signified a new beginning, a chance to migrate to Australia or England. However, as a further chapter explains, for the majority, there would have to be another lengthy stay in an evacuee camp – this time in Eritrea – courtesy of the British Government before this became a reality – if at all.

Table IV Evacuees – Military Service			
Name	Regiment	Rank	Notes Civilian Occupation
Lucas Aicolina	East Yorkshire		Clerk/motor mechanic Attached to No.15 POW Camp, served 2 years 129 days
Lucas Attard	Not known		French Polisher Ex-Serviceman
Nicolas Borg	Not known		Served with H M Forces
Francis Buttigieg	RE Corps	Sapper	Clerk. Served 1 year, 6 months Very good conduct
Joseph J.M. Buttigieg	ROAC and REME	Craftsman	Fitter, Grade I
Peter Buttigeig	East Yorkshire	Private	Jeweller. Married 1946
Charles Caruanna	Not Known		Motor Mechanic Did War Service
Joseph Cassar	East Yorkshire	Private	Electrician
John Cauchi	Not Known		Clerk/ motor mechanic Seen War Service
Stratos Chialton	East Yorkshire		Painter
Thomas Chialton	East Yorkshire, transferred to RE		Tilemaker
Catherine Damato	WAC (I)		Women's Auxiliary Corps, India.
Andrew Genovese	East Yorkshire	Private	Cook
Basil Millevoy	RASC Pioneer Corps		Plasterer. Served in Middle East and India for 5 years 81 days. Recruited to Army in Egypt.
Charles Mizzi	East Yorkshire and REME		Plumber
Peter Mizzi	East Yorkshire and REME	Fitter, Grade II	Professional Central Heating and Hydro Mechanic
Anthony Portelli	Unknown	Craftsman	Served 1 year 282 days. Motor mechanic
Leonard Portelli	ROAC and REME		Served for approx. 4 years, including Tobruk and Mersa Matrah. Possibly recruited in Egypt.
Name	Regiment	Rank	Notes Civilian Occupation
Nicolas Portelli	REME	Craftsman	Electrical Engineer
John Ronzevalle	Madras Guards		Electrician Served 1941 – 1943

Paul Schembri	East Yorkshire	Private	Painter
Thomas Serra	Not Known		Did Military Service, spent 5 years in the Army Emigrated to Australia
Blaise Shannon	Madras Guards		Electrician
Emmanuel Targano	Madras Guards	Private	Toothbrush maker
John Tocton	ROAC		Plumber
Laurence Tocton	Not Known		Hairdresser Has done War Service
Information collated from Nominal Rolls (Evacuees proceeding to Eritrea) and Army Service List compiled by the British Evacuees Association, Mai Habar Camp, TNA: FO 1015/53.			

Table V A Selection of Evacuee Marriages, India 1943 – 1947				
Date	Place	Bride and Groom	Father	Notes
June 1942	Satara	Margaret Borg Felice Genovese	Joseph Borg A Genovese	Child born December 1942, died April 1943
July 1943	Coimbatore	Rosina Borg Nicholas Camilleri	Constantine Borg Joseph Camilleri	
January 1944	Coimbatore	Mary Cilia Michael McGinley	Paul Cilia James McGinley	Went to UK, child born 1951
March 1944	Coimbatore	Benedico Chialton Arthur Nahum	Natale Chialton Nissum Nahum	Child born October 1944
October 1944	Coimbatore	Pauline Yoanna Magdalena Sammut Jack Childes	Antonis Sammut Thomas Henry Childes	Went to UK, son born 1947

January 1946	Coimbatore	Mary Aloysia Cassar Albert Jones	Salvatore Polycarp Cassar Albert Jones	Went to UK, Children born
February 1946	Coimbatore	Celestine Vella Petries Marino Shannon	Joseph Vella Andrew Shannon	
March 1946	Coimbatore	Yolanda Cagliari Charles Caruana	Felix Cagliari Manuel Caruana	
April 1946	Coimbatore	Maria Ellul Peter Lucas Buttigieg	Alexander Ellul Pascal Buttigieg	
June 1946	Coimbatore	Josephine Concepta Dimech Nicolas Portelli	Alfred Dimech Laurentis Portelli	
July 1946	Bangalore	Maria Rosalia Buttigieg Polycarpu Portelli	Alexander Buttigieg Joseph Portelli	
July 1946	Coimbatore	Antoinette Borg Paul Shannon	Paul and Maria Borg Andrew and Leontine Shannon	
September 1946	Coimbatore	Mary Callus Matthew Leonard Burrell	Salvatore Callus Matthew Burrell	Went to UK, children born 1947 & 1953
October 1946	Coimbatore	Celestine Josephine Bugeja Douglas Joseph Lee	Felix Bugeja Joseph Gilliard Lee	Went to UK, Children born 1947 & 1951
October 1946	Coimbatore	Nina Eugenia Esposito Woldemar Kont	Alfred Esposito Johannes Kont	
November 1946	Coimbatore	Mary Emmanuel Ellul John Michael Cilia	Carolius Ellul Paschal Cilia	Emigrated to Australia from India, December 1948

January 1947	Coimbatore	Antoinette Elizabeth Buttigieg Anthony Joseph Mizzi	Anthony Buttigieg Spiridon Mizzi	
January 1947	Coimbatore	Theresa Pollicini George Morrison	Polycarpo Pollicini Donald Morrison	
February 1947	Coimbatore	Magdalena Eftalia Portelli Georges Vella	Antonius Portelli Salvatore Vella	
February 1947	Coimbatore	Maria Tocton Joseph Ellul	Michael Tocton Anthony Ellul	
June 1947	Coimbatore	Antoinette Faboni Anthony Portelli	Vincantius Faboni Polycarp Portelli	
June 1947	Coimbatore	Rosaline Tabone James Blake	Lalatore Tabone Edward Arthur Blake	Went to UK, child born 1949
July 1947	Coimbatore	Liberty Victoria Cillia John Robert Parker	John Cillia John Robert Parker	Went to UK
September 1947	Coimbatore	Amelia Marie Camilleri Donald Ian MacDonald	? Camilleri Donald MacDonald	Went to UK, child born 1950
Information taken from 'India Marriages 1792 – 1948' available online at https://www.familysearch.org/en/ . Have preserved the variations in spelling.				

Chapter Three

‘What a bit of luck not to be British’: The Emigration/Repatriation Issue

A natural assumption for the inhabitants of the British Evacuee Camp once the Second World War had ended was that they could look forward to resuming their former lives. This chapter looks at the emigration/repatriation issue from the evacuees’ viewpoint rather than from the official perspective which will be discussed in the next chapter. Repatriation of some of the Balkan evacuees was fairly straightforward, for example, as long as those returning to Greece had a means of support (employment or relatives) and a place to reside, arrangements could be made. However, for the majority of Balkan Maltese evacuees, their stay in India became protracted creating a feeling of genuine aggrievement and resentment at the slow response to their emigration and repatriation requests. This was particularly expressed in letters from the British Evacuees Association to the Colonial Office in London.

The contents of one of these letters formed the basis of an article which appeared in the *Daily Mirror* in July 1947.³³⁸ It summarised how the ‘700 Maltese’ had come to be in India and how disappointed they were after being assured a number of times that passages would be found for those who received authority to move to another country.³³⁹ The matter had even been discussed in the House of Commons, with the Secretary of State for the Colonies (Creech Jones) replying to a question on the topic from a member of parliament: ‘Their resettlement presents very great difficulties, and, while the matter has received and is receiving urgent consideration, it has not yet been possible to formulate final plans...’³⁴⁰ This reassurance was rather vague even if it intimated that the Maltese evacuees’ situation was a top priority. It certainly would not have given the evacuees any confidence, especially when they were already aware that there was a plan to move them elsewhere. A notice to this effect had been posted in the camp a few months previously.³⁴¹

Their frustration stemmed not only from British Government inertia on their behalf, but also that displaced persons across Europe were being assisted to return home, and that transport could be found for ‘exiled ex-enemies’ (former civilian internees and POWs).³⁴²

³³⁸ ‘Commonwealth Column: 700 exiles unlucky to be British’, *Daily Mirror*, 23 July 1947, p.3. A copy of the original letter to Creech Jones may well exist in Colonial Office archives but has yet to be located.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates, vol. 436, 30 April 1947. Available online at: [Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

³⁴¹ ‘Commonwealth Column: 700 exiles unlucky to be British’, *Daily Mirror*.

³⁴² Ibid.

If this could be organised for thousands, then why not for a comparatively small group like the inhabitants of the BEC? It all seemed relatively straightforward, but as will be discussed later, the Balkan Maltese evacuees fell between the cracks. They were not at this point classed as ‘displaced persons’ and remained the responsibility of the British Government as opposed to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. Nor did they have access to any assisted migration schemes which had been set up to allow groups of various nationalities – including Poles and Maltese (from Malta) - to emigrate to countries within the British Commonwealth and to the United Kingdom itself. Their British passports seemed to open no doors or give them any privilege when it came to resettlement. This explains the parting message of an Estonian from the camp who had been granted entry to Australia: ‘What a bit of luck not to be British.’³⁴³ This was a cheeky riposte as it was service in the ‘British’ Army during the war which also aided immigration applications, particularly to the dominions.

The Estonians residing at BEC had left their home country following the Nazi invasion in 1941 and eventually made their way to India. A group, including Erik Kristall, applied for permission to go to Australia.³⁴⁴ It is possible to track Kristall and his fellow Estonians – Rudolf Grassmann and Edgar Kurn – on their journey to Australia arriving on the *Marella* in June 1947.³⁴⁵ As Australia opened its doors to post-war migrants, their status as refugees/displaced persons increased their eligibility, as did the fact they had all served in the British Army with the Royal Sussex Regiment.³⁴⁶ Men and women who had served during the Second World War had their service record taken into consideration during the immigration process. It seemed that the combination of status as a displaced person and a service record speeded up applications. This was certainly a source of frustration to the Balkan Maltese evacuees, as many men had also ‘done their bit’ during the war.

In fact, there was not so much a loophole, but a backdoor route to Australia for servicemen and women, one which was used by a young Maltese man who had come to India as an evacuee from Turkey. This was the ‘application for permission to remain in Australia upon discharge from the British Armed Forces both in Australia and Abroad’

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Erik Kristall, immigration file. Not only had Kristall served in the British Army but was also married to a Maltese British Subject – Josephine Callus (see marriages above). NAA: A441, 1951/13/9206.

³⁴⁵ See incoming passenger list, *Marella*, 18 June 1947, NAA: K269 Series, digital copy. Grassman and Kurn are recorded in Kristall’s immigration file.

³⁴⁶ Only 9th Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment served in India during the war. Raised in mid-1940 after the retreat from Dunkirk it deployed to India in 1942 and took part in the Burma Campaign.

(Form 49).³⁴⁷ In other words, **any** person who had served in the British Army could fill out this form whether they were in Australia or not. Sergeant Anthony (Tony) Tabone applied using Form 49 while still in India, and arrived in Australia on the *Gorgon* via Singapore in April 1947.³⁴⁸ Tabone had been sent to the Bharatpur Camp with his family but, according to an interview in an Australian regional newspaper, ‘very quickly tired of the camp life and joined the British Army in early 1943’.³⁴⁹ After training, he was posted to several army sections where his language and photographic skills were put to good use, and served in both India and Burma.³⁵⁰ Tabone’s promotion through the ranks to sergeant indicates that his abilities were recognised and rewarded. With a good service record, his request to be demobilised in Australia was granted by the country’s immigration department. Although keen to start a new life in a new country, by late 1949 Tabone had already experienced different employments including working at the Department of Taxation and co-proprietor of a café; it seems he was still finding his feet and direction.³⁵¹

A search of Australian records reveals that at least two Balkan Maltese evacuees took advantage of Form 49 to aid their immigration application to Australia – Tabone and John Cilia.³⁵² Other evacuees, however, did enquire into resettlement in Australia. This was a frustrating process, as John Rozenvalle, an evacuee from Greece, explained in a letter to David Rees Williams, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, in 1948.³⁵³ A British subject by birth, Rozenvalle had worked at the Passport Office, British Legation, Athens prior to evacuation, and had done army service while in India. Initially, he wished to return to Greece, so had made the ‘necessary formalities’ to do so.³⁵⁴ After a conversation with Webb (on a visit to the BEC in March 1947), who counselled him not to go back due to the civil war, Webb allegedly gave a promise to ‘help me in every way for a resettlement in Australia if I so decided, where employment could be easily secured, especially with the

³⁴⁷ ‘Applications for permission to remain in Australia upon discharge from the British Armed Forces lodged both in Australia and Abroad [Form 49]’, NAA: A12288 Series.

³⁴⁸ ‘Tabone, Antonio Nicolas, Army Service. No: 15000748, born Smyrna, Turkey on 1 June 1924. Application dated New Delhi, 7th October 1946’, NAA: A12288 Series, item 1/109. 5,676 applications were lodged in total using Form 49, many from India. The arrival of Sergeant Anthony Nicolas Tabone, Soldier is recorded in Incoming Passenger List, *Gorgon*, 13 April 1947 NAA: K269, digital copy.

³⁴⁹ ‘Served in British Service in India: Recent Arrival’s Interesting Army Career’, *Singleton Argus* (NSW), 3 June 1949, p.4.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁵¹ ‘Served in British Service in India’, *Singleton Argus*.

³⁵² Several groups of Form 49 were submitted from India from 1946 to 1948. ‘John Michael Cilia, Army Service NO: 15000745, b. Malta, 28 June 1923. Wife: Mary Cilia. Application dated Coimbatore 27th October 1947’, NAA: A12288, item 6/215.

³⁵³ John Rozenvalle, British Evacuees Camp, Block 17, Mai Habar, Eritrea, to Reese Williams, 19 June 1948, ‘Proposal to settle Maltese refugees in India in British occupied territories in Africa’, TNA: FO 1015/52.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

qualifications in my possession'. Rozenvalle completed and submitted all the forms for entry to the dominion.³⁵⁵ Yet, his expectation of leaving with his family for Australia in the immediate future was unfulfilled. Orders were received to proceed to Eritrea with the bulk of the camp. It was understandable that he felt very let down, particularly after acting on the advice of the Principal Refugee Officer to change his plan to return to Greece. After submitting his application for entry in mid-1947, it took another two years for the Rozenvalle family to finally sail to start a new life in Australia, departing from Massawa, Eritrea, in early 1949.³⁵⁶

While the majority of the inhabitants of the British Evacuees Camp at Coimbatore remained disappointed by the lack of progress with their repatriation or resettlement, a fortunate group was given passage on a ship carrying visitors and immigrants to Australia arriving in August 1947. This was arranged by Captain Webb with a sympathetic Australian Migration Officer who happened to be Delhi. After discussing the case of five or six families who had completed all the paperwork for entry to Australia, but did not have enough funding from the allowances Webb was able to allocate to them, the officer took it upon himself to arrange for them to be escorted: 'As however, the families seemed likely to make good settlers and an officer of his Department was travelling on the ship, he undertook to see them through the immigration formalities on landing and promised to endeavour to obtain them early employment before their funds were exhausted.'³⁵⁷ This group consisted of the Katz family and the extended families of Di Giorgio and Portelli.³⁵⁸

Joseph Katz with his wife Cecilia and two sons had originally indicated that they wished to go to England.³⁵⁹ Their plans changed, and the family received assistance from the Australian Jewish Welfare Society (Sydney) to apply to resettle here.³⁶⁰ This organisation was set up in 1936 and assisted Jewish migrants (especially children) both before and after the Second World War; individuals and families were sponsored by the society for entry to

³⁵⁵ Ibid. The 'situation' in Greece was that it was currently experiencing a civil war.

³⁵⁶ Incoming Passenger List, *Misir*, arriving in Australia, 21 February 1949, NAA: K269 Series, digital copy. 45 Balkans and Maltese evacuees embarked at Massawa, the largest contingent in one group. Some left the ship at Fremantle, but most at Melbourne. See Chapter Six – The *Misir* Incident.

³⁵⁷ 'Maintenance of evacuees accommodated in India', Report from Principal Refugee Officer to Under-Secretary to the Government of India dated 31 July 1947, IOR/L/PJ/8/391. See also Ministry of Home Affairs, Home Department: 'Instructions – Passport facilities for Australia to Maltese British subjects, 1947,' NAI: 74/47-POLL-E.

³⁵⁸ Incoming passenger list, *Manoora*, 15 August 1947, NAA: K269 Series, digital copy. Names cross referenced with those on the questionnaire summary attached to Webb to Gilchrist, 9 May 1946.

³⁵⁹ Details of evacuees' preferred destinations in early 1946 are recorded in the questionnaire summary, TNA: FO 371/57830, WR 1575. See also Letter from Webb, Principal Refugee Officer, to Gilchrist, India Office, 9 May 1946, IOR/L/PJ/7/10109.

³⁶⁰ Passenger List, *Manoora*, 15 August 1947, NAA: K269 Series. The society is listed as agency responsible for their welfare on arrival in Australia.

Australia.³⁶¹ It was also common for potential non-British European immigrants to have support for their applications from charitable organisations, or from family members or friends already resident in Australia.³⁶² As British subjects, though, Balkan Maltese evacuees from India would have applied as British migrants.³⁶³

While there is little information about the Katz family on arrival in Australia, both the Di Giorgio and Portelli families are mentioned in newspaper articles focussing on migrants arriving on *Manoora* that August.³⁶⁴ South Australia was the destination for the Balkan Maltese evacuees from India where they were taken under the care of the State Immigration Department (presumably at the request of the immigration officer travelling on the ship) which found them temporary accommodation in a hostel. Although this appeared to be a hasty arrangement, local voluntary organisations in Adelaide were aware that migrants would need some assistance initially. The National Council of Women's Migration Committee was standing by to help migrants settle in: 'one of the main objectives of the committee which was working with the approval of, and in co-operation with, the Government, was to endeavour to assist in every way possible the absorption of immigrants into the life of the community to make them feel welcome and to help them adjust themselves to Australian living conditions.'³⁶⁵

Only seven families (Anglo-Indian and Balkan Maltese) required accommodation at the hostel. This was sparse but adequate with beds provided in large dormitories, bathrooms, and limited cooking facilities.³⁶⁶ The purpose was to provide a base while migrants sought work and housing. It was reported that everyone was keen to find employment as soon as possible: 'All the men are skilled workers who intend to look for jobs while their wives look for homes. Mr. M. J. Portelli, a builder, said: "All I want is one room to begin with. I know things are difficult here, and I do not want people helping me. I only want a room and a job.'³⁶⁷ Other Maltese named were J. P. Portelli and his brother Anthony (carpenters, joiners

³⁶¹ See Anne Andgel, *Fifty Years of Caring: The History of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society, 1936-1986* (Sydney: Australian Jewish Welfare Society and Jewish historical Society, 1988).

³⁶² This was Form 40: 'Application forms for admission of relatives or friends to Australia' which went alongside Form 47: 'Application for permit to enter Australia (non-British European) and Form 47a – Medical Examination'. NAA: A261 and A997 Series (Department of Immigration) respectively. Also, NAA: A434 Series: 'Class 3 – Non-British European Migrants, 1939 – 1950'.

³⁶³ British Migrants were in Class 5. See NAA: A436 Series: 'Correspondence Files (British Migrants)'.

³⁶⁴ See for example: 'Migrant Here from India', *Adelaide Advertiser*, 22 August 1947, p. 3, and 'No Jobs, No Homes: Families at Hostel', *Adelaide News*, 22 August 1947, p. 3.

³⁶⁵ 'NCW Migration Committee', *Advertiser*, 15 August 1947, p. 13. See also 'SA Women Will Welcome New India Families', *News*, 20 August 1947, p. 7.

³⁶⁶ 'No Jobs, No Homes', *Adelaide News*, 22 August 1947.

³⁶⁷ 'No Jobs, No Homes'.

and French polishers), Mr N. di Giorgio (master painter) and Mr George di Giorgio (shoemaker).³⁶⁸ While the Di Giorgio families can be easily identified from the questionnaire given to evacuees at the BEC in 1946, it is much harder to separate the Portelli families as the names given in the passenger arrivals list for *Manoora* and those in the newspaper report do not tally exactly with those recorded in India. For example, there is no ‘M.J. Portelli;’ it is probable that names were misheard, and that individuals were known by second names. There are a number of likely families listed – all which had initially chosen Turkey as their preferred destination.³⁶⁹

Table VI		
Balkan – Maltese Evacuees in India (Captain Webb’s Report 2 April 1947)		
Totals: (a) evacuees from Greece and Balkans		245
(b) Maltese from Turkey		550
		795
Comparison of proposed destinations		
Country	Report 1 (9/8/46)	Report 2 (2/4/47)
UK	44	18
Canada	25	20
South Africa	44	8
Australia	80	306
New Zealand	6	1
Malta	16	0
Cyprus	24	207
Turkey	331	69
Italy	0	3
Rumania	0	8
Hungary	0	2
Problem	0	3
Information taken from Minute Sheet: Civil Affairs signed Lieutenant-Colonel Reid regarding meeting held to discuss disposal of 700 Maltese from India at The Treasury (30 April 1947). TNA: FO 1015/52.		

³⁶⁸ ‘Migrants Here from India’, *Adelaide Advertiser*, 22 August 1947.

³⁶⁹ Questionnaire Summary, TNA: FO 371/57830, WR 1575.

As Table VI above shows the number of individuals and families wishing to go to Australia rose considerably, while those wanting to return to Turkey dropped. Certainly, the dominion was a more sensible destination for younger Maltese evacuees, rather than the prospect of not being allowed to work in Turkey and needing to rely on consular relief. These families were the vanguard of Maltese evacuees from the BEC in India (and then Eritrea) who would migrate to Australia. However, as noted previously, even in mid-1947 evacuees at Coimbatore were frustrated because passages were not available for those who had had applications approved to enter another country. Yet suddenly space for 25 Maltese evacuees was found on a ship due to sail to Australia. The answer lies in the circumstances prior to the departure of *Manoora* from Bombay as well as Webb's intervention following a timely meeting with an Australian Migration Officer. The passenger liner had been converted into a troopship for the duration of the Second World War and continued to be used for military and humanitarian transportation in the years afterwards. As the date of independence for India approached the Commonwealth Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell, asked whether the *Manoora* could be sent to collect Australian and British citizens anxious to leave.³⁷⁰ This was not only due to the escalating violence and unrest, but for many their employment had come to an end, so opportunities were being sought elsewhere. As a 'white' dominion Australia was an ideal location to start again for those of pure British descent as the country was keen to enlarge its population with its preferred type of immigrant.

This racially biased policy did not exclude European nationalities, although northern Europeans with fairer skin colouring were more favoured than those from southern Europe who tended to have darker complexions.³⁷¹ There was certainly a softening of this preference after the Second World War as the world reorganised itself and countries pledged to take in former refugees looking to start their lives again. However, prejudice against Asian migrants, particularly from China (the 'Yellow Peril') whose alienness in both appearance and culture spooked White Australia considerably, continued. This racially motivated mistrust also extended to those of mixed race, as the *Manoora* incident shows. Fortunately for the small group of Maltese evacuees travelling on the ship, being of southern European descent worked in their favour.

³⁷⁰ See Alison's Blunt informative article 'Postcolonial Migrations: Anglo-Indians in "White Australia"', *International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies* 5:1 (2000), pp. 2-15. Also, Catherine Rivera 'Diasporic Anglo-Indians in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the UK: A Review of the Scholarly Literature', *International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies* 16:2 (2016), pp. 43-64.

³⁷¹ The Immigration Restriction Act, also known as the White Australia Policy, was created in 1901. The aim of this legislation was to curb non-white immigration, particularly migrants from China and the Pacific. As part of the immigration process, the Dictation Test – which required a person to write a dictation of fifty words in any European language - was a very effective way of blocking entry to any undesirable migrants: it was practically an impossible task.

As a troopship, conditions on board were certainly not luxurious but adequate. Information was soon circulating in India that a voyage on *Manoora* would be ‘austerity travel.’³⁷² A passenger, Major Hall, explained to a newspaper: ‘The Australian High Commissioner’s Office advised people who had applied for passages to Australia that conditions on *Manoora* were austere ... Hundreds of Australian and British migrants cancelled their applications.’ Additionally, a member of the ship’s staff commented ‘The High Commissioner’s Office had applications for only about 300 of the berths available. A firm of shipping agents in Bombay filled the remainder, mainly with Anglo-Indians and Europeans.’³⁷³ It would have been pointless to send a more than half-empty ship back to Australia, so a practical solution was to offer passage to other groups wishing to go to there, such as Anglo-Indian families and Polish displaced persons. It was an ideal opportunity to find berths for a small party of Maltese evacuees and Webb was aware that ‘a ship was leaving’ so took advantage of the opportunity.³⁷⁴

Their arrival in Australia was masked by the controversy which surrounded the admission of Anglo-Indians to the country. This is discussed in detail by Alison Blunt who summarises the negative and racist reaction both by government and the Australian population to this breach of the White Australia policy.³⁷⁵ This is typified by the prejudicial indignation of one woman returning to her home country:

... she and her husband were horrified when they boarded the *Manoora* in India to find there were only 18 Australians on board, a few English people, and hundreds of Anglo-Indians.

Anglo-Indians don’t understand our Australian way of living, she said...

They treated British people as foreigners and were used to be waited on by Indian servants.

Mrs Wright said she was particularly resentful of Anglo-Indians who had come here without either accommodation or jobs. She knew of British families in India which [sic] had been refused permission to come to Australia and they could guarantee their accommodation.

³⁷² ‘Migrants Arrive: *Manoora* Contingent at Fremantle’, *Perth West Australian*, 16 August 1947, p.15.

³⁷³ ‘Migrants Cancel Australian Berths: Passengers Blame Adverse Publicity about *Manoora*’, *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 29 August 1947, p. 9.

³⁷⁴ ‘Maintenance of evacuees accommodated in India’, 31 July 1947.

³⁷⁵ Alison Blunt, *Domicile and Diaspora: Anglo-Indian Women and the Spatial Politics of Home* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), Chapter 6.

Anglo-Indians were being allowed to come here without [interview] and with only the stipulation that they must have 50 per cent British blood. And 50 per cent English blood is not enough.³⁷⁶

There was certainly some twisted reasoning in her argument. It is clear that her preference was for settlers of pure British descent yet she stopped short of expressing a central premise of discrimination: Anglo-Indians were, as a newspaper described them, ‘colored migrants’ (actually mixed race or Eurasian) and their arrival was, according to an official aboard the *Manoora* ‘a jolt for the White Australia Policy’.³⁷⁷ Despite being ‘British subjects’ they were deemed unacceptable, although there was support for their arrival too. In the view of an Indian Army Officer (Captain R. Hill) ‘the Anglo-Indians were hard-working people, frequently well-educated and would make excellent Australian citizen’.³⁷⁸ In comparison to Eurasians, both the Polish refugees and Balkan Maltese evacuees, as Europeans were more desirable immigrants, and for the latter, their status as ‘British subjects’ was a favourable distinction. ‘The Maltese who had been living in Southern India’ (as a newspaper described them) were now well placed to make new lives for themselves in Australia, no longer having to rely on financial assistance from the British Government.³⁷⁹ As is discussed in the next chapter, Balkan Maltese evacuees were given a limited resettlement grant and travel expenses when they sailed from India. Australia expected immigrants to be self-supporting, that is, to have enough money to that they would not be a burden on the State in which they settled. This could be an amount to tide them over before finding employment, but as Webb acknowledged fell short of what was required.

In Adelaide it was a Maltese migrant, George di Giorgio who was the ‘first of Indian Migrants to get a job... A skilled shoemaker, he will start on Monday with Goldsworthy Ltd., shoe makers of Unley,’ the *Adelaide News* proudly reported. ‘A representative of the firm interviewed him last night at the Adelaide Migration Hostel, following publication of a picture in “The News” yesterday.’³⁸⁰ This photograph is shown below:

³⁷⁶ ‘Wants Anglo-Indians Kept Out’, *Adelaide News*, 21 August 1947, p. 4. Also ‘Migrants by Troopship’ (‘People’ by Rosa Lynd), *Western Mail*, 21 August 1947, p. 4.

³⁷⁷ ‘Colored Migrants in Ship’, *Sydney Sun*, 17 August 1947, p.3.

³⁷⁸ Quoted in ‘Wants Anglo-Indians Kept Out’.

³⁷⁹ ‘Migrants Here from India’, *Adelaide Advertiser*, 22 August 1947.

³⁸⁰ ‘Maltese First of Indian Migrants to Get Job’, *Adelaide News*, 23 August 1947, p. 3.



‘Migrant Found It Cold,’ *Adelaide News*, 22 August 1947, p. 1.

The arrival of the first party of Maltese evacuees in Australia from the British Evacuees Camp at Coimbatore had gone smoothly – particularly due to Captain’s Webb’s unofficial arrangement with an Australian Migrant Officer operating in India, but no other groups followed. A few small family groups or individuals had also dispersed to the United Kingdom and elsewhere, but the majority remained at the camp, with the prospect of transferring in one bloc to Eritrea, a state of affairs that no one was happy about. The British Evacuees Association declared that the Maltese evacuees ‘would never forget the unfair ban put on us by the Australian Government.’³⁸¹ It was believed that the Commonwealth

³⁸¹ ‘Unfair Austn Ban, Allege Maltese’, *Adelaide Mail*, 31 January 1948, p. 21.

Government was accepting ‘non-Britishers’ over the Maltese who were British subjects.³⁸² As stated previously, the dominion opened its door to displaced persons from Europe to assist in resolving the refugee crisis following the war. However, the inference was that the group of Maltese evacuees should have priority, if not an automatic right to enter Australia because of their British status. In the wake of the arrival of Anglo-Indians on the *Manoora*, the dominion did discriminatorily tighten up the application process and change criteria to prevent people of mixed race entering the country.³⁸³ While there was no ban on Maltese evacuees, there may well have been a more thorough check of applications from any person in India wishing to emigrate to Australia which slowed everything up. Furthermore, passages on ships were always in short supply. Therefore, there was no ‘ban’ per se, directed at the Maltese evacuees. It was the situation itself - of remaining in a camp that was being relocated to another country – that caused such anger and frustration.

Some individuals defied the order to move to Eritrea much to the chagrin of British authorities in India. These were ‘marginally noted British Evacuees’ from the BEC at Coimbatore who ‘refused to proceed to Eritrea, though wanted to do so on SS “Cagliari” in late March 1948.’³⁸⁴ In addition, two families had applied to go to Australia, but were waiting to hear whether they had been successful: ‘it is expected that acceptance will be obtained in the near future. The present delays are due to technicalities of procedure only, it is believed,’ wrote Webb.³⁸⁵ However, the ‘marginally noted persons’ had been warned that ‘all assistance would be withdrawn’ should they remain in India.³⁸⁶ In other words, these ‘recusant evacuees’ would no longer receive any financial maintenance or allowances from the British government, as they had failed to toe the line and proceed to Eritrea. Additionally, British officials in Madras and Bombay were advised to reject any requests for assistance from them ‘on principle and in the interests of discipline’.³⁸⁷ This was a harsh reaction, as the individuals and families involved believed themselves to be on the verge of starting a new life. A move to Eritrea would only delay this process. Indeed, it actually required starting the entire process again and having to apply through the Australian High Commission in Cairo (see Chapter 5).

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Blunt, *Domicile and Diaspora*, Chapter 6.

³⁸⁴ Webb to High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in India, New Delhi, 23 March 1948. Copy to Gilchrist, Commonwealth Relations Office, London, TNA: FO 1015/52.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

In the event, of those named by Webb as ‘marginally noted persons’ – Mr. and Mrs. Pascal Cilia, Emanuel Ellul, and Eugene Portelli and family – only the latter left for their chosen destination (Britain), arriving in Liverpool in June 1948.³⁸⁸ Mr. and Mrs. Cilia and Ellul eventually departed for Eritrea as they are listed in the Mai Habar Camp nominal roll. Both were related to Sergeant John Cilia, who with his wife and child remained in India. They are one of the ‘two families’ mentioned by Webb (the other was the Serra family).³⁸⁹ There must have been an expectation that the extended family would be able to travel together to Australia, but this was not to be. Both John Cilia and Thomas Serra had served during the Second World War and were determined to remain in India until they had received permission to enter Australia. Their perseverance paid off and the families finally sailed from Bombay, arriving in Australia in December 1948.³⁹⁰ This was way beyond the time schedule indicated by Webb: from March it was approximately a nine month wait until departure.

From the point of view of the Maltese and Balkan evacuees who transferred to Eritrea, it was definitely not lucky to be British. The move only increased uncertainty about their future and whether they would ever have the opportunity to resettle in another country or return to where they had come from. The evacuees had filled in questionnaires, made enquiries, completed application forms, and been issued with passports. They had lobbied British officials in India, government departments in London and written about their predicament to newspapers. Yet this had produced little result. It is no wonder then, that the evacuees felt marginalised and disaffected. Yet, it was a positive sign that a small number of evacuees had departed from India to begin new lives, mainly in Australia. This demonstrated that applications were being processed – albeit slowly – and passages could be found.

Care of this group of Maltese and Balkan evacuees, numbering around five hundred, now passed to the British Military Administration (BMA) in Eritrea. It was an arrangement foisted upon the BMA by the machinations of government departments in the British government which could not reach a consensus about what to do with the inhabitants of the British Evacuees Camp. It was, as the following chapter describes, an unsatisfactory situation for all concerned.

³⁸⁸ United Kingdom incoming passenger lists available online at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/> Eugene Portelli, his wife and three children arrived at Liverpool.

³⁸⁹ Only John Cilia is given in Webb’s letter. However, Thomas Serra’s name is mentioned alongside those of Pascal Cilia and Eugene Portelli in the newspaper report ‘Unfair Austr. Ban, Allege Maltese’.

³⁹⁰ Incoming Passenger List, *Strathaird*, 20 December 1948, NAA: K269 Series, digital copy. Serra left the ship at Fremantle while Cilia disembarked at Adelaide.

Chapter Four

From India to Eritrea: Maltese Evacuees in East Africa, 1946-1948

For all his good intentions, Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, in facilitating the evacuation of Maltese British Subjects from Turkey in 1941, created quite a headache for the British Government after 1945. Although only a relatively small group (approximately 500 people) these ‘refugees’ needed repatriation to their country of origin, if possible, or be relocated elsewhere from the camp where they were housed at Coimbatore in India. Their removal, alongside that of Polish, Balkan, and Far East evacuees, became a matter of urgency: India was preparing for independence from the United Kingdom. The country was in violent turmoil with physical and political clashes between the leading factions – Indian National Congress and Muslim League - as the terms of independence were agreed. In such a volatile atmosphere the Government of India was anxious that arrangements for the removal of European evacuees were made as soon as possible.

While the British Government had been instrumental in arranging for Polish evacuees from Russia to be sent to India, as European displaced persons not British Subjects, their care was taken over by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). The headquarters for the Middle East UNRRA operation was at Cairo.³⁹¹ These camps were originally set up by the Middle East Relief and Refugee Administration – a British initiative (created in 1942) - then transferred to UNRRA, an international organisation, set up in late 1943 at a conference in Washington. Along with its partner agency the International Refugee Organisation (IRO), UNRRA provided care for refugees across the world, and following the end of the war oversaw the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of displaced persons to their home countries or emigration to another.³⁹²

This was a complicated and protracted challenge: in war ravaged Europe issues such as food shortages, lack of transportation and housing, and immigration constraints caused delays. Additionally, refugees did not want to return to their home country, for example Poland where the Soviet Union had imposed itself, to live under a communist regime. In particular, Jewish refugees who had managed to escape from Nazi-occupied territory or had

³⁹¹ It was also the base for UNRRA operations in The Balkans, Italy, Ethiopia, Greece, and Yugoslavia. Ben Shephard, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War* (London: Vintage, 2011), p. 53.

³⁹² The UNRRA and IRO were temporary agencies created before the United Nations officially came into being in October 1945, with the former ceasing operation in 1946. Records of the UNRRA are held by the World Health Organisation in Switzerland and New York. Reports and an official history were published in the post-war years. See George Woodbridge, *UNRRA: The History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in Three Volumes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950).

survived and been liberated from concentration camps looked to resettle elsewhere. Palestine (Israel) and the United States of America were sought after destinations, but emigration to both was dependent on immigration quotas and policies. It took until the early 1950s to largely resolve the predicament of displaced persons, some seven years after the war had ended.

It is important to understand this wider context in which the British Government – on a much smaller scale – made its own arrangements to return ‘British’ evacuees domiciled outside of the United Kingdom to their places of origin, or elsewhere. As this chapter outlines, in the case of Balkan Maltese refugees this was no easy task for the authorities concerned, nor a positive experience for this group who were moved from ‘pillar to post.’ The security of permanent settlement seemed an elusive goal on all sides: against time constraints, the Foreign Office, Colonial Office, and Dominions Office worked with (among others) the Government of India, the British Military Administration (Eritrea), and the Governments of Turkey, Cyprus, and Australia to expediate this. Despite their best efforts, it was a slow process, and therefore hardly surprising that the Maltese British subjects, for their part, became increasingly frustrated and unsettled by the way they were treated. As the war ended, like so many other displaced persons, they had every expectation of being able to resume their lives again.

This frustration was recorded by Captain Webb in his report from August 1946 in which he warned:

Here, too, the restlessness among them mentioned in my last two reports is growing apace. It is high time these people left India and I, personally, am more than ever convinced that if our suggestion to His Majesty’s Government is accepted, that they should be given free passages plus a cash grant for resettlement not exceeding £200/- in any family, or a small old age pension to those over sixty years of age or incapacitated, then a very large number of these persons could, in a very short time, return to the countries whence they came or find new homes in other countries...³⁹³

As Principal Refugee Officer, Department of Commonwealth Relations of the Government of India, Webb was exasperated by inaction over the resettlement issue. His task was to oversee the repatriation of thousands of refugees and evacuees still left in the country, one

³⁹³ Tenth periodical report re: maintenance of evacuees accommodated in India, 31 August 1946. Captain A. W. T. Webb, Principal Refugee Officer, to Secretary, Government of India, Department of Commonwealth Relations, Delhi, TNA: FO 371/57830, WR 2810.

year after the Second World War had ended. The majority of these were Polish, with smaller groups of Greeks, Balkan, and Balkan Maltese evacuees from Europe, as well as Anglo-Indian, Anglo-Burmese, and Europeans from the Far East. As the excerpt above highlights, evacuees were becoming increasingly restless having no indication of when they might leave India, despite having filled in questionnaires in which they stated their destination preferences.

As mentioned previously, responsibility for Polish refugees had been passed to UNRRA (Mideast). Approximately 4,600 were still in India, but the majority did not want to return to Poland which caused a difficulty in itself, as they would need to be resettled elsewhere. This number included 400 orphans who looked likely to be able to move to Australia as the dominion government had indicated that it would welcome these child immigrants.³⁹⁴ However, the upshot of all this uncertainty was, as Webb explained, ‘... all, including the orphans, are in a state of mind bordering on hysteria, compounded partly of ignorance on which the forces of propaganda have worked distressingly, partly of nervousness about the political situation in India, and partly of the deepest distrust of the intentions of UNRRA’.³⁹⁵ Like the Balkan and Maltese evacuees, it took several years for the resettlement of Polish Displaced Persons to be finalised; they too, had to be moved to temporary camps in East Africa.³⁹⁶

Webb’s exasperation about the situation was compounded by the fact he had flown to the United Kingdom to attend a meeting about the Maltese evacuees, with the intention of impressing upon the British Government ‘the imperative necessity for removing from India all European evacuees at the earliest possible date and not later than the end of 1946’.³⁹⁷ He had been hopeful after discussions had taken place that ‘some finality was over the hill’, and delayed sending his report, so that he could include arrangements made for the group to leave India.³⁹⁸ However, there had been no positive outcome, according to Webb, as the Ministerial Committee refused to ‘comply with India’s request.’³⁹⁹ The Government of India’s overwhelming priority lay with negotiations and arrangements for the country’s independence. Along with the removal of European refugees and evacuees - particularly for

³⁹⁴ Ibid. It is unclear if the Polish orphans actually went to Australia from India. As displaced persons Polish refugees in the Indian camps and in East Africa eventually resettled in Canada, Australia, UK and also America. See Ewa Stanczyk, ‘Exilic Childhoods in very foreign Lands: Memoirs of Polish Refugees in World War II’, *Journal of War & Cultural Studies* 11:2 (2018), pp. 136-49.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Bhattachjee, *The Second Homeland*.

³⁹⁷ Tenth periodical report re: maintenance of evacuees accommodated in India.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

their own safety – it also had to address the problem of British subjects (European and Anglo-Indian) who lived and worked in India, whose services were no longer required. For example, members of the Indian Civil Service or those serving with the Indian Army. These people and their families would either have to return to the United Kingdom or emigrate elsewhere.

As Principal Refugee Officer, Webb was in correspondence with the India Office in London which in turn was in contact with the Colonial Office regarding the Balkan and Balkan Maltese group at Coimbatore. It is clear that he had given much thought to arrangements for their repatriation, but any plans were reliant on whether they were given permission to return to their countries of origin, i.e. be issued with visas, and that they would be able to support themselves, or be maintained by other family members.⁴⁰⁰ An additional proposal was that Balkan evacuees ‘with genuine home ties in the United Kingdom or the Dominions’ could, if they wished, ‘proceed to those countries at his Majesty’s Government’s cost’.⁴⁰¹ However, Webb was only in a position to put forward advice: it was really the responsibility of the Foreign Office to arrange their repatriation, to make guarantees of monetary support where applicable, and most crucially, through its consular and diplomatic staff to negotiate the necessary visas for transit across or entry into various countries. Entry to British colonial territories or emigration to one of the commonwealth dominions – Australia, Canada, New Zealand or South Africa – may have seemed to be an easier option, but as will be shown in a later chapter, it turned out to be just as fraught, especially for the Balkan Maltese evacuees, in spite of their ‘British Subject’ status.

Webb, in fact, had little good to say about the Maltese evacuees, the majority of whom initially wished to return to Turkey ‘where they have, or expect to be reunited with relatives and friends.’⁴⁰² This was expressed in a letter to R. N. Gilchrist at the India Office. As explained in chapter one, Maltese British subjects, as foreigners, were not legally permitted to work in Turkey, and were supported by a maintenance allowance from the British Government. If allowed to resume their lives there (this of course, being at the discretion of the Turkish authorities) they would still expect to draw dole payments. Webb suggested that ‘if these persons could be given some initial assistance to re-establish themselves in a country where they would be permitted to work they should, after a short time, be able to support themselves.’⁴⁰³ This certainly mirrored the intention of Knatchball-Hugessen, who

⁴⁰⁰ Webb to R. N. Gilchrist, India Office, 2 November 1945, TNA: FO 371/57830, WR 289.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid. A later report in 1947 established that many evacuees had changed their minds with many now preferring Australia to Turkey as a destination. See Table VI.

⁴⁰³ Webb to Gilchrist, 2 November 1945.

had initiated the voluntary evacuation of Maltese from Izmir and Istanbul in 1941. While such a scheme seemed a sensible option, it did not account for personal feelings. Many Maltese British subjects had actually stayed put in Turkey (and presumably were still receiving payments). It was only natural that evacuees would want to return to their former communities.

The Maltese evacuees' ever-changing decisions about their preferred destination have been explored in the previous chapter. The official deliberation - that is of the British Government - of where this group should be relocated ran parallel to this. With a change of political leadership in the United Kingdom following the July 1945 General Election, newly appointed Labour ministers would need to get up to speed on the state of affairs in their departments. These included Ernest Bevin (Foreign Office), Arthur Creech Jones (Colonial Office) and Baron Pethick-Lawrence (India Office).⁴⁰⁴ Within the United Kingdom government focus turned to post-war reconstruction including issues such as housing, employment, and economic recovery. In addition, the creation of the Welfare State – a National Insurance scheme and National Health Service – was a lauded success. Attlee's government also implemented a plan to nationalise major industries and services such as coal mines and railways. Domestic issues therefore were a priority, but Britain also faced challenges on an international level. Both give background context in which to place the response of the various government departments involved to the question of the Maltese evacuees.

Globally, Britain's status as a world power waned as America continued to dominate international politics. A schism between former allies was created in Europe as the Soviet Union under Stalin gained control over the eastern bloc, while the United States led its western allies in containing the communist grip spreading farther afield. The resulting stand-off between East and West – known as the Cold War – lasted decades. Britain's prestige was further knocked by the gradual disintegration of the British Empire. The dominions were keen to develop independently of imperial ties to the mother country and have their own voices heard on the world stage. However, fragmentation of the British Empire began with the independence of India, hastily concluded in 1947, then Pakistan and Burma the following year. Simultaneously hostility towards colonial rule increased in Malaya, resulting in a dozen years of guerrilla warfare as the communist Malayan National Liberation Army challenged British authority.⁴⁰⁵ In the Middle East, the Palestine Mandate was a major

⁴⁰⁴ With the merger of the India and Dominion Offices in 1947 to form the Commonwealth Relations Office, Philip Noel-Baker was appointed, succeeding respectively the Earl of Listowel and Viscount Addison.

⁴⁰⁵ Other challenges to British authority also took place, including the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya (1952-60).

headache for Prime Minister Attlee and his Foreign Secretary, Bevin. Unable to resolve animosity between Arabs and Jews over the creation of a Jewish homeland, the British Government relinquished its mandate evacuating in mid-1948, thereby handing the problem over to the United Nations. This global organisation was formally created in October 1945 to replace the now defunct League of Nations. Palestine was partitioned in two, with the UN able to negotiate armistice treaties between the new state of Israel and its Arab neighbours, bringing some temporary peace to the region.

Taking both domestic and international issues together, in the post-war years the Attlee government had much to preoccupy its time and resources. In particular, there was a commitment to ensuring world security and stability with British Armed Forces deployed in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. This included British Military Administrations (BMAs) in former Italian colonies in Africa and a British area in a now divided Germany. Briefly, these acted as an interim governing body until permanent regional or national governments could be organised, for example in Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and Eritrea. BMA also operated in British colonies in South East Asia which had been occupied by Japanese forces – Malaya, Burma and Borneo – with the intention being to restore British rule. Germany was divided into four sections between America, the United Kingdom, France and Soviet Union. Likewise, Berlin, although in the Soviet Sector, was also divided into four areas. Concern over Soviet Communist expansion in Eastern Europe led to the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) of which Britain was a founder member. This was another military and political commitment to upholding regional security and stability (and later global), which continues to this day.

With regard to the movement of people the demobilisation of British servicemen and women, and the repatriation of former Allied POWs and civilian internees had precedence. The return of former Axis prisoners of war to their home countries was another matter: as Shephard explains the Attlee government was reluctant to give up German POWs who had provided essential manpower - especially within agriculture - during the war years and whose contribution was still needed to maintain productivity and rebuild Britain's economy.⁴⁰⁶ After criticisms were raised by the British Press and from Parliament about the slowness of repatriation, numbers returning to Germany increased, although by the end of 1947 there were still 200,000 German POWs in the UK.⁴⁰⁷

In addition, the British Government started to recruit European volunteer workers from displaced persons camps within Europe through several schemes to help with labour

⁴⁰⁶ Shephard, *Long Road Home*, pp. 325-32.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 235. Over 185,000 German POWs had been repatriated since the end of the war.

shortages. The Baltic Cygnet scheme encouraged women from Baltic States to sign up to work in the United Kingdom, while the Westward Ho! scheme ‘aimed to bring 100,000 people from the DP camps to work in the British cotton, coal and agricultural industries.’⁴⁰⁸ These had limited success due to the opportunities on offer – menial work – and the fact that Britain was seen as the least desirable destination compared with, for example - America, Canada, and Australia. Women especially, as MacDowell has shown, were put into manual or domestic placements such as cotton mills or as cleaners in hospitals.⁴⁰⁹

Similarly, British subjects from the Caribbean islands who arrived in the post-war years were expected to fill gaps in low-status jobs and were subjected to appalling racial discrimination from the general public.⁴¹⁰ Despite responding to a call from the British Government to come to the country, Caribbean migrants found their status as British subjects was of no advantage to them in terms of how they were treated. Prevailing racist attitudes expected them to take low paid employment and remain an underclass. Conversely, as McDowell explains, women from the Baltic state of Latvia were preferred as EVWs because of their ‘whiteness’ that is, their racial purity. It was anticipated that they would integrate into British society, particularly through marriage, thereby helping to boost the population.⁴¹¹ However, like other European Displaced Persons - albeit of Anglo-Saxon/Nordic stock – they were still required to work in low skilled jobs whatever their educational background and social status.

There was also a steady flow of other emigrants to the United Kingdom during the post-war years, which included those from the island of Malta. As British subjects Maltese had unrestricted access, but as Cauchi notes it was not the most popular place to settle for many, although between 1946 and 1976 approximately 30,870 had opted to come.⁴¹² Likewise, Britain was a destination option for the evacuees at the BEC, but lacked appeal that returning to Turkey or resettling in Australia had (see Table VI). Climate may well have been a factor in this but also that many evacuees wanted a fresh start within the British Empire. It is worth noting at this point there was never any suggestion of the Balkan and

⁴⁰⁸ Shephard, *Long Road Home*, pp. 328 and 330, respectively.

⁴⁰⁹ See Linda McDowell, ‘Constructions of Whiteness: Latvian women workers in post-war Britain’ in *Journal of Baltic Studies* 38:1 (2007), pp. 85-107. Also, McDowell, ‘Narratives of family, community, and waged work: Latvian European Worker women in post-war Britain’, *Women’s History Review* 13:1 (2004), pp. 23-55.

⁴¹⁰ For an overview of post-war migration to the United Kingdom see Clair Wills, *Lovers and Strangers: An Immigrant History of Post-War Britain* (London: Penguin, 2018). Also Ian R. G. Spencer, ‘The Open Door, Labour Needs and British Immigration Policy’, *Immigrants and Minorities*, 15:1, 1996, pp.22-41.

⁴¹¹ McDowell, ‘Constructions of Whiteness’.

⁴¹² Nicholas N Cauchi, 1.3: Migration to UK, ‘The Maltese Diaspora: Changing Faces of Malta Abroad’ accessed at [The Maltese Diaspora: Changing Faces of Malta Abroad | Prof. Maurice N. Cauchi \(wordpress.com\)](https://www.nicholasncauchi.com/2018/01/03/migration-to-uk/)

Maltese evacuee group being moved to the United Kingdom to hasten their removal from India. As explained earlier, many wished to migrate to Australia, so a transfer to the UK would, in a sense, move them further away from their journey's end. It would also have meant finding appropriate accommodation, something in short supply due to destruction of housing stock by enemy action and the cessation of building new homes during the war. (A quick and cheap solution to this was the construction of pre-fabricated houses intended for the general public in need of homes.) Empty army camps were also being utilised to accommodate former Polish servicemen and their families who had joined them in Britain.⁴¹³

Another pressure on the British government, but particularly for the Colonial Office, was the presence of several thousand Gibraltarian evacuees who were stranded in Northern Ireland. They were the remainder of approximately 15,500 civilians who had been hurriedly evacuated from the Rock (a British naval base) in July 1940. While just over 3,000 had been sent to Madeira and Jamaica, the majority arrived in the United Kingdom. They were dispersed to boroughs in London, Barking, and Northern Ireland where they remained until 1944 when some were permitted to return to Gibraltar. However, repatriation rapidly came to a stop as there was a shortage of housing, so no accommodation was available for returnees. Instead, as an interim measure, Gibraltarian evacuees (around 5,000) from England were then moved to temporary camps in Northern Ireland.⁴¹⁴ Conditions in these were completely unsatisfactory which led to protests and complaints from evacuees.⁴¹⁵ Eventually, they were then transferred back to London, and finally repatriated to Gibraltar, the last group returning in 1951.⁴¹⁶ While only mentioned briefly here, their experiences were simultaneous and comparable to those of the Balkan and Maltese evacuees. Attention now turns to the official perspective of the transfer of Balkan and Maltese evacuees to former Italian colonial territory in East Africa.

Transfer to Eritrea: Discussions regarding the resettlement of Maltese Evacuees

Deliberations regarding what to do about the Balkan Maltese group in India were ongoing in London from 1945. As already noted, the change in government from a Conservative-led

⁴¹³ See Agata Blaszczyk, 'The Resettlement of Polish Refugees after the Second World War', *Forced Migration Review*, 54 (2017), pp. 71-73; Wieslaw Rogalski, *The Polish Resettlement Corps 1946-1949: Britain's Polish Forces* (Solihull: Helion & Company, 2019); Zosia and Jurek Biegus, *Polish Resettlement Camps in England and Wales, 1946-1969* (Rochford: P B Software, c.2013).

⁴¹⁴ Finlayson, *The Fortress Came First*.

⁴¹⁵ Joseph Garcia, *Gibraltar: The Making of a People* (Gibraltar: Panorama Publishing, 2002), p. 23.

⁴¹⁶ Finlayson, *The Fortress Came First*, Chapters 16, 17 and 18.

national coalition to a Labour majority government impacted on the speed at which decisions were made. As correspondence between the India and Colonial Offices show, a major stumbling block was which department was actually responsible for the Maltese evacuees. In mid-1946 Gilchrist wrote to S. E. V. Luke at the Colonial Office:

I assume that, as the Foreign Office have in effect disowned responsibility for these evacuees, though the original responsibility for moving them lies on their shoulders, the Colonial Office will now take the matter over and, in the first place, summon an interdepartmental meeting to discuss the subject.⁴¹⁷

As civil servants at the India Office were being kept well apprised of the situation of the Maltese evacuees by Captain Webb, as well as the progress toward Indian independence, it was no surprise that Gilchrist instigated communication with the Colonial Office. Clearly in his opinion the Foreign Office were not fulfilling their obligations. The meeting proposed (and which took place on 24th June 1946) was the one attended by Webb when he visited Britain (mentioned above), a coincidence that should have worked in the India Office's favour, having someone with first-hand experience of the increasingly complicated and fractious situation in India.⁴¹⁸ In addition, it was evident that Gilchrist had studied Webb's proposals carefully, and in detail, commenting that the reasons he had given (that is for the speedy removal of all remaining refugees and evacuees from the country) made it 'desirable that action should be taken without delay.'⁴¹⁹

He also noted that the costs of resettling the Maltese evacuees would mean additional expenditure for the British Government which had already paid out a considerable amount for their maintenance. A further financial burden might be lessened if the Turkish Government 'could be persuaded to take these people back.' Although, he continued: 'This solution may appear to be impracticable in view of the repeated refusals of the Foreign Office to approach the Turks, but if Captain's Webb's proposals were accepted, the Turkish Government might be prepared to reconsider the matter.'⁴²⁰

Webb's proposal was in effect a financial incentive for Maltese evacuees to choose to settle elsewhere rather than return to Turkey. He suggested that it should be made clear to those wishing to return that there would be no entitlement to any dole payments from the

⁴¹⁷ Gilchrist to Luke, Assistant Secretary, Colonial Office, 12 June 1946, TNA: FO 371/57830, WR 1575.

⁴¹⁸ Minutes of Meeting (held at the Colonial Office) 'Expatriate Maltese', FO 369/3571, K9102.

⁴¹⁹ Gilchrist to Luke, 12 June 1946.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

British Government; only travelling expenses would be met. However, if they decided to settle elsewhere within the British Commonwealth then transport costs and a resettlement payment would be made.⁴²¹ The major difficulty, he concluded, would be persuading Maltese not to return to Turkey, but if they did change their minds, then the problem would be to find 'any country rash enough to accept such an unpleasant addition to their population. Taken as a whole the Maltese are dirty in their persons, lazy, grasping and with a deep-rooted antipathy for anything British, except their money.'⁴²² This cutting assessment implied that the majority were - in Webb's eyes - an unsavoury lot, but as previously discussed there were those who were hardworking and respectable. That said, it did not bode well that the Principal Refugee Officer was describing them in such terms, and his suggestions for suitable destinations for those unable to return to Turkey were Libya and Eritrea.⁴²³

Neither of these countries were within the British Commonwealth, although British Military Administrations were in control in both former Italian colonies. Libya comprised of three provinces – Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan – the first two under British administration and the latter under French following the end of the Second World War. Eritrea formed part of Italian East Africa along with Abyssinia and Italian Somaliland and had come under British military control in 1941. There were well established Maltese communities in Libya so it may have been possible to integrate the evacuees into these. Eritrea's closer proximity to India certainly made it geographically a suitable location, but Webb's recommendations placed the Balkan Maltese group in what essentially were temporary destinations under the jurisdiction of an interim British authority. His priority was to get them moved from India as soon as possible. Gilchrist stressed this point in his letter to the Colonial Office, noting that the Maltese evacuees could not remain in India for much longer:

As the majority of them speak only Turkish or Greek, the only suitable havens would seem to be elsewhere in the Levant and the obvious choices are Palestine or Cyprus. If the Foreign Office continue to be obdurate about not asking the Turkish Government to take them then they might consider an approach to the Government of Syria, the Lebanon or Egypt to take a small quota of each.⁴²⁴

⁴²¹ Webb to Gilchrist, 2 November 1945.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Gilchrist to Luke, 12 June 1946.

Palestine and Cyprus made better sense as they offered a more long-term solution; the former was under a British mandate, while the latter was a Crown Colony. However, Palestine was neither a secure nor peaceful location at this time with British military forces finding it increasingly difficult to maintain order. Thousands of European Jewish refugees and Holocaust survivors wished to settle in the region in anticipation of the creation of the state of Israel. The continuing influx of Jewish immigrants caused friction with the Arab population who feared being displaced in what they considered was their own country. As such, Palestine was not a stable environment in which to send a group of Maltese evacuees. Cyprus, too, was under pressure at this time. The island was being used to provide an interim holding location for Jewish Holocaust survivors wanting entry to Palestine. They were being held in specifically built accommodation in what were essentially detainment or what several historians have described as ‘concentration’ camps.⁴²⁵ The parallel with the Nazi concentration camps was undeniable; Jewish people who had survived inhumane conditions and barbarity then had to experience another period of incarceration.

Syria and Lebanon were a practical suggestion, but the former French colonies, although in the Levant, were in close proximity to Turkey. In other words, an ideal jumping off point for Maltese to return to their former homes if they wished and where they would be able to claim British financial support again. Egypt already had well-established Maltese communities, but from a political viewpoint it was not the best option to ask the government there to accept a group of any size. British influence was on the wane in Egypt and during the evacuation of Maltese from Turkey, they had had to spend several months in the country while their final destination was decided upon. This had caused friction with Egyptian authorities who had demanded their removal. So, while Gilchrist’s suggestions were well meaning, he did not perhaps have the knowledge and expertise of a civil servant in the Foreign Office or the Colonial Office about situations or restraints in these countries. His main priority was to push for a decision to be made over the relocation of the group of Balkan Maltese evacuees still at Coimbatore. To this end he took the initiative to contact the Colonial Office directly and put the ball in its court. Whether the Colonial Office actually wanted to take responsibility for the group is another matter.

⁴²⁵ See Morris Laub, *Last Barrier to Freedom: Interment of Jewish Holocaust Survivors on Cyprus, 1946-1949* (Berkeley, CA: Judah L Magnus Museum, 1985); Iakovos D. Michailidis, ‘Escaping Nazi Horror: Jewish and Christian Refugees in Cyprus’, *Israel Affairs* 25:6 (2019), pp. 972-9; Branka Arrivé, ‘Why were the Cyprus Camps for Jewish Detainees not dissolved immediately after the Independence of Israel?’ *Israel Affairs* 25:6 (2019), pp. 980-98; Vasiliki Selioti, ‘The Jewish Detainees in the narrations of the Greek-Cypriot Press 1946-1949’, *Israel Affairs* 25:6 (2019), pp. 999-1005.

An interdepartmental meeting did take place, but the outcome was unsatisfactory in Webb's opinion. He expected a decision to be made about the Maltese evacuees' removal from India by the end of 1946 as requested by the Indian government. Surprised that the ministerial committee had refused to comply with this request he wrote in his report of August 1946:

Even allowing for all the undoubted difficulties with which his Majesty's Government are surrounded – and they are great – refusal to relieve India of the function of agent in respect of these refugees, when the agent had clearly and with reason expressed unwillingness and inability to continue the agency, seem to ignore the very basis on which the agency came into being. It is sincerely hoped that His Majesty's Government's decision may be reconsidered...⁴²⁶

The agency – that is the agreement of the Government of India to provide accommodation and assistance for Maltese evacuees on behalf of the British Government for the duration of the war - had gone beyond any reasonable time frame.

The main issue was that despite Webb and Gilchrist emphasising the 'extreme urgency' of the removal of Poles, British subjects from the Balkans, and Maltese from Turkey no snap decision was made at the meeting or directly afterwards. Rather, the conclusion was to instigate information gathering about where the evacuees could be moved temporarily, the position of Maltese communities in foreign countries and to identify suitable settlement areas within the British Empire.⁴²⁷ The question of the resettlement of Maltese evacuees was still under discussion in mid-1947 some eight months after the initial interdepartmental meeting.⁴²⁸ Deliberations were ongoing between the governmental departments involved - Treasury, Foreign Office, India Office, Colonial Office and the War Office – and centred on where the group might be sent.⁴²⁹ Follow up meetings were finally held at the Treasury in March and April; the length of time between them (approximately six weeks) gave time for officials to investigate further any proposals made.

⁴²⁶ Tenth Periodical Report re: maintenance of evacuees accommodated in India. See also letter from Webb to Gilchrist, 9 May 1946, TNA: FO 371/57830, WR 1575.

⁴²⁷ Minutes of Meeting 'Expatriated Maltese', FO 369/3571, K9102.

⁴²⁸ 'Proposal to settle Maltese refugees in India in British Occupied Territories in Africa', TNA: FO 1015/52 and FO 1015/53.

⁴²⁹ Two meetings were held in succession on 14 March 1947 and 30 April 1947, TNA: FO 1015/52; IOR/L/PJ/8/391.

Possible destinations were Cyprus, Malta, British Somaliland, Eritrea or Cyrenaica, and Kenya, but excuses were raised for all.⁴³⁰ Carstairs, representative of the Colonial Office, reported that the Governors of Cyprus and Malta indicated unwillingness to accept all the evacuees. British Somaliland was unsuitable as there were 'no facilities for reception there' and its climate would exclude 'permanent absorption', while accommodation in Kenya might be required for other purposes.⁴³¹ The Foreign Office was averse to more British citizens migrating to ex-enemy territories in North Africa as their future status was uncertain, but 'room might be found later on'.⁴³² This was a reference to former Italian colonies which at this moment were under the control of British Military Administrations. Brigadier J. F. Benoy (Deputy Director, Civil Affairs) explained that 'Eritrea would not be very suitable' due to the restricted time of the British occupation, and also that the War Office would feel special difficulty about the suggestion of sending the evacuees to Cyrenaica.⁴³³ Alongside these objections the main stumbling block was finding a destination to accept all Maltese evacuees:

As there seems thus to be little prospect of success from any one of the alternatives suggested, Mr Helsby reverted to his proposal at the earlier meeting that the evacuees should be divided into groups, several countries being pressed to take a small party of 200 or so. It was generally agreed that this course seemed to offer the best hope of solution and the meeting considered that Cyprus, Malta, Eritrea, and Kenya should each be able to accept a suitable proportion of the whole.⁴³⁴

It is notable that countries would need to be 'pressed' into accepting parties of evacuees, in the hope that a smaller number would be more palatable. An indication, surely, that a hint of desperation was creeping in. Overall, there had been a negative response to requests to accept the Maltese evacuee group, however both Carstairs and Benoy agreed to again look into the proposed destinations, and even the Treasury offered to contact the Dominions Office about some going to Australia.⁴³⁵ Additionally, the number given of evacuees in the

⁴³⁰ Minutes of a meeting held at the Treasury, 30 April 1947, to continue the discussion of 14 March 1947, about the resettlement of Maltese evacuees in India, TNA: FO 1015/52; IOR/L/PJ/8/391.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Minutes of a meeting held at the Treasury, 30 April 1947.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

group – 800 – was inaccurate; this over-estimate mirrored the same mistake made prior to the Maltese evacuees' settlement in India. In fact, the figure was closer to 500, but this explains why the meeting decided to split them into parties of 200, a more manageable and less noticeable quantity. Lastly, a key word being used was 'resettlement.' The object of the meetings appeared to be to transplant the Maltese evacuees permanently; at this point officials were not considering a temporary move to relieve India. This was at odds with the findings of the questionnaire arranged by Captain Webb where evacuees had stated their preferred countries to settle in. As explained in the previous chapter, many were already engaged in the emigration process to Australia.

The last of the proposed locations for resettlement were Malta and Kenya. Malta seemed a logical option, however the government there had refused to accept any responsibility for Maltese domiciled in Turkey and the Balkans principally because they had had no connection to the island for several generations. The island had suffered greatly during the Second World War, under constant enemy attack because of its strategic position in the Mediterranean as an Allied base. Consequently, its infrastructure and economy required repair and rebuilding. In other words, the island was not in a fit state for accepting incomers, albeit of Maltese extraction. In reality emigration was actively being encouraged due to over-population. Kenya, on the eastern coast of Africa was a reasonable choice, however a group of Jewish detainees had recently been moved to the British colony. These were members of Zionist paramilitary organisations (Irgun and Lehi) who had been abruptly deported from internment in Palestine in October 1944 and transported to East Africa.⁴³⁶ They were firstly placed in a camp at Sembal, Eritrea, but proved adept at planning and engineering (mostly failed) escapes; so much so that that the 239 men were then transferred to the inhospitable location of Carthage in Sudan.⁴³⁷ Conditions here were appalling so after nine months the group was returned to Sembal.

Here, escape efforts continued culminating in a mass escape of 54 detainees in June 1946. Although recaptured, it did not discourage their ingenuity or fervour. Lapidot writes that 'the prisoners made further escape attempts but all ended in failure. As a result of these attempts, which greatly embarrassed the camp command and army headquarters in Eritrea, the British government decided to transfer the prisoners to Kenya.'⁴³⁸ The Jewish group arrived here in early March 1947 and were transported from Mombasa to an internment camp

⁴³⁶ An informative account of this episode is given on the Irgun website, written by Professor Yehuda Lapidot: <http://www.etzel.org.il/english/index.html> See also Julius Carlebach, *The Jews of Nairobi, 1903-1962* (Nairobi: Nairobi Hebrew Congregation, 1962), pp. 62-3; Shulamit Eliash, *Irgun and Lehi in Exile: In the Internment Camps in Africa, 1944 -1948* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1996).

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

at Gilgil which had previously been used to house Italian POWs.⁴³⁹ This did not deter further escapes, but the detainees were eventually released and returned to the newly created state of Israel in July 1948.⁴⁴⁰ Their recent arrival in Kenya may explain why Carstairs of the Colonial Office gave a fudging excuse for why the Maltese evacuees could not go there. Moreover, there had been an influx of immigration and the colony's political situation was increasingly unstable as groups representing the indigenous population agitated for increasing representation and involvement in the administration of their country.⁴⁴¹ In these circumstances, the Colonial Office preferred not to impose on Kenya further.

Deliberations continued about the fate of the Balkan Maltese evacuees in the following months. By September military authorities had conceded that they would have to take a proportion of the group: 'Although we have not yet agreed to accept the 200 into Eritrea you will see from interdepartmental correspondence it appears to have been taken for granted that we will do so. However it seems we shall have to agree in view of the increasing urgency of the problem and the fact that no other home can be found for these unfortunate people.'⁴⁴² Those unfortunate people were already well aware that a move was imminent. A newspaper report in July 1947 stated that Maltese evacuees had been notified as far back as April that at some point that year they would be moved to another country. The situation was a source of frustration and agitation to the group who were unenthusiastic about relocating, wishing just to move to their preferred destinations. No doubt the blending of the Dominion and India Offices into the newly formed Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) contributed to the delay in decision making.⁴⁴³ In early November, Sir T. I. K. Lloyd at the Colonial Office wrote to Sir Archibald Carter at the CRO giving a summary of the background to the current problem regarding the Maltese evacuees and commented upon their reluctance to another move:

⁴³⁹ During the Second World War there were a number of POW camps within Kenya under the authority of East Africa Command. See Aldo Manos 'WW II: Kenya's Forgotten Italian Connection' in *Kenya Past and Present*, 41 (2014), pp. 29-33; Daniel Mugoro, Reuben M. Matheka, Dorothy Nyakwaka, and Fred Ernest Nasubo, 'Security Establishments: The Making of Gilgil Town, 1897-1970', *Journal of International Academic Research for Multidisciplinary* 4:9 (2016), pp. 1-16, available at www.jiarm.com/OCT2016/paper28903.pdf

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Issues included land ownership. This led to the Mau Mau Rebellion 1952-1960.

⁴⁴² Minute, 16 September 1947, 'Resettlement of the Maltese ex-India', TNA: FO 1015/52. Eritrea was under the overall authority of the British army command MELF (Middle East Land Forces) operating from Egypt.

⁴⁴³ The CRO came into existence in mid-1947. Despite stability provided by civil servants from the amalgamated departments there must have been disruption caused as the new office settled down.

We now learn that there is considerable opposition among the evacuees themselves to any such move as that to Eritrea. While it would no doubt be possible to bring pressure to bear on them ministers feel it would be extremely difficult to defend any such steps in the House of Commons. These are British subjects who have been moved to India at no wish of their own but by a Foreign Office decision of 1941; and they have demanded that they should be resettled in England or the Dominions or in the countries from which they were evacuated. To send them to Eritrea, which is not even British territory and where they would have no hope of finding permanent homes, against their own vigorously expressed desire would need an unanswerable argument of public interest to defend it. While, therefore we are most grateful to the War Office for their readiness to accept this responsibility we do not feel able to enforce the move unless we can show quite clearly that there is no other alternative.⁴⁴⁴

The gist was that there needed to be a watertight reason why the Maltese evacuees had to be moved to Eritrea. Lloyd then put forward a polite request asking whether the group might remain in India until arrangements could be made for those with specified destinations to move there: ‘... we feel that the first step is to sort out all those who have any prospect of finding homes in other countries before any general move to a transit camp’.⁴⁴⁵ The Colonial Office put forward the following groups: those applying to return to Greece and Turkey with a resumption of consular relief payments if agreed by Turkish Government; applicants to the United Kingdom who had guaranteed accommodation (17); and 3 wishing to go to Italy. It further proposed that the 207 opting for Cyprus should be repatriated to Turkey as they were mostly elderly.⁴⁴⁶ This would reduce the number of evacuees to be accommodated in Eritrea, and perhaps be a reassurance to the War Office that efforts were being made for arranging permanent moves. Lloyd acknowledged that if successful this would not reduce the number moving to Eritrea by much, but he also reasoned that ‘on the other hand, it is clearly a mistake to move people twice if one move will do, and any steps we can take to dispose of the above groups will reduce the size of the hard core remaining’.⁴⁴⁷ The fact that Webb had been struggling with this issue since the end of the war was not encouraging – Maltese and Balkan

⁴⁴⁴ Lloyd to Carter, 3 November 1947, TNA: FO 1015/52; IOR/L/PJ/8/391. Carter served as permanent Under-Secretary of State at the India Office, moving to occupy the same (joint) position at the CRO.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

evacuees had left the camp in dribs and drabs with the largest party leaving for Australia in August (see previous chapter).

Additionally, the idea of approaching Britain's East African colonies was mentioned - once again - even though it had been clear at the meetings earlier in the year that these were highly unlikely to accept any of the Maltese evacuees. Their reaction had not been promising:

I am not sure whether your Department has been informed that the first response from the three East African Governors was unequivocally hostile. I will not go into any details of their arguments, but they are in general most reluctant to see an increase of potential 'poor whites' of whose ultimate removal to other homes they have no guarantee. We are, however, proposing to the East African Governments that they should reconsider this decision on the understanding that the arrangements will only be temporary and that His Majesty's Government will not forfeit that they have a responsibility for finding permanent homes elsewhere for these people. A necessary condition of this arrangement would have to be that His Majesty's Government met all expenses in East Africa in connection with these people.⁴⁴⁸

Quite why the Colonial Office kept approaching the East African colonies is a credit to their perseverance, and Lloyd was even hoping to speak directly with Sir Philip Mitchell, Governor of Kenya who was visiting London imminently, but from the beginning of the process of evacuating Maltese British subjects from Turkey and elsewhere in the Balkans in 1941, these had always replied negatively.⁴⁴⁹ None wanted the awkwardness of the arrival of more 'poor whites' in addition to the influx of European settlers – including Jewish people – who were regarded as detrimental to British prestige. Their presence undermined the presumption of white superiority, at a time when the British Empire was in transition and beginning to fragment with increasing challenges to its authority. The prejudice against the Maltese is evident and no doubt their troublesome reputation as expressed by Webb and other officials did not assist their case. However Lloyd's suggestions were practical and aimed to repatriate rather than relocate the evacuees, which would require less disruption. Nonetheless, it was simply too late in the day to ask India to allow the group to stay longer,

⁴⁴⁸ Lloyd to Carter, 3 November 1947.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid. See chapter on Mackereth Evacuation Scheme. The colonies approached in 1941 were Kenya, Tanganyika, and Northern Rhodesia, so presumably these remained the same.

to expect the East African governors to change their stance, or for the Foreign Office to agree to the Maltese evacuees' return to Turkey if permitted. A major reason of the then ambassador Knatchbull-Huggessen for encouraging them to evacuate had been to relieve the British Government of the burden of shelling out continuous relief payments. The situation required fast resolution.

Over a month later a meeting of the Commonwealth Affairs Committee was held at which a proposal for the removal of Balkan Maltese Evacuees from India to Eritrea was discussed.⁴⁵⁰ This proposal had been put forward by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, the department which had been attempting to drive forward decisions about relocating the Maltese evacuees.⁴⁵¹ According to the minutes of the meeting the Foreign Office agreed that the group should be moved:

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that the Foreign Secretary did not wish to oppose further the transfer of these persons to Eritrea in view of the advanced stage which the arrangements had already reached. He understood that the United Nations Commission which was visiting Eritrea would have left before the transfer took place.⁴⁵²

Two points of interest here are: (1) that transfer arrangements were well in hand and (2) that the Foreign Office revealed a motive for delaying the move. They did not wish the United Nations Commission to encounter a group of evacuees on their tour of Eritrea. This would have led to questions being asked by the Commission as to why the Maltese evacuees had been moved there, a decision that might also invoke censure. The British Military Administration only acted as an interim government while the future of former Italian East African colonies was decided, a process under the direction of the United Nations. Therefore, Eritrea should not have been used as a dumping ground whether for Jewish political detainees or displaced British subjects; the comment above reveals the underhandedness of the Foreign Office's motivation. If transfer arrangements were at an 'advanced stage' this suggests that communications between the War Office (Civil Affairs Directorate) and the Commonwealth Relations Department had been ongoing for several months. Actually, the

⁴⁵⁰ Extract from the [Cabinet] minutes of 5(47), meeting of the Commonwealth Affairs Committee, 22 December 1947, TNA: FO 1015/52; IOR/L/PJ/8/391.

⁴⁵¹ Depending on the date of the memorandum sent by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, this was most likely Philip Noel Baker who took over the position from Viscount Addison in October 1947.

⁴⁵² Extract from the minutes, TNA: FO 1015/52.

burden appears to have fallen upon Captain Webb who liaised directly with the BMA in Eritrea.

It is also clear that the Foreign Office was taking a back seat and allowing the Colonial Office and Commonwealth Relations Department to take the lead. Throughout the discussions about the resettlement or relocation of the Maltese evacuees Civil Affairs (War Office) had repeatedly voiced objection to the suggestion that they could be sent to any territories under the control of British Military Administrations. A general concern was 'that we are likely to be in them only for another eighteen months' and that local inhabitants 'may resent' their admission.⁴⁵³ However, as noted above, Civil Affairs had come to the realisation that they would have to accept Maltese evacuees into Eritrea. In addition, during this meeting of the Commonwealth Affairs Committee several points were made which reiterated the options of permanent settlement in either Cyprus or Cyrenaica and introduced the idea that 'responsibility for these refugees might be handed over to the International Refugee Organisation of the United Nations, in return for suitable per capita payment'.⁴⁵⁴ These served as a reminder that the Civil Affairs Office only expected to oversee the care of the Maltese evacuee group for a short length of time. This was further reinforced by the concluding statements of the meeting:

The Committee: -

- (1) Agreed that the Balkan refugees now at Coimbatore, South India, should be transferred to Eritrea until a decision could be reached on their permanent settlement.
- (2) Invited the Secretary of State for the Colonies in consultation with the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, to consider what arrangements should be made for the permanent settlement of these refugees.⁴⁵⁵

The confirmation that the War Office would allow any remaining Balkan and Maltese evacuees to be temporarily accommodated in Eritrea meant that the group could finally be moved on from India. The end of 1947 was fast approaching so there was a final push by Captain Webb to complete arrangements for their departure and forward information onto

⁴⁵³ Minute by Lieutenant-Colonel E. C. S. Reid, CAO, 30 April 1947, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁴⁵⁴ Extract from the minutes.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

the BMA. A covering letter and memorandum was sent to the Chief Administrator on 29 December. Briefly the latter gave the following summary:

- I.** Who are the Balkan and Maltese Evacuees?
- II.** Scheme for resettlement of evacuees.
- III.** Sanction for grant of free passages to European British Evacuees for resettlement.
- IV.** Nominal Rolls with notes on evacuees and list of long-term invalids.
- V.** Financial Assistance rendered to Balkan and Maltese evacuees while in India:
 - (a) Maintenance Advances.
 - (b) Special Allowances.
- Items debited from individual accounts:
 - (i) Cost of accommodation, light, water, and supervision.
 - (ii) Medical treatment in Camp Hospital.
 - (iii) Cost of education of children, if any.
- VI.** Staff accompanying evacuees to Eritrea.
- VII.** System of messing in India.⁴⁵⁶

The Refugee and Repatriation Office hoped that the memorandum would ‘prove useful to you’ but apologised he had been unable to include the nominal rolls which had not been sent to him yet (presumably from the BEC), but these would be forwarded as soon as possible.⁴⁵⁷ The summary certainly covered all the basic information required, for example, explaining the scale of maintenance advances, what special advances could be given (clothing, specific medical requirements, dental or optical needs) and the fact that some expenditure could be charged to the evacuees’ individual accounts. Point VII was a practical inclusion which aimed to help the BMA in their preparations for the accommodation and care of the evacuee group. Webb explained that communal messing arrangements had not been successful, so evacuees (families and individuals) were given a daily allowance of food and firewood to prepare their own meals.⁴⁵⁸ Hopefully, if they followed this advice, problems could be avoided.

⁴⁵⁶ Webb to Chief Administrator, MELF, Asmara, Eritrea, 29 December 1947, with memorandum, TNA: FO 1015/52. Also found in TNA: FO1015/53 with Nominal Rolls of evacuees proceeding to Eritrea.

⁴⁵⁷ Webb to Chief Administrator, 29 December 1947, with memorandum.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

In a caveat, he also gave the Chief Administrator the benefit of his opinion of the evacuees, which – unsurprisingly – was not at all flattering:

I feel it is only fair to warn you that, for the most part, the evacuees are some of the most greedy, grasping and turbulent people we have had to deal with. They require a very firm hand indeed. This move to Eritrea is not popular with them and they are still raising every difficulty and objection. During their period in India, they have developed the begging mentality. They are completely without gratitude to the British tax-payer who supports them or amenable to any argument on the score that British citizenship carries obligations as well as benefits.⁴⁵⁹

In contrast, though, Webb made a particular request of the CA: ‘to your special care, I commend the following two English ladies in the party – Mrs E.C. Greenfield and Mrs B.A. Lucas. Both are grand types and it is sad that they have to mix with the Maltese riff-raff. Both are penniless, and Mrs Lucas is suspected of having cancer of the liver. A little special attention to them will be greatly appreciated.’⁴⁶⁰ The bias is evident.

While it was constructive to issue a caution to the next caretakers of the Balkan and Maltese evacuees, in part this negative character assessment was Captain Webb venting his ire, having been responsible for the group for the past six years. This was unfair towards those who the Refugee and Repatriation Officer had previously described as quiet and hardworking and, as will be seen in the next chapter, it influenced the way the BMA handled the group.⁴⁶¹ The main difficulty for Webb was that the Maltese evacuees in particular were putting up a fierce resistance to being relocated and were proving very uncooperative at a time when he was so close to seeing them finally leave India. His reaction was expressed in a letter to Gilchrist at the Commonwealth Relations Office:

In connection with this move to Eritrea, the Maltese are behaving more vilely even than usual, and I shall breathe a sigh of relief when we get them on a ship. They are making astonishing demands and are in the mood to object to travelling by troop train and by troop deck. However, I feel pretty confident that they will eventually get off. The unfortunate part is that I suspect that the

⁴⁵⁹ Webb to Chief Administrator, 29 December 1947, with memorandum.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ See Nominal Rolls and Chapter Two.

Commandant and the Deputy Commandant, who have games of their own to play, have been party to some of the trouble in the camp. This is very disgraceful of course, but typically oriental and in consonance with the complete lack of discipline throughout this country.⁴⁶²

It is understandable if camp officials displayed sympathy towards the evacuees' situation. With independence the balance of power had changed in India. As British imperial servants relocated elsewhere or retired, Indian officials were no longer subservient or required to answer to a white voice. Perhaps their confidence and assertiveness encouraged Maltese evacuees to challenge Webb's authority. As noted above, this did not go down well, and the Refugee and Repatriation Office resorted to describing the perceived meddling of the Commandant and Deputy Commandant of the BEC as 'typically oriental' – his prejudice evident. Yet, these two men had organised the day to day running of the camp and were in close contact with the evacuees living there. They were also witness to the evacuees' growing frustration and anger at the slowness of their repatriation or resettlement, as well as their outrage at being transferred to yet another camp in East Africa.

The inhabitants of the BEC had, according to Webb, demanded that the Commandant, Mr Cowasji, accompany them to Eritrea, a request which he saw as another example of their difficult behaviour.⁴⁶³ Moreover, he suspected that 'the commandant himself was party to the intrigue.' Additionally:

He is a Parsi and certainly has done his work well. His original demands however, as to salary and guarantee of at least twelve months employment in Eritrea decided us not to send him. As he now has accepted our terms, we are bowing to the demand and permitting him to go. His weaknesses are two – an inclination to leave office work to his clerks and a proneness to gain popularity at the expense of those above him.⁴⁶⁴

While partly praising Cowasji, at the same time Webb inferred to the Chief Administrator

⁴⁶² Webb to Gilchrist, 31 December 1947, TNA: FO 1015/52; IOR/L/PJ/8/391.

⁴⁶³ Webb to Chief Administrator, 29 December 1947, with memorandum.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid. In general, the British in India held members of the Parsi community – descendants of Zoroastrians who had fled from religious persecution by Muslims in Persia – in good regard. See Tanya M. Luhrmann, *The Parsi: The Postcolonial Anxieties of an Indian Colonial Elite* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); John R. Hinnells and Alan Williams (eds), *Parsis in India and the Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2007); Pilo Nanavitty, *The Parsis* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1980).

that the Commandant was untrustworthy. Again, such comments were to sway the BMA towards a negative judgement of this man. It had been in his best (financial) interests to negotiate the most favourable terms for continuing as Camp Commandant, an effort which had failed. However, Cowasji's leadership may well have assisted with the transfer of the camp between countries, given continuity to its administration as well as providing a familiar face for the evacuees. In other words, some stability at a time of upheaval. Instead, as will be seen later, the BMA made short shrift of dispensing with his services, replacing him with a local (white) administrator, an action which caused a nasty incident in the evacuee camp. Other staff accompanying the evacuee group were a lady doctor (Mrs. Wright), and a trained nurse (Miss Hall). A matron (Mrs. Wiltshire, a trained midwife) is also listed but her husband was to remain at the BEC until the camp was finally empty, with the option of travelling to Eritrea if required.⁴⁶⁵ In the event only Mrs. Wright and Miss Hall travelled.⁴⁶⁶

Despite all the hindrances, Captain Webb succeeded in embarking the bulk of the remaining Balkan and Maltese evacuees from the British Evacuee Camp at Coimbatore – some 456 in total – on 8th January 1948 sailing on the *Jehangir* with a small group to follow later.⁴⁶⁷ His responsibility was over but just beginning (with great reluctance) for the British Military Administration in Eritrea. The evacuees were an additional burden on its time and resources which it simply did not want. With the exception of the India Office/Commonwealth Relations Office, other British Government departments involved, namely the Colonial and Foreign Offices, had shilly-shallied around in circles, revisiting outdated suggestions of where the Maltese evacuees could be resettled for the best part of two years. As an interim measure, a camp in Eritrea was not ideal, but it would give them more time to make decisions about this misplaced group of British subjects.

The next chapter explores the British Military Administration's arrangements for the accommodation and administration of the evacuee group and its attempts to assist in their resettlement. It also focuses on the continuing quest by British Government departments to find an appropriate destination to resettle a core of Maltese evacuees. And most importantly, it recounts the experiences of the evacuees themselves including their protests at being held at the camp at Mai Habar, and frustration at not being able to return home to Turkey or to migrate to Australia and elsewhere. Despite assurances that the move to Eritrea was a temporary measure, it would be their residence until mid-1949. It was an unhappy episode for all concerned.

⁴⁶⁵ Webb to Chief Administrator, 29 December 1947, with memorandum.

⁴⁶⁶ Telegram from Webb to Gilchrist, CRO dated 12 January 1948, IOR/L/PJ/8/391.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

Chapter Five

Mai Habar Camp, Eritrea

With their arrival in Eritrea, the Balkan and Maltese evacuees had crossed over into another continent and into the care of British military authorities. The chain of command ran from the Directorate of Civil Affairs at the War Office, through the Civil Affairs Bureau, Middle East Land Forces (Egypt) to the Chief Administrator, BMA, Eritrea. The directorate was a relatively new department having been established in 1943 but had roots in the Occupied Territory Administration (OTA) established during the First World War.⁴⁶⁸ Its purpose was to oversee interim military-led administrations to ensure continuity and stability of local colonial government. D. C. Cumming, the last Chief Administrator in Eritrea, described this as a ‘stewardship’ in his account of the British administration of Italian colonies, one exercised on behalf of the Allies, and which was ‘the keystone of our policy in spite of the anomalies it sometimes created; in spite of what it cost; and in spite of the fact that our enemies did not take an equally correct attitude in the British territories they occupied.’⁴⁶⁹

In East Africa, BMA were set up to cover Eritrea, Italian Somaliland, Ethiopia, as well as provinces in Libya. There was no automatic assumption that colonies would be returned to Italy after the end of the Second World War; rather the Council of Foreign Ministries, and then the newly formed United Nations were responsible for deliberating the best course of action.⁴⁷⁰ In the case of Eritrea, debate centred on whether the country should be divided up between neighbouring states or incorporated with Ethiopia which eventually happened. By the time the Balkan Maltese evacuees arrived in January 1948, the former Italian colony had been under British stewardship since 1941 and had entered a period of continuity with the appointment of Brigadier Francis Drew as Chief Military Administrator in November 1946.

Drew - a career soldier - had a solid background in command and administration. Commissioned into the Royal Engineers in 1911, he was posted to India, serving with the 2nd Queen Victoria’s Own Sappers and Miners and then as Garrison Engineer, Peshawar.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁸ Brigadier P. D. W. Dunn ‘Civil Affairs in Territory Under Military Occupation’, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 19:558 (1945), pp. 158-65.

⁴⁶⁹ D. C. Cumming, ‘British Stewardship of the Italian Colonies: An Account Rendered’, *International Affairs* 29:1 (1953), p. 12.

⁴⁷⁰ The Council of Foreign Ministries drew its membership from the four major allied powers – France, Soviet Union, United Kingdom, and United States of America – and its main aim was to formulate peace treaties with Axis countries post-war.

⁴⁷¹ ‘Memoirs: Brigadier F. G. Drew, CBE’, *The Royal Engineers Journal* 76:1 (1962), pp. 102-4.

During the First World War he saw service in France and Iraq, followed by further promotions and spells in both India and Britain during the inter-war years.⁴⁷² From the outbreak of the Second World War he was appointed to a succession of staff officer and commanding officer positions while on home service in the United Kingdom. This culminated in an appointment as a Colonel in the Directorate of Civil Affairs in early 1944, with promotion to Deputy Director in November 1945.⁴⁷³ Therefore Drew would have been familiar with the British Military Administrations in East Africa prior to his own arrival in Eritrea. During his time in Eritrea he oversaw the transition from a military administration to a purely civilian one when the BMA was eventually transferred from the War Office to the Foreign Office. This saw the creation of the Foreign Office Administration of African Territories in early 1949 (shortened to FOAAT) which oversaw the British Administration of Eritrea until 1952 when the future of the territory was settled.⁴⁷⁴

With a wealth of experience from his earlier military career in a colonial setting, (and as previously mentioned a stint at the Directorate of Civil Affairs in London), Drew had the ability to negotiate the everyday running of the BMA, Eritrea, and the unexpected additions to his responsibilities such as the arrival of 500 disgruntled Balkan and Maltese evacuees from India.

Arrival in Eritrea

Compared to their extended stay in India, the Maltese and Balkan evacuees were only resident in Eritrea for a relatively short period, from January 1948 to July 1949 when the majority were moved on. As will be revealed in the following chapter, for the first time the group was split with Maltese evacuees being relocated to a camp in Cyprus while a small group of non-Maltese British subjects evacuated from Balkan countries remained in Eritrea while repatriation was arranged for them. In addition, British authorities in Asmara were able to arrange for forty-five people from the British Evacuee Camp at Mai Habar to be shipped to Australia in early 1949, while smaller numbers either returned to their place of origin or left for the United Kingdom. However, the focus of this chapter is what occurred in 1948. This was predominately a fraught year for all concerned as yet again visa and

⁴⁷² 'Memoirs: Brigadier F. G. Drew, CBE'

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ FOAAT existed only briefly but was essential to maintaining an interim administration in ex-Italian African colonies while the UN deliberated their fate. See Saul Kelly, *Cold War in the Desert: Britain, the United States and the Italian Colonies, 1945-1952* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 110-33.

emigration documentation had to be processed and there was a general shortage of passages on available shipping. Allocation of passages was prioritised for the resettlement of displaced persons, and also for migration schemes set up between British Commonwealth countries such as Malta and the dominions (Australia in particular).

Having agreed that the inhabitants of BEC at Coimbatore could be relocated to Eritrea, the War Office became responsible for passing on any information to MELF, which in turn relayed it to the BMA. In late December 1947, the latter received confirmation that it would be acting 'solely as agent' and that all costs regarding transport, accommodation and food should be recorded 'for ultimate recovery' from MELF.⁴⁷⁵ The length of time the evacuees would be staying was unknown. Most importantly, there was a warning about the state of the evacuees:

War Office informs us that these Maltese who have had a rough time view with foreboding the prospect of a stay in darkest Eritrea and have addressed numerous memorials requesting that they be sent elsewhere. It is hoped that in the circumstances you will do all possible to ensure that they are welcomed sympathetically and maintained in reasonable comfort.⁴⁷⁶

According to the reply from the BMA, it had received a summary of information from Webb in India and would do 'everything reasonably possible' for the evacuees: 'Have prepared accommodation for them in Mai Habar ex hospital. This may be regarded as somewhat isolated but is in fact the best available.'⁴⁷⁷ Mai Habar was a small town near the capital, Asmara.⁴⁷⁸ The hospital was originally a 500-bed facility used by the Italian army, then by the British military medical services. For a short time from 1942 it had also been home to the US Army 21st Station Hospital.⁴⁷⁹ On paper, therefore, with a large capacity and established buildings, it seemed ideal to house the Maltese and Balkan evacuees.

⁴⁷⁵ Commander-in-Chief, MELF, to BMA, Eritrea, 24 December 1947, TNA: FO 369/3958, K---35. Also found in IOR/L/PJ/8/391.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ BMA, Eritrea, to C-in-C, MELF, 26 December 1947, TNA: FO 369/3958, K---35; IOR/L/PJ/8/391. The information forwarded to the BMA is the memorandum from Webb to the Chief Administrator, 29 December 1947 mentioned in the previous chapter, found in TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁴⁷⁸ It is difficult to find any contemporary descriptions of Eritrea while the evacuee group was there. However, a useful account is given by Margaret Reardon who lived in the territory while her husband, Pat, was part of the BMA. Margaret Reardon, *An Unexpected Journey: Life in the Colonies at Empire's End: A Woman's Role* (Bourn: Catherine Armstrong, 2015).

⁴⁷⁹ See Charles Maurice Wiltse, *The Medical Department, Medical Service in the Mediterranean and Minor Theaters: United States Army in World War Two: The Technical Services* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1965), pp. 68-69.

However, on their arrival it soon became clear that the accommodation would require alteration. In correspondence with the Civil Affairs Branch at MELF the Chief Administrator, Drew, forwarded Webb's memorandum about the evacuees and also commented that this information required a rethink of arrangements already made. A summary of his complaints was passed on to the Director of Civil Affairs at the War Office:

In forwarding this memorandum, the Chief Administrator points out that this was the first intimation which he had received as to the nature of the people being evacuated to Eritrea, in spite of repeated requests for particulars. The information was received only ten days before their arrival and was of such a nature as to require drastic alteration in the plans for their reception and accommodation, which had necessarily been made in the dark, but on the assumption that the evacuees were normal people.⁴⁸⁰

Webb's influence can be seen here as his description of the evacuees was far from flattering (greedy, grasping, turbulent and demanding) and they were reliant on funding from the British Government. Even 'normal' people may have balked at being housed in a hospital with communal living in former ward buildings. Perhaps acceptable for single persons, families would certainly prefer their own units, and as mentioned in the previous chapter, evacuees were used to cooking for themselves rather than having a camp kitchen. In late January 1948, Drew visited Mai Habar and recorded his own impression of the evacuees. It was not flattering: 'At the moment the evacuees are living in comparative luxury in a "Rest Camp" or "Transit Hotel." They are doing virtually nothing for themselves ... with cooks, waiters, servants, cleaning staff all paid for by His Majesty's government.'⁴⁸¹ He also observed that although a few were working as carpenters to improve the accommodation they were getting paid and still receiving an allowance.⁴⁸²

It clearly irritated Drew that the Balkan Maltese evacuees were continuing their 'colonial' lifestyle in Eritrea and also that some were being employed in paid work yet still receiving maintenance all funded by the British Government. It appears that they were temporarily accommodated in a rest camp which usually provided a comfortable place to

⁴⁸⁰ Brigadier F. R. W. Jameson, Civil Affairs Branch (CAB), GHQ, MELF, to Director of Civil Affairs, War Office, 24 January 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁴⁸¹ Notes by the Chief Administrator following visit to Mai Habar, 28 January 1948, attached to letter from BMA, Eritrea, to CAB, MELF, [?] February 1948, TNA: FO 1015/53.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

stay and recreation facilities for British soldiers serving in Eritrea while on leave.⁴⁸³ A transit hotel, as its name suggests, served as lodging for people passing through, or even out of the country, for example groups of displaced persons moving from camps to an onward destination - Italian expatriates and Jewish refugees. While the evacuees were temporarily living in these two places, they were blocking the facilities being used for their intended purpose. So it was imperative that the former hospital buildings were adapted as soon as possible to house all the evacuees.

The Chief Administrator was quite specific that the evacuees could not continue to expect to have servants and ancillary staff looking after them:

This requires alteration. The camp must be run as a village community with no outside assistance. Every individual must subscribe to a municipal tax from which the camp staff working within the camp to be provided by the evacuees themselves must receive the minimum payment necessary.⁴⁸⁴

The aim was self-sufficiency. Some evacuees had been employed at the British Evacuee Camp at Coimbatore as clerks, teachers, and medical assistants, but menial tasks were carried out by Indian staff. Drew was particularly rankled by the amount of money evacuees were receiving and felt this must be reduced if not stopped entirely: 'The total "allowances" at the Indian rate payable to the head of a family for living and doing nothing at HMG expense are I understand in excess of the salary we are paying the Camp Commandant in Eritrea.'⁴⁸⁵ He reasoned that as accommodation, food, light, and water, were being provided in 'kind' that the maintenance allowance and cost of living allowance 'will not be applicable and not be paid'.⁴⁸⁶ This left pocket money, that is funds for personal items and treats. Of course, Drew's recommendations had to be relayed back to the War Office but his opinion in his notes was evident: the BMA was only acting as an agent for the British Government (Commonwealth Relations Office) and that no financial burden should fall upon the administration. Additionally the evacuees should be removed from Eritrea as soon as

⁴⁸³ War Office, MELF, Quarterly Historical Reports, Eritrea, TNA: WO 261/165 – 168. Battalions from the King's Own Royal Regiment, the Loyal Regiment and the Royal Berkshire Regiment were all stationed in Eritrea and also a company of the Royal Army Service Corps.

⁴⁸⁴ Notes by the Chief Administrator following visit to Mai Habar, 28 January 1948.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

possible and that the Commonwealth Relations Office should appoint a resettlement officer to assist with this aim.⁴⁸⁷

One immediate action the Chief Administrator took following the arrival of the Maltese and Balkan evacuees was to replace the Camp Commandant:

I interviewed Mr Cowasjee [sic] who accompanied the evacuees from India as Camp Commandant. I explained that his dismissal was due to no fault of his, but merely to the fact that I required a British Camp Commandant (at a fraction of the salary which Mr Cowasjee was drawing) who was au fait with local conditions and had the necessary local contacts.⁴⁸⁸

Webb had warned Cowasji was untrustworthy and it had been discovered he was receiving a salary in excess of that of a white official. It is no surprise that Drew dispensed with his services. It is recorded that he was receiving £80 a month, whereas another source gives the figure of £25 per month for the locally recruited camp commander, although it was noted 'for that one cannot get very brilliant material'.⁴⁸⁹ The inference was that this salary was actually too low and was only attractive to less capable candidates.

Although it was helpful to have an official familiar with the locality, it was not merely a question of saving money. It would certainly have caused complaint among any British civilian staff had it become known that a Parsi was being paid considerably more than they. Even after India had gained independence, its citizens could not be treated equally, or indeed better than their white counterparts. A Mr Green was appointed as camp commandant soon after the evacuee group arrived; presumably Cowasji was sent back to India. The Chief Administrator gave credit to Green 'for the way the camp has been prepared and organised and for the handling of evacuees.'⁴⁹⁰ All seemed well initially, but an incident a few weeks later demonstrated that the evacuees themselves were not pleased with the new appointment:

... on the night 10th February a brawl occurred in the Mai Habar Camp which resulted in the arrest of five of the evacuees for assault. They are now planning various accusations against the Camp Commandant with the object of getting

⁴⁸⁷ Notes by the Chief Administrator following visit to Mai Habar, 28 January 1948.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid..

⁴⁸⁹ Jameson to Director of Civil Affairs, War Office, 24 January 1948; J. T. Crawford, BMA, Asmara, to Major P. N. Dolan, War Office, 22 September 1948: See TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid (Jameson to Director of Civil Affairs).

him dismissed. A British police inspector has now been posted to the Camp, but I foresee frequent disturbances so long as the evacuees remain in Eritrea.⁴⁹¹

According to another source, the victim of the ‘attempted’ assault was Green himself.⁴⁹² It is not recorded what triggered the altercation, and it may have been a heavy-handed response to have those involved arrested. It could also indicate that the new commandant did not have the aptitude or authority required to deal effectively with the situation. The evacuee group was in a period of transition, getting used to a new situation and under a new authority. It may have started as a protest against changes to finances and living arrangements.

The BMA was having to make swift decisions about these new arrivals during the first months. After Drew’s personal visit to Mai Habar, correspondence was circulating between Eritrea, Egypt and London recording these and general arrangements made. This was in the absence of any guidance from the Commonwealth Relations Office which was assumed to have overall responsibility for the Maltese and Balkan evacuees. The Civil Affairs Bureau in Cairo reported to the War Office that an estimated £2,000 had been expended on preparing the camp and transportation from the port of Massawa to Mai Habar.⁴⁹³ Communal messing provided by a contractor had been arranged although it was later noted that it appeared this ‘was not a success in India, and it may be objected to by the evacuees in Eritrea. If objections are raised, it will be necessary to consider other arrangements, but to provide cooking facilities for individual families will involve additional expenditure and a cash advance [...] per day per head.’⁴⁹⁴

Additional thought had also been given to the scale of payments given to evacuees. This followed the system used in India but was paid in East African Shillings (EAS), the currency used in British commonwealth and occupied territories in this area. Per month a single adult would receive 20/-, a married couple 30/-, and dependents 7/50. There was also access to a clothing allowance (paid out as needed) of no more than 10/- a month.⁴⁹⁵ Medical treatment – hospitalisation, dental and optical needs – were available through the BMA medical services and ‘costs debited to individual personal accounts’.⁴⁹⁶ Similarly, general costs of camp living – water, electric, light, camp staff wages – would also be charged per

⁴⁹¹ BMA, Eritrea, to CAB, MELF, [?] February 1948.

⁴⁹² Dolan, CAB, GHQ, MELF, Cairo, to Director of Civil Affairs, War Office, 26 February 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52. Dolan was now in Cairo having transferred from London.

⁴⁹³ Lieutenant-Colonel J. F. Taylor, CAB, GHQ, MELF, Cairo, to War Office, 30 January 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.* Messing was costed at 2/- per person per day.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

capita to evacuees' accounts.⁴⁹⁷ Because, as already highlighted, Civil Affairs was still trying to establish which governmental department was financially liable for the Maltese and Balkan evacuees a suspense account was set up.⁴⁹⁸ Any expenditure made by the BMA could be debited to the War Office via this account.⁴⁹⁹ This would in effect be a separate financial record for the Mai Habar Camp which could then be recouped from the appropriate government department (through a Treasury vote). This was an important arrangement as the Chief Administrator had made it clear that the BMA accepted no monetary liability for the evacuee group.

The top priority for BMA, Eritrea, was to move the evacuees on as soon as possible. Following his visit to the Mai Habar Camp, Drew made the following recommendation:

CRD [CRO] must therefore appoint a resettlement officer to deal with this side of the problem. Such an one could be locally engaged as a BMA monthly paid employee, but he (she) should be empowered to act and sign on behalf of the CRD in conducting correspondence with Australia, Turkey, Greece, etc. This resettlement officer must necessarily be located in Eritrea so as to be in a position to interview evacuees as required.⁵⁰⁰

He also emphasised that the BMA did not have the manpower to take on this task and it was not its responsibility anyway.⁵⁰¹ This recommendation was relayed via MELF to the Civil Affairs Bureau, War Office, but the Chief Administrator did not receive any acknowledgement of his proposal even after follow up letters were sent which asked for the matter to be acted upon.⁵⁰² The expectation was that the BMA would communicate directly with the CRO which would quicken the passing of information.⁵⁰³ However, this presupposed that the CRO was the correct government department. The Commonwealth Relations Office had been recently created from a merger between the Dominions and India Offices. Therefore, as the Maltese and Balkans evacuees had arrived from India, it was

⁴⁹⁷ Taylor to War Office, 30 January 1948, TNA.

⁴⁹⁸ *Collins Dictionary* defines this as 'a temporary account in which entries are made until a permanent decision is made about where the entries should go'.

⁴⁹⁹ Taylor to War Office, 30 January 1948, TNA.

⁵⁰⁰ Notes by the Chief Administrator following visit to Mai Habar, 28 January 1948.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰² Dolan to Director of Civil Affairs, War Office, 26 February 1948; BMA, Eritrea, to CAB, MELF, 4 March 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52. See also TNA: FO 1015/53.

⁵⁰³ Chief Secretary, BMA, Eritrea, to Civil Affairs Directorate, London, 4 September 1948, TNA FO 1015/52

understandable that Drew believed that the CRO was the department in charge. It would take nine months from the arrival of the evacuees in Eritrea for firm clarification that it was actually the Colonial Office (reluctantly) which was tasked with organising their resettlement within the British Commonwealth.

In the meantime, the British Military Administration frustrated by a lack of information, began its own enquiries and was successful in arranging passages for a number of Maltese and Balkan evacuees during 1948. In part, the administration was reacting to a negative atmosphere in Mai Habar Camp. By April, its inhabitants were becoming quite agitated as this telegram shows:

Interviewed today deputation from Mai Habar Camp. Evacuees are restless and in mood to cause trouble.

Pressing need for resettlement officer paramount unless stay of Maltese is very temporary. Considerable number could be placed in various countries if resettlement officer could be authorised. This would produce real savings to HMG and therefore deserves favourable reply.

Believed also that evacuees intend communicate directly to Commonwealth Relations complaining of treatment here.

IMPORTANT.⁵⁰⁴

The significant word here was ‘important.’ Its use demonstrated not only how pressing the appointment of a suitable official was, but also that adverse reports about the Mai Habar Camp would not reflect well on the BMA. Colonel G. W. Kenyon-Slaney of the Civil Affairs Branch (CAB), Cairo, immediately contacted the War Office asking Anderson (Civil Affairs Directorate) if he ‘might perhaps be able to wake up CRD before the Maltese put in some exaggerated grouse against lack of interest which we will – perforce – be accused of taking. ... If, of course, these people are going to be moved as you suggested when here, no action will be necessary, but even then I fear we shall get accused by the Maltese of *laissez faire*.’⁵⁰⁵

Clearly, the BMA and CAB, Cairo, was under pressure and did not want to appear to be continually fobbing off enquiries from the Maltese and Balkans evacuees about their resettlement. No doubt the deputation from Mai Habar Camp comprised of members of the

⁵⁰⁴ BEMA, Eritrea, to Civil Affairs, Mid-East, 28 April 1948, attached to letter from Colonel G. W. Kenyon-Slaney to Major General A. S. Anderson, Civil Affairs Directorate, London, 28 April 1948, TNA: FO 1015/53.

⁵⁰⁵ Kenyon-Slaney to Anderson, 28 April 1948, TNA: FO 1015/53.

British Evacuees Association, which had also been active at Coimbatore. This organisation did indeed write a letter in late May 1948, but not to the Commonwealth Relations Office, rather the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Arthur Creech Jones.⁵⁰⁶ It seems that the evacuees were more aware than the BMA of which government office to approach. In addition, the tried and tested tactic of sending multiple copies to politicians and other was also followed. These were sent to Attlee, Churchill, the Lord Archbishop of Malta and Gozo, and courteously to the Chief Administrator, Eritrea.⁵⁰⁷ The appeal from the elected chairman and committee of the Maltese and Balkan Camp asked for ‘the termination of the present unfortunate state of affairs’ and questioned:

Why are we in Eritrea? ... [we] have been dispatched to this country against our will, after seven years of exile in India we naturally expected to be repatriated to various countries of our desire, where it is possible to obtain employment, not to be in continuous receipt of charity from the British Govt.⁵⁰⁸

The British Evacuees Association then presented a well-considered proposal which called for a scheme for the resettlement of evacuees with financial assistance for one year to give them ‘a chance to obtain employment and return to normal life’.⁵⁰⁹ It was also pointed out that if this could be achieved it would end His Majesty’s Government’s obligation of running the camp and relieve British taxpayers of having to pay for its maintenance.⁵¹⁰ The Association also gave estimated costings for running the Mai Habar camp for six months with a total given of just over £22,000, which was a significant amount.⁵¹¹ Finally, the two signatories - Griscti and Mamo – hoped that their appeal would be urgently considered.⁵¹² The letter contained no complaints about their treatment by the BMA; rather it emphasised that both the military administration and evacuees actually wanted the same outcome – for the group to be resettled as soon as possible.

⁵⁰⁶ British Evacuees Association, Mai Habar Camp, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26 May 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁵⁰⁷ See correspondence in TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁵⁰⁸ British Evacuees Association, Mai Habar Camp, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26 May 1948.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Ibid.

The BEA petition was flagged up at an interdepartmental meeting held at the Colonial Office on 9 June 1948. This was held to ‘discuss possibilities of a permanent resettlement of the Balkan Maltese now in Eritrea’ with representatives of the Colonial Office, Treasury, Foreign Office, Commonwealth Relations Office, and War Office.⁵¹³ It followed on from the meetings held at the Treasury in March and April of the previous year which focused on the same topic.⁵¹⁴ The outcome of these had been the temporary move to Eritrea (see previous chapter). After the petition was read out there was a discussion about whether the evacuees should have a free choice of where to resettle, although repatriation to Turkey was dismissed as returnees would remain a financial charge.⁵¹⁵ As in the previous meetings various reception territories were then proposed with advantages and disadvantages of each considered. The difference this time was that instead of an urgency to move the group of evacuees from India it was now from Eritrea: ‘It was stated that the Italian Government had already raised objection to their continued presence which only served to aggravate the grave unemployment problems for local Italians’.⁵¹⁶ In other words, it was perceived that the Maltese might be encouraged to find work outside of the camp. Additionally, with the future of Eritrea to be decided, it was urgent to move the Maltese and Balkan evacuees before this was finalised.⁵¹⁷

The possibility of Cyprus, East Africa, the dominions, and ex-Italian colonies in Africa were all revisited once again, while separately the Colonial Office had also considered and discounted Northern Rhodesia, British West Indies, and North Borneo as well as South American countries such as Argentina. The latter seemed suitable, having a temperate climate and Roman Catholic populations, however concern was expressed about compromising immigration to South America from Malta.⁵¹⁸ It was put forward in the meeting that it would be easier and more politically acceptable to settle evacuees somewhere in the British Commonwealth and Empire, so ‘British flag’ destinations were looked at first.⁵¹⁹ While the dominions and East African colonies were discounted, Cyprus was thought by the Foreign Office and the Treasury to have the best prospects as a destination where the

⁵¹³ Notes of meeting held on 9 June 1948, Colonial Office, to discuss possibilities of a permanent resettlement of the Balkan Maltese now in Eritrea, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁵¹⁴ Notes of meetings held on 14 March and 30 April 1947 at the Treasury.

⁵¹⁵ Notes of meeting held on 9 June 1948.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.* Colonial Office memorandum on ‘Settlement of Balkan Evacuees in Eritrea, Section III, Permanent Settlement – Destinations’, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁵¹⁹ Notes of meeting held on 9 June 1948.

evacuees could resettle and be self-supporting.⁵²⁰ However, the Colonial Office pointed out that the Jewish camps in Cyprus were still in use and needed to be cleared before more refugees (evacuees) were sent there.⁵²¹ These were holding camps for Jewish refugees from Europe hoping to resettle in Israel (described by some as ‘internment’ camps for Jewish detainees).⁵²² All would, in time, be transferred to Israel. The resettlement of Balkan Maltese and Balkan evacuees in the United Kingdom was seen as the last resort if no British territory would take them.⁵²³

The meeting then went over the old ground of permanent settlement of the evacuee group in Somalia, Eritrea, Cyrenaica, or Tripolitania. All of these were currently under British military administration and the response from the War Office was an unequivocal ‘no’. Prior to the June interdepartmental meeting, the Colonial Office circulated a ‘Memorandum on Settlement of Balkan Evacuees in Eritrea’ which outlined potential destinations for the evacuee group,⁵²⁴ Part III focused on permanent settlement. This section gave the Civil Affairs Directorate an opportunity to produce a forceful summary of why the ex-Italian colonies currently under its control were not suitable locations.⁵²⁵ Despite the objections raised, it was still agreed at the meeting to approach MELF via the War Office to ask about the BMA controlled territory. This persistence was admirable but mis-directed.

Another option put forward was to approach the International Refugee Organisation (IRO). According to J. W. O. Davidson, head of the Consular Department, Foreign Office, the IRO would not take on any new commitments arising after June 1947. The minutes continued: ‘In any event these people were not displaced persons in the true sense of the word, and the IRO could not provide financial assistance though he felt they might be able to give us administrative advice.’⁵²⁶ Davidson was correct: according to a report in *International Organization* the Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission of the

⁵²⁰ Notes of meeting held on 9 June 1948

⁵²¹ Ibid.

⁵²² See Branka Arrivé, ‘Why were the Cyprus Camps for Jewish Detainees not dissolved immediately after the Independence of Israel?’, *Israel Affairs* 25:6 (2019), pp. 980-98; Iakovos D. Michailidis, ‘Escaping the Nazi Horror: Jewish and Christian Refugees in Cyprus’, *Israel Affairs* 25:6 (2019), pp. 972-9; Maurice Laub, *Last Barrier to Freedom: Internment of Jewish Holocaust Survivors on Cyprus, 1946-1949* (Berkeley, CA: Jewish Magnes Museum, 1985).

⁵²³ Notes of meeting held 9 June 1948.

⁵²⁴ Colonial Office memorandum, ‘Settlement of Balkan Evacuees in Eritrea’, 1 June 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁵²⁵ Reid, Deputy Director, Civil Affairs, ‘Permanent Settlement of the Balkan/Maltese now in Eritrea’, 8 June 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁵²⁶ Notes of meeting held 9 June 1948.

IRO established a 'freeze order in July 1947 'which closed the care and maintenance facilities of the Preparatory Commission to new applications with the exception of 'hardship cases'. This decision was made in an effort to use the commission's limited resources as efficiently as possible for the benefit of persons already in its care'.⁵²⁷ Additionally, although the Maltese evacuees were sometimes described as refugees, they had not been displaced from a country directly affected by the world war. They had been moved in anticipation of a possible invasion of Turkey by Axis forces. On the other hand, a minority of evacuees had actually been evacuated from Balkan countries which were invaded such as Greece. All were recognised as 'British subjects' and as such were the responsibility of His Majesty's Government. It was left for the Foreign Office to ask the IRO for advice and administrative assistance. This was a sensible course of action as the organisation was actively coordinating resettlement or repatriation of tens of thousands of displaced persons across the world.

It is worth pausing at this point to look at the work of the International Refugee Organisation, particularly in relation to its operations in the Middle East and East Africa which impacted on efforts to resettle the Maltese and Balkan evacuees. More correctly it was the Preparatory Commission of the International Refugee Organisation (PCIRO) which took on the responsibility of caring for and assisting the resettlement or repatriation of displaced persons. The agency was supported and funded by member states of the United Nations, many of which agreed to take refugees too. An excellent summary of the initial phase of PCIRO is given by Sir Arthur Rucker who served as Deputy Executive Secretary from July 1947.⁵²⁸ Taking over from UNNRA and the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR or ICR) the focus was to create an administrative system with a headquarters in Geneva and offices across the world as well as to 'concentrate most of our effort on the care and maintenance of people in the camps'.⁵²⁹

During its first year (July 1947 – July 1948) IRO was financially stretched which led to a cautious approach to arranging shipping for the transport of refugees; in consequence less resettlement took place.⁵³⁰ However, this situation improved rapidly with increased funding as further countries pledged support to the IRO – now an established specialized

⁵²⁷ *International Organization* 2:1 (1948), p. 130.

⁵²⁸ Sir Arthur Rucker, 'The Work of the International Refugee Organization', *International Affairs* 25:1 (1949), pp. 66-73.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 67.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 68.

agency.⁵³¹ As Rucker commented ‘we are now the largest mass transportation agency in the world’ although ‘still short of ships to Australia.’⁵³²

This is illustrated by a report that stated by November 1948 ‘twenty-five ships were in operation, thirty trains a month were run for IRO in Europe, and 19,000 a month were moved at a daily cost of \$160,000. An air-sea-lift was planned for Australia bringing refugees by air from Europe to Eritrea and by sea from Eritrea to Australia, thus cutting down on shipping time. It was also hoped to establish an all air-lift to Australia with the whole cost met in sterling’.⁵³³ While this was good news for the dispersal of refugees and displaced persons, the fact that IRO now had a dominant hold on shipping available for the transportation of people meant that it would be a struggle to find blocks of passages for Maltese and Balkan evacuees. This influenced the strategy of those trying to organise their resettlement who decided that sending ‘penny numbers’ would be the best course of action as they would be able to secure berths for small groups. It also meant that the evacuees were a little less conspicuous, especially when migrating to Australia. As will be explained in the following chapter, this was partly to get round a repeat of Australian Immigration’s objections to the arrival of a party of Maltese evacuees from Massawa in February 1949.

In the Middle East and East Africa, IRO took on the responsibility of European refugees who had been dispersed to camps across these regions. Holborn explains:

During the war, members of the Polish, Yugoslav, or Greek armed forces, civilian refugees from countries bordering the Mediterranean, and dependants of refugees, mainly Polish, had been admitted into the Middle East, East Africa, and India as a British responsibility, the British Government giving its undertaking to the sovereign or colonial governments that these persons would not become a public charge and would ultimately be removed. Most of these were originally assisted by the Middle East Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and later by UNNRA. IRO continued UNNRA’s activities under an agreement concluded with the Government of the UK. Covering the Organisation’s activities in the Middle East (India, The Lebanon, Palestine and East Africa) the administrative responsibility was entirely British, and the

⁵³¹ Rucker, ‘The Work of the International Refugee Organization’, p. 69.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ ‘The Work of the International Refugee Organization’, p. 352.

IRO took over the arrangement already in existence whereby the Organisation paid the British Government a *per capita* charge to cover all costs.⁵³⁴

Even before the Maltese and Balkan evacuees had arrived in Eritrea (January 1948), the British Government was under pressure to follow through on its assurance that refugees would be dispersed from the countries and colonies they had been sent to. These included Egypt, Kenya, Nyasaland, the Rhodesias, Tanganyika, and Uganda. In July 1947 there were approximately 17,500 refugees in sixteen centres in East and Central Africa.⁵³⁵ Their resettlement was a priority not only for the British Government, but also for the IRO which was bearing the financial cost. Under the scheme 'Operation Pole Jump' the majority were resettled in Britain, while Australia and Canada accepted others, each country sending selection missions to identify - or cherry-pick - the best candidates.⁵³⁶ Like 'Balt Cygnet' and 'Westward Ho!', 'Pole Jump' was another British scheme which brought refugees/displaced persons over to the United Kingdom. It was connected directly to the Polish Resettlement Corps and focused on bringing dependants of men who had served in the UK. Between 1947 and 1948 approximately 40,000 Polish family members were resettled from Europe, the Middle East and East Africa.⁵³⁷

With heavy British involvement in IRO operations in the Middle East and East Africa, and a commitment to resettle Polish refugees in Britain, it is no surprise that the Maltese and Balkan evacuees appeared to have been side-lined. It would have been easy - but entirely inappropriate - for them to be included in any existing resettlement schemes or to take advantage of shipping laid on for transportation of displaced persons. There had to be a clear separation between arrangements made on behalf of the IRO by a British administration (that is, an IRO mission) and those made for the group of evacuees in Eritrea.

Re-entry to Turkey?

While the inter-departmental meeting had not had a decisive outcome, the BMA continued its efforts to assist in the resettlement or repatriation of evacuees. A major step in the right

⁵³⁴ Louise W. Holborn, *The International Refugee Organisation. A Specialized Agency of the United Nations: Its History and Work 1946-1952* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 143-44.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 420. According to Holborn there were 16,519 with an additional 1,000 made up of 720 Poles transferred from India, Polish government officials from across Africa, and a group of internees.

⁵³⁶ Holborn, *International Refugee Organisation*, pp. 392-93 and 421.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 392-3.

direction was the appointment of a Resettlement Officer – D. H. Gamble of the Labour Office, Asmara. Contact was established with the Turkish Council, the Australian Trade Commission (both in Cairo) as well as the Governor of Cyprus. In addition passages to the United Kingdom were arranged although a protest instigated at Mai Habar Camp over a monetary allowance meant no one travelled.

As Turkey was a preferred destination for some Maltese, applications were made for their return on the understanding that individuals were self-supporting or had a guarantee of maintenance and accommodation. This is not to say that the Turkish Government was eager to see their return and the process of gaining re-entry was officious and protracted. BMA administrators in Eritrea had to forward information to the Civil Affairs Agent, Cairo, who then passed this on to the Turkish Consul. Applications were finally sent to Ankara for consideration.⁵³⁸ Each one required the following supporting documentation: a visa issued by a Turkish Consul, a passport and inoculation certificates.⁵³⁹ Maltese evacuees actually had acquired this paperwork while in India so British Indian passports and visas issued from the Turkish Consul at Bombay, were presented.⁵⁴⁰ In effect, as India had gained independence, the passports should not have been valid but appear to have been accepted. Perhaps as a precaution the Turkish Consul also asked for the date and place of birth of applicants, their previous nationality, as well as a photograph.⁵⁴¹ This would also verify a connection to Turkey for those who were born there as well as their British subject status.

In June and July 1948, Gamble and the Principal Immigration Officer, Eritrea, processed around thirty applications from Maltese wanting to return to Turkey.⁵⁴² The emphasis was on despatching them quickly: ‘All the persons are evacuees at the Mai Habar Camp and expected to leave as soon as their passports return’, wrote the Principal Immigration Officer to the CAA, Cairo.⁵⁴³ However, the return to their former homes was soon thrown into doubt after the Foreign Office received a warning from its Consul-General at Izmir. The gist of the letter was that a group of ten Maltese evacuees which had come back from India had done so having produced undertakings signed by relatives or friends ‘to

⁵³⁸ See correspondence between Gamble and Principal Immigration Officer, BMA, Eritrea, and Civil Affairs Agent, Cairo, July-August 1948, TNA FO 1015/53.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.* Inoculation certificates were for cholera and smallpox.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴¹ See letters from Turkish Consul, Cairo, to Civil Affairs Agency, Cairo, 24 July 1948 and 5 August 1948, TNA: FO 1015/53.

⁵⁴² Correspondence between Gamble and Principal Immigration Officer, BMA, Eritrea, and Civil Affairs Agent, Cairo, July-August 1948.

⁵⁴³ Principal Immigration Officer, BMA, Asmara, to Civil Affairs Agency, Cairo, 22 July 1948, TNA: FO 1015/53.

the effect that they would not be a burden to His Majesty's Government on their return to Izmir'.⁵⁴⁴ Now all but one had applied for relief from the consulate:

Whether or not these undertakings were signed in good faith or not we do not know, but the facts today show that it is impossible for the guarantors to honour their signatures.

The position is aggravated by the fact that some of these persons have returned in a very poor state of health (possibly due to the climate in India) and are in the need of urgent medical treatment.⁵⁴⁵

The consulate then asked for clarity about the status of Maltese returning from Eritrea and whether any would be entitled to relief.⁵⁴⁶ Although not stating openly that Maltese evacuees should not return to Izmir, the inference that they would become a financial burden again was apparent. The Foreign Office was clearly alarmed by this thought and alerted the Colonial Office to the problem:

On the subject of the Maltese evacuees in Eritrea and the question of their return to countries such as Turkey I enclose a copy of a very significant letter from the Consulate-General at Smyrna [Izmir] which tells its own story. It is fairly obvious from this that when dealing with such people we have to be on the look out for all kinds of assurances which are absolutely meaningless with regard to their maintenance in countries of the Levant. We are therefore copying this letter to our Consul-General at Cairo through whom we have agreed to channel applications from the Maltese in Eritrea for return to foreign countries.⁵⁴⁷

By ensuring applications were handled by the Consul-General in Cairo the Foreign Office could monitor Maltese wishing to return to Turkey and the viability of any guarantees for maintenance and accommodation. Local British consular staff were familiar with Maltese communities in their areas and therefore could ascertain if individuals were capable of giving

⁵⁴⁴ British Consulate, Izmir, to Consular Department, Foreign Office, 28 August 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52. At this time the Consul-General was Richard Edward Wilkinson.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid. The British Consulate had a figure of about 53 persons returning from Eritrea.

⁵⁴⁷ K. G. Ritchie, Consular Department, Foreign Office, to P. A. Carter, Colonial Office, 16 September 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

financial support to others. While well-intentioned, the efforts of BMA officers and the Civil Affairs Agency, Cairo, did not draw upon this knowledge. Their focus was on moving on as many evacuees as possible from the Mai Habar Camp.

The War Office was quick to advise the BMA that there was ‘no question of allowing an evacuee to go to a country (such as Turkey) where he might foreseeably come to be a charge upon consular relief funds. Obviously, it is cheaper and better that those who cannot be made fully self-supporting should be looked after in a British administered territory’.⁵⁴⁸ The reply was indignant and frustrated: ‘We quite realise that no evacuee can be sent to any country where he might foreseeably come to a charge upon consular relief funds: there was never any intention of doing this; even to get rid of them from here!’⁵⁴⁹

It was then suggested that the appointment of someone in the dual roles of resettlement officer/camp commandant would be very helpful, especially ‘if such a person had any authority springing directly from the Department responsible for the evacuees’.⁵⁵⁰ This was, on paper, a sensible suggestion as it would take pressure off BMA officials and place responsibility for the evacuee group in other hands – providing a British government department would step up. The main issue was that the evacuees needed to be moved as soon as possible:

Our chief desire is, of course, to get rid of these extremely troublesome people altogether; their presence here is almost intolerable. We sincerely hope plans are being made for them to be put in some permanent camp, rather than to be left here until they are resettled (which in some cases may be never). I may add that the DCA said that we would only be saddled with them for a few months.⁵⁵¹

This rather blunt response from the Acting Chief Administrator, demonstrates how tense the situation regarding the Maltese and Balkan evacuees had become. Perceived criticism of its efforts to arrange resettlement or repatriation had not gone down well. However, the Foreign Office was only stung into action by a possible financial burden in the case of returnees to Turkey. It is worth noting here that the Foreign Office was appallingly slow to respond to the Consul-General’s (Izmir) question as to whether he was authorised to give out relief. By November 1948 the situation had considerably worsened: ‘the plight of these people is

⁵⁴⁸ War Office to Crawford, 16 September 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁵⁴⁹ Crawford to Dolan, 22 September 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid

becoming acute. ... The matter is particularly urgent in the case of Thomas Serra and his wife and two young children who are still without winter garments and in considerable distress owing to under nourishment and other privations. To make matters worse Thomas Serra himself is a sick man and practically helpless' he wrote to the Consular Department.⁵⁵² It took another six weeks for authorisation to make relief payments to former evacuees to come through following a decision about the 'future policy for the assistance of Maltese in Turkey.'⁵⁵³ Interim financial support should have been made. Sadly, evacuees who returned to Izmir seemed to have gone full circle, no better - or even worse off - than when they left in 1941.

Another attempt by the BMA at arranging repatriation had certainly set off the frustration felt by British officials in Asmara about moving the Balkan Maltese on, as well as increasing tension with the Foreign Office. It also reflected negatively on how it was handling the inhabitants of Mai Habar Camp. This was the refusal of a small group of evacuees to embark on a ship to the United Kingdom. The incident took place in July 1948, with both sides (BMA and the British Evacuees Association) reporting what took place.

Maltese Evacuees Protest

Briefly, arrangements were in hand for eight Maltese evacuees to proceed to the UK where they had either friends or relations with paperwork in order and only passages to be booked when they came available. Berths were booked upon a ship departing from Massawa on 23 July, but the evacuees were unhappy with the allowances given to them for travelling expenses and the purchase of clothing, so refused to leave. These allowances had been set by BMA administrators.⁵⁵⁴ Officials were sent to Mai Habar Camp to persuade the group to go:

Others from this Headquarters went to the camp and explained the position to the eight persons concerned, and later to a mass meeting of the camp. The eight persons still refused to accept the allowances and refuse to leave as arranged for them. Their claim was that as all evacuees who had left the camp

⁵⁵² British Consul-General, Izmir, to Consular Department, Foreign Office, 25 November 1948, 'Proposals for emigration to the Argentine, Australia and Eritrea of evacuees of Maltese, Gibraltarian and Cypriot Origin', TNA: FO 369/3961, K12232

⁵⁵³ Consular Department to Consul-General, Izmir, 8 January 1949, TNA: FO 369/3961, K12332.

⁵⁵⁴ Crawford to Civil Affairs Directorate, War Office, 27 July 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

when in India had received 500 rupees, they therefore considered they had a right to £35 and would not accept any less. Today the Maltese Evacuees Committee was interviewed and it was pointed out to them that it was for this Administration to say what allowances they would receive, both in the camp and for travelling, and that their behaviour was considered intolerable. As they have been continually troublesome ever since they have been here, they were warned as to future behaviour.⁵⁵⁵

With figures being given in rupees and British sterling across the correspondence it is difficult to make an accurate comparison with allowances calculated by the BMA. The British Evacuee Association quoted an amount of £37.10.0 which had been given to evacuees leaving India for Australia, while pointing out the BMA gave only £10 for a clothing allowance and 2/6d per day for incidental expenses.⁵⁵⁶ According to J. T. Crawford, 'allowances as ruled by the DCF and A were 270/-' which seems to be a round figure for the group of eight.⁵⁵⁷ This works out at £33.15.0 per person, a difference of £5 between the Indian and Eritrean allowances. While it is understandable that the British Evacuees Association (on behalf of all evacuees) expected continuity with allowances, the BMA was acting in the best interests of the British Government, keeping a careful eye on spending. What had been calculated was only a few pounds short of the amount that the evacuees would accept.

Evidence suggests that what actually worsened the situation was the heavy-handed response of the acting chief administrator and the treatment of representatives of the BEA both before and after the meeting of the entire Mai Habar Camp. Additionally, Crawford's quick reporting to the Civil Affairs Directorate and warning that the evacuees would most likely complain suggests that he was aware that he may have mishandled the incident. On the other hand, the inflexible stance taken by the BEA on behalf of all evacuees did not help the situation. Also, what pressure was put on the eight evacuees to refuse the lower allowance as this would have set a precedent for future payments to those travelling?

According to the BEA account of events questions were raised about the allowances immediately after the evacuees were notified that they would be leaving with the claim that it was not enough to financially undertake the journey. Mr R. G. Mamo – Vice President of the Association - went to Asmara to enquire in person and invite officers to visit the camp

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ British Evacuees Association to Rees-Williams, 26 July 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁵⁵⁷ Crawford to Civil Affairs Directorate, War Office, 27 July 1948. DCF was Director of Civil Finance, while 'A' presumably stood for Administrator. TNA: FO 1015/52.

to ‘fully explain’⁵⁵⁸ Captain Podesta and Mr R. K. Parr arrived next day requesting only to speak to those who were due to travel. Allowances had not changed although ‘at the same time the officers informed them that every assistance would be afforded them on their arrival at port of destination’.⁵⁵⁹ Podesta ‘strongly emphasised’ that they should accept the cash allotment. This closed meeting gave them an opportunity to speak with the eight evacuees without the influence of the Association or other camp residents. However, it was clear that this tactic was unsuccessful especially after the two officers had addressed a general meeting for the party ‘unanimously and categorically’ refused the offer made as ‘quite insufficient to cover their travelling expenses’.⁵⁶⁰ Interestingly, the author of the letter, George Griscti, President of the BEA, carefully pointed out that evacuees would receive assistance at their destination which had not been mentioned at the camp meeting or relayed to him personally.⁵⁶¹ It is doubtful that this would have made any difference to the outcome but suggests that the full facts were not given.

Within a few days representatives from the BEA were summoned to a meeting at BMA Headquarters with the Acting Chief Secretary, Crawford, and Assistant Political Secretary (Podesta).⁵⁶² The former put forward very bluntly the position of the Maltese evacuees and his fury at their obstruction: ‘It was explained to the Committee that further behaviours of this sort would not be tolerated and that this Administration insisted on discipline and obedience.’⁵⁶³ The President (Griscti) expressed gratitude to the British Government but reiterated the complaint about travel allowances being too low and that evacuees were entitled to more money to cover their expenses while settling down.⁵⁶⁴ At this point the interview became extremely heated and was ended. Clearly Crawford had lost patience and also his temper, while the Maltese Committee still felt its demands were reasonable and fair. In particular, the President found Crawford’s remarks very offensive, so much so that he sent a transcript of the conversation with the letter to the War Office in early August:

⁵⁵⁸ BEA, Mai Habar Camp, to the Under-Secretary of State for War and Colonial Office, 2 August 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid. Podesta is described as a CAO (Civil Affairs Officer) while Parr was from the Office of Controller of Labour.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² File Note, BMA, Eritrea – No.53/C, ‘Subject: Report on interview with Maltese Committee on 27 July 1948’, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

I wish to point out and emphasise that what I consider a great affront and indignity were received from Lt Col Crawford and was not directed to me alone but involved all the Maltese evacuees whom I represented. I would impress upon you that being an ex-officer, and having served in the capacity as Secretary to British Military Attaché, British Legation, Sofia and British Legation Athens until such time I had to take refuge with the staff of the latter in Egypt, also in the consideration of my advanced age (70) it is the very first rebuke that I have suffered in my life under such circumstance, and an outstanding insult to be shown the door.⁵⁶⁵

However provoked, the conduct of the Acting Chief Secretary was unprofessional, while the insistence of the Maltese evacuees to have what they felt they were entitled to demonstrates the extent of their institutionalisation. Neither side was prepared to give ground, so both lost out, especially the group of eight evacuees who had the chance of passages to resettle in the United Kingdom. The incident did not sway a change in the amount given a travel/clothing allowance, but it certainly cemented for the BMA, Eritrea, that the inhabitants of Mai Habar Camp were troublesome in the extreme. It would be speculation to assume that Crawford received admonishment for his part in the debacle. However, a letter from the Chief Administrator in early September 1948 in reply to one from the Civil Affairs Directorate indicates that enquires were made: ‘With regard to the complaint that their deputation was not treated properly, attached copy of the file note on the report of the interview, which was made immediately afterwards, explains the position. Needless to say the “verbatim” account of the interview is much distorted.’⁵⁶⁶

This refers to the transcription of the conversation between Crawford and Griscti mentioned above and it does not read as a distorted version of what occurred.⁵⁶⁷ Rather, it reveals that Griscti had been unaware of some details told to the eight evacuees who were due to leave - this group included the Vice President of the BEA, Mr R. G. Mamo. Additionally, the account conveys objectively how humiliating an experience it was for Griscti and exposes the depth of Crawford’s antipathy towards the evacuees in general. The fact that an extract from Webb’s letter to the Chief Administrator warning him that the evacuees needed a firm hand is quoted by the BMA to back up Crawford’s handling of the

⁵⁶⁵ BEA, Mai Habar Camp, to the Under-Secretary of State for War and Colonial Office, 2 August 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁵⁶⁶ Civil Administrator, BMA, Eritrea, to Civil Affairs Directorate, London, 6 September 1948, sent in reply to letter of 25 August 1948, FO TNA: 1015/52.

⁵⁶⁷ Annexe to letter from the BEA to Under-Secretary of State for War and Colonial Office, 2 August 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

matter demonstrates how influential this was. Doubt is also cast on the legitimacy of their British subject status: ‘The description “British Evacuees Association”... that these people call themselves, is somewhat misleading; these people are Maltese and Balkan evacuees, some of whom claim British nationality.’⁵⁶⁸ As the British Government had taken responsibility for the evacuees from the beginning as British subjects (not British nationals) the title of the Association fitted the bill. It gave the group an identity and cohesion when fundamentally due to circumstances beyond their control they were displaced and even stateless persons.

A postscript to this episode was that just over a month after they should have travelled, six evacuees from the original group left for the United Kingdom on the *Empire Ken* (31 august) indicating that the travel and clothing allowances had been accepted. All – Horace Daws, Francis and Mary Borg, Jeanne Bugeja, Mary and Henry Wiltshire – had guarantees of maintenance and accommodation.⁵⁶⁹ Notably absent were Mamo (Vice President of the BEA) and his wife who had papers in order to travel to Dominica via England to join family.⁵⁷⁰ For whatever reason, their departure was delayed, eventually leaving from Cyprus after the evacuee camp had moved there (July 1949).⁵⁷¹ Griscti and his wife also left from Cyprus settling in Istanbul, Turkey.⁵⁷² It had been a struggle to despatch these six evacuees from over five hundred currently resident at Mai Habar Camp and efforts continued to arrange resettlement in Australia for more. Gamble, the Resettlement Officer, found progress frustratingly slow.

Undesirable Migrants

This was the third strand of the BMA’s efforts to unburden itself of the Maltese and Balkan evacuees and initially was equally as unsuccessful as attempts to arrange to send parties back to Turkey or the United Kingdom. There were around 200 evacuees who wanted to settle in Australia, many of whom had the necessary paperwork completed while they were resident at the British Evacuee Camp, Coimbatore. However, in essence, the process had to

⁵⁶⁸ Civil Administrator, BMA, Eritrea, to Civil Affairs Directorate, 6 September 1948.

⁵⁶⁹ Crawford to British Consul-General, Cairo, 7 September 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52. See also ‘List of Persons’ who had guaranteed maintenance and accommodation in the UK compiled by the British Evacuees Association, Mai Habar Camp, TNA: FO 1015/53.

⁵⁷⁰ ‘List of Persons’.

⁵⁷¹ List of Maltese refugees repatriated 1 August 1949 to 15 June 1951 who had signed undertakings to repay advances etc, ‘Maltese in Cyprus’, TNA: CO 67/372/8.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

start again due to the move to Eritrea with new officials involved in making enquiries and arrangements. Moreover, the post-war Australian immigration policy favoured certain types of immigrants. This policy was initiated by Arthur Calwell who was appointed the first Minister for Immigration in the Australian Federal Government in 1945.⁵⁷³ With a shortfall in the number of British-born emigrants, Calwell turned to Europe to recruit suitable immigrants from among millions of displaced persons to provide a core of labour for Australia's industrial expansion.

Eric Richards describes how Calwell spent three months touring 23 countries returning 'convinced that European refugees were the best immediate pool of mass migration'.⁵⁷⁴ A particular attraction for the Minister for Immigration was their suitability and the advantageous low investment the dominion would need to make to bring them to Australia as refugees as they would be subsidised by the International Refugee Organisation.⁵⁷⁵ He was so keen to secure the cream of displaced persons rather than seeing them dispersed elsewhere that he offered to pay 'the extra £10 required for the passage'. The IRO would, however, need to arrange the shipping to bring them to Australia.⁵⁷⁶ In another shrewd move directed at integrating and popularising these European migrants he began referring to them as 'New Australians'.⁵⁷⁷ A term which no doubt aimed to make them more palatable to white Australians of predominantly British stock.

Nationalities favoured were Poles, Yugoslavs, Ukrainians, Hungarians, and Czechs as well as Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians.⁵⁷⁸ A large group from the Baltic States were in the vanguard of post-war immigration, selected to reassure the white Australian public that the right kind of people were coming to settle in the country. Nicknamed the 'Beautiful Balts' they embodied all the ideal migrant attributes – fine physical specimens, hardy, industrious, and predominantly blond and blue eyed – 'splendid types' all round.⁵⁷⁹ It was

⁵⁷³ Calwell was appointed by the new Labour Prime Minister, Ben Chifley.

<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/calwell-arthur-augustus-9667>

⁵⁷⁴ Eric Richards, *Destination Australia: Migration to Australia Since 1901* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2008), p. 182.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid. An agreement was finalised with IRO for 4,000 DP migrants in 1947 and 12,000 in 1948.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid. First coined in 1947, the tag 'New Australian' was, by 1949, in general use.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 185.

⁵⁷⁹ See Jayne Krisjanous and Djavlonbek Kadirov, 'Migrants are Splendid Types: The Beautiful Balts', *Journal of Micromarketing* 38:4 (2018), pp. 425-40. Australian academic Jayne Persian has written about DP immigrants extensively, for example: *Beautiful Balts: From Displaced Persons to New Australians* (Sydney: New South Publishing, 2017); 'Chiefly Liked Them Blond: DP Immigrants for Australia', *History Australia* 12:2 (2015), pp. 80-101; 'Displaced Persons and the Politics of International Categorisation(s)', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 58:4 (2012), pp. 481-96; 'The Dirty Vat: European Migration to Australia from Shanghai, 1946 -1947', *Australian Historical Studies* 50:1 (2019), pp. 21-40.

this publicity campaign orchestrated by Calwell which presented the ideal immigrant that softened the way for the arrival of other European displaced persons. As Shephard comments the label ‘Balt’ with Calwell’s encouragement was applied to immigrants of many European nationalities and ‘for years most Australians referred to non-British, non-Mediterranean immigrants as ‘Balts’ – a misuse of the term to which many of the immigrants, including some from the Baltic area, vehemently objected’.⁵⁸⁰

British migrants from the United Kingdom were still very much welcomed in the dominion and Calwell’s ‘New Australian’ immigration policy was gradually expanded with agreements reached with various European countries to facilitate a steady stream of suitable immigrants. According to Richards, ‘the new arrangements began with Malta in 1948 (which was in a special relationship with Britain and the Empire) and then expanded first to The Netherlands in 1951, then to Italy in 1952, Germany in 1952 and later Greece, Spain, Sweden and beyond.’⁵⁸¹ The Maltese and Balkan evacuees in Eritrea were not covered by any of these agreements, and with Australia’s pre-occupation with recruiting young, fit and healthy displaced persons, even their British Subject status gave no advantage. In addition, their southern European origins made them less desirable at a time when there was glut of ‘splendid types’ of migrants.

This background explains the attitude of the Australian official who was contacted by Gamble, the resettlement officer in Eritrea. During July 1948 he sent several letters to the Australian Trade Commissioner in Cairo explaining his association with a camp ‘of British subjects of European descent’, two hundred of whom were ‘very anxious to settle in Australia’ and checking where he should send their application forms.⁵⁸² (As there was no official Australian diplomatic representation in Egypt yet, the Commission acted as a conduit to Federal Government departments.) All had valid British passports and the majority ‘are in sound health, and on records forwarded here, from India, where they were evacuees for six years, of good character.’⁵⁸³ Gamble also drew attention to some of the negatives – they had little money, none had confirmed jobs in Australia or accommodation – but he pointed out that ‘some of their number have been admitted into Australia from India’.⁵⁸⁴ This was a

⁵⁸⁰ Shephard, *The Long Road Home*, p. 343.

⁵⁸¹ Richards, *Destination Australia*, p. 186.

⁵⁸² Gamble, Labour Office, Asmara, Eritrea, to Australian Trade Commissioner, Cairo, 1 July 1948, TNA: FO 1015/53. For further information about Australian Trade Commissions see Boris Schedvin, *Emissaries of Trade: A History of the Australian Commissioner Service* (Barton, ACT: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2008).

⁵⁸³ Gamble to Australian Trade Commissioner, Cairo, undated (sent possibly 17 July 1948), TNA: FO 1015/53.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

truthful approach to take, although guarantees of employment, maintenance and accommodation provided essential support for successful applications to enter Australia.

The reply from J. Wilcox, Information Officer, was on the surface, quite encouraging. He suggested that given the large number of individuals involved it 'may be simpler for an Officer of this Commission, on your request, to fly down and discuss migration more fully'⁵⁸⁵ Wilcox also provided some general information about requirements for entry into Australia and requested more details about the camp, asking 'What kind of 'BRITISH' have you in the camp? From one name I have, that is Borg, I assume that there are Maltese amongst them. Would you let me know whether the majority are local British Maltese, British Cypriots, Gibraltarians, from Aden Colony, etc., for there are many variations for different shades of British?'.⁵⁸⁶ The Australian official was familiar with 'different shades of British' but with no knowledge of the existence of Mai Habar and its purpose he could not identify its residents. This was cleared up by further information provided by Gamble in his second letter which seems to have crossed in the post with Wilcox's reply where he specified that the camp's residents were Maltese.⁵⁸⁷

Despite the undercurrent of racial suspicion, Wilcox finished his reply with some encouraging words: 'I should think Australia would be most interest[ed] in your charges as the majority are young people with children and although we are particularly anxious to secure young migrants we would accept their parents also.'⁵⁸⁸ Buoyed by this response Gamble responded with an invitation for an officer from the Australian Trade Commission to visit the camp.⁵⁸⁹ Unfortunately, nothing happened immediately. Another telegram indicates that the resettlement officer was 'anxious for a reply' and that there were now 250 Maltese wanting to go to Australia.⁵⁹⁰ Gamble's keenness reflects the BMA's determination to resettle evacuees as soon as possible by directly contacting Australian officials who could help. As Wilcox was corresponding with the Department of Immigration, Canberra, it suggests that he was liaising between the federal government office and the Australian Trade Commission. A memorandum sent from the information officer reveals that he eventually

⁵⁸⁵ J. Wilcox, Information Officer, Cairo, to Gamble, undated, TNA: FO 1015/53. Although in correspondence the Information Officer is addressed as J. Wilson, this appears to be a misreading by Gamble as in documents held by the National Archives of Australia his name is given as Wilcox. See 'Maltese Evacuees in Cyprus', NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

⁵⁸⁶ Wilcox to Gamble, 17 July 1948, TNA: FO 1015/53.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., and Gamble to Wilcox, 29 July 1948, TNA: FO 1015/53.

⁵⁸⁸ Wilcox to Gamble, 17 July 1948.

⁵⁸⁹ Gamble to Wilcox, 29 July 1948.

⁵⁹⁰ Gamble to Wilcox, 14 August 1948, TNA: FO 1015/53.

visited in late August.⁵⁹¹ Wilcox happened to be in Eritrea on other business so ‘took the opportunity of having a chat with the BMA and, without disclosing my identity to the inmates, spent half a day at the Mai Habar camp.’⁵⁹² This was a wise decision as he would no doubt have been inundated with questions from evacuees. After giving a summary of the history of, and situation regarding the resettlement, Wilcox gave his opinion of the evacuees themselves:

On the whole the inmates of Mai Habar camp are not very impressive, but this may not be a fair remark as I am comparing them with the Yugo-Slav refugees seen at El Shatt camp and with the normal Maltese residents of Egypt. They have done little to improve or smarten their camp at Mai Habar but this spiritlessness is not surprising after 7 – 8 years living without a purpose. The camp is rather heavily weighted in the upper ages and few of the adults speak English to any extent. Most of the youngsters have a smattering of the language as they had some tuition in English during their stay in India. The children have not the appeal of the Yugo-Slav children, but again that is a personal reaction – uniformly brown-eyed black-haired youngsters compared with blue-eyed fair-skinned kiddies.⁵⁹³

It is creditable that the Australian information officer acknowledged his bias when comparing the children, but it was clear the Maltese youngsters did not have the desired attributes required of potential New Australians. The general malaise within the camp was not encouraging either, although some sympathy was expressed for ‘inmates’ current circumstances. The use of ‘inmates’ was probably used unthinkingly, but it carried a negative inference. The Maltese and Balkan evacuees were neither prisoners nor internees, or displaced persons as those in El Shatt Camp. They were in a sense misplaced British subjects. Additionally, although Wilcox was aware of the general facts about British efforts to resettle the evacuees, for example, the difficulty of re-entry to Turkey, he gained the impression that evacuees had insufficient money to pay the fare to Australia: ‘if it is resolved to take any of these Maltese it would have to be on a completely free basis’, he wrote.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹¹ Memorandum ‘British Evacuees (Maltese) in Eritrea. Maltese Evacuees in Cyprus – Question of Admission’, 4 September 1948, NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

⁵⁹² Ibid. Wilcox was part of the Reconnaissance Party for the IRO Airlift Migration Plan mentioned above.

⁵⁹³ Memorandum ‘British Evacuees (Maltese) in Eritrea. Maltese Evacuees in Cyprus – Question of Admission’.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

It was true that individual evacuees and families could not afford fares but the British Government was already committed to funding passages and providing travel allowances, so this was not an issue. This had already been done with the group of Maltese evacuees who departed from India to Australia arriving in August 1947, and who slipped under the Department of Immigration's radar at this time thanks to Webb's intervention. Wilcox did correct this mistake in a later memorandum after attending a conference arranged by the Labour Counsellor (M. T. Audsley) at the British Embassy, Cairo where Maltese in North and East Africa were discussed. Here he learnt that the Labour Counsellor was 'already authorised by the UK Treasury to meet all transportation costs'.⁵⁹⁵ It is surprising that this had not been disclosed to him during his visit to Mai Habar Camp as he had met with the camp director who 'hoping for some early resettlement move ... had documented the people according to country of choice and prepared medical histories of about the standard of our 47A'.⁵⁹⁶ It would have been a note of positivity among the minus points stacking up against their possible resettlement in Australia.

An official at the Department of Immigration considered Wilcox's first memorandum, summarising the drawbacks of the Maltese in Eritrea as potential immigrants. These ranged from having families with too many children (three or more) which would make finding accommodation difficult, to their uncertain financial status which indicated that many would more likely 'become a public charge for some time'.⁵⁹⁷ As a group, the evacuees were not 'desirable settlers'; but the official noted that individuals with small families and verified 'special skills' might be 'desirable migrants'.⁵⁹⁸ Two options were then presented for direction as to whether:

(a) the Australian Government Commissioner be authorised to obtain further information with a view to determining the suitability of individuals for settlement in Australia,

or

(b) He be advised that because of accommodation problems Australia is unable to accept any members of this group.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁵ Memorandum to Secretary, Department of Immigration, Canberra, from Wilcox, 13 September 1948, NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

⁵⁹⁶ Memorandum 'British Evacuees (Maltese) in Eritrea' – Question of Admission. 47A was the medical examination form for migrants and was presented along with Form 50 (passport and personal information) and Form 40 (application for admission of relatives or friends to Australia).

⁵⁹⁷ Handwritten note to Assistant Secretary, signed by G. Watson, 6 October 1948, NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

The second option sounded reasonable but was a convenient excuse. It was certainly less prejudicial than just stating they were the wrong kind of potential immigrants but racism was at the root of Australia's immigration policy. It had also been mentioned that Mr Wilcox 'describes them as "spiritless" and compares them unfavourably with the Yugo-Slavs he saw at El Shatt'.⁶⁰⁰

The Assistant Secretary (A Nutt) to whom the note was addressed recommended paragraph (b) to the Secretary (Tas Hayes).⁶⁰¹ This does not appear to be the final decision adopted by the Minister for Immigration as there is a reference elsewhere that implies that Maltese evacuees from Eritrea selected by the Australian representative were acceptable as long as the British Government funded their travel to the dominion.⁶⁰² As will be seen later, the lack of clarity and misunderstandings surrounding the Mai Habar evacuees' eligibility for migration to Australia caused a livid response from the Department of Immigration when a party of Maltese from Eritrea arrived unexpectedly in February 1949.

A Foreign Office Intervention

Since the Maltese and Balkan evacuees had moved to Eritrea in January 1948, the British Military Administration under Sir Francis Drew had been trying doggedly to arrange their resettlement. This was on the BMA's own initiative as they wanted to be 'rid' of them and were continuing on all the groundwork done by Webb in India in preparing lists of evacuees and their preferred destinations, arranging visas, passports, and other necessary paperwork. In addition, the Colonial Office was still negotiating an agreement with the Cyprus Government hoping that it would accept the evacuees there, so there was no guarantee that the entire group could be moved in the near future. The Foreign Office had remained remarkably quiet, keeping a distance from the issue as it believed that the Maltese and Balkan evacuees were entirely the responsibility of the Colonial Office. However, as noted above, an enquiry from the Consul-General at Izmir regarding relief payments to returned evacuees from India, prompted an urgent reaction. This put a halt to any more returning to Turkey and

⁶⁰⁰ Handwritten note to Assistant Secretary, 29 October 1948.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Ibid.

involved the Consular Section at the British Embassy, Cairo, in future resettlement arrangements.

Remarkably, although the Foreign Office was in the information loop about the group of Maltese and Balkan evacuees, the British Embassy Consular Section, Cairo, was apparently uninformed. In a letter to the Chief Administrator, E. P. Wiltshire, acting Consul General, explained that:

I have the honour to inform you that I have recently learnt of the existence of a group of approximately 200 Maltese British subjects (evacuees) at Asmara. The Resettlement Officer, Labour Office, Asmara, wrote to the Australian Commissioner Cairo in July about them, and I have recently received copies of that letter and of the reply thereto of the Information Officer of the Australian Commission.⁶⁰³

Two hundred refers only to the evacuees wishing to resettle in Australia, as there were approximately five hundred and fifty inhabitants at the Mai Habar Camp. On advice from the Civil Affairs Branch, Cairo, Wiltshire was contacting the BMA, Eritrea, directly to find out further information, not only about the 'welfare and emigration of these refugees' but also a possible resettlement scheme which possibly had been discussed 'at a high level'.⁶⁰⁴ There was some confusion over what was meant by 'at a high level'. The Australian Trade Commission thought a scheme might be being discussed between the War Office and Australian High Commission in London, but this was conjecture. It actually referred to migration and recruitment schemes being set up in Egypt to help British subjects there (see below). Wiltshire ended the letter as follows:

For your information the Labour Counsellor of His Majesty's Embassy here and I are concerned with the arrangements for the emigration to Australia or elsewhere of many members of the British Community including Maltese, in Egypt, and since Eritrea is in my Consular district, I should be grateful for any information regarding these refugees and potential immigrants you may be able to let me have.⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰³ Wiltshire to Chief Administrator, BMA, Eritrea, 14 August 1948, TNA: FO 369/3960, K9408.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

As the evacuees had been in Eritrea since January, it is remarkable that the Consular Section at the British Embassy was in ignorance of their whereabouts for nine months until alerted to their presence by the Australian Trade Commissioner, Wilcox. This can be explained by a number of factors. Firstly, the Foreign Office understood that the move to Eritrea from India was of a temporary nature. It was taken for granted that the Colonial Office was in the process of arranging for the group to be moved with all hopes pinned on Cyprus. Therefore, there was no reason for the Consular Section to become involved. Additionally, paperwork for evacuees wishing to resettle or return to Turkey had already been completed during their time in India, so the BMA already had documentation to complete or begin applications. Secondly, staff at the British Embassy in Cairo were heavily involved preparing resettlement schemes for the British community in Egypt, especially for Maltese. Negotiations with Australia were ongoing, so the last thing needed was a parallel arrangement being organised elsewhere.

There had been European settler communities in Egypt for centuries, including Greek, Cypriot, Maltese, and also Jewish and Syrian which were becoming increasingly vulnerable due to the Egyptian government policy of ‘Egyptianization’ and diminishing British influence in the region.⁶⁰⁶ A British military presence and political influence had continued during the Second World War as the country was a strategic hub for both the African and Mediterranean theatres of war. This was in spite of the Treaty of 1936 which agreed that Britain would withdraw its military forces from Egypt except for a reduced number to protect the Suez Canal Zone. In the post-war era resentment built as there was no sign of a British withdrawal. Following rioting and protests, plans were finally announced in mid-1946 for the reduction and removal of British forces to the Canal Zone. As a result many British subjects (mainly Maltese) who had been employed by British Armed Forces, for example in the naval dockyards, found themselves without jobs. There was also a drive towards Egyptianization in the workplace, that introduced a preference for employing Egyptians instead of foreigners.⁶⁰⁷ York explains ‘The Maltese presence in Egypt was linked to the British presence there, and the Maltese prospered in Egypt in such areas as the civil service, the professions, commerce, the military and trade. All this came under threat when

⁶⁰⁶ See for example, Najat Abdullaq, *Jewish and Greek Communities in Egypt: Entrepreneurship and Business before Nasser* (London: I B Tauris, 2016); Barbara Curli, ‘Dames Employees at the Suez Canal’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46:3 (2014), pp. 553-76; Angelos Dalachanis, *The Greek Exodus from Egypt: Diaspora, Politics and Emigration* (New York: Berghahn, 2017).

⁶⁰⁷ Specifically, the Egyptian Government introduced legislation including Law 138. See Floresca Karanasou, ‘Egyptianisation: the 1947 Company Law (Phd Thesis, University of Oxford, 1992); Barbara Curli, ‘Dames Employees’; Robert L. Tignor, *State, Private Enterprise and Economic Change in Egypt, 1918-1952* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

the Egyptian Government decided to give preference to its own people in matters of employment'.⁶⁰⁸

The British Embassy in Cairo was therefore concerned with the welfare of all British subjects affected by these changes including Resident Minister, Edwin Chapman-Andrews, took a lead in finding a solution to their predicament following an appeal from British communities for an assisted migration scheme to be set up. This would encompass Anglo Saxon, Maltese, Cypriot and miscellaneous (for example Gibraltarians and Indians).⁶⁰⁹ Financial assistance was required to fund passages and also a resettlement grant and recommendations put forward by British Ambassador Sir Ronald Campbell received approval from the Foreign Office in July 1948.⁶¹⁰ These were:

- (1) a formula to provide financial assistance towards emigration expenses briefly involving a grant equivalent to 12 months' relief payments for those in receipt of relief and advances for other suitable emigrants who would become distressed if they remained in Egypt, and
- (2) the regular allocation of berths at the normal tourist rate (averaging £60 on British migrant carrying ships on the United Kingdom – Australia run).⁶¹¹

This, in essence, was the 'Australia Scheme' which aimed to assist migration to the dominion of British subjects now residing in Egypt. However it still required the Australian Government's agreement. The second scheme (approved by the Foreign Office in August 1948) was to send selected Maltese to the United Kingdom, beginning with single men and women.⁶¹² Like schemes for displaced persons the intention was to recruit workers.

With concern over the return of Maltese evacuees to Turkey and the BMA's direct approach to the Australian Trade Commission about resettlement in Australia, to protect its own interests the Foreign Office decided to channel all applications from the Mai Habar Camp through the British Consulate in Egypt. This ensured that only suitable evacuees were put forward - having been screened first - with the correct paperwork and guarantees of

⁶⁰⁸ York, *The Maltese in Australia*, p. 125.

⁶⁰⁹ Memorandum by Chapman-Andrews, 27 September 1948, FO 369/3961, TNA. Chapman-Andrews served as Minister in Cairo between 1947 and 1951. For an account of his career see Peter Leslie, *Chapman-Andrews and the Emperor* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2005).

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.* Sir Ronald Campbell succeeded Lord Killearn (Sir Miles Lampson) as Ambassador in 1946, remaining in the post until 1950.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁶¹² Memorandum by Chapman-Andrews, 27 September 1948. Correspondence regarding the UK scheme and applicants are found in TNA: FO 369/3958 to 3961.

maintenance and accommodation in place if required. This also provided an opportunity for the Consulate to monitor the resettlement process and avoid any mistakes which might jeopardise the migration schemes set up for British subjects in Egypt. As the Foreign Office (especially through the British Ambassador in Turkey) had been responsible for the evacuation of the Maltese and Balkan British subjects in the first place, it had a duty towards their continuing welfare. After years of living in camps the evacuee group were apathetic, dejected, and dependent on British Government financial support. Chapman-Andrews even used their current state as an example of the potential impact on the Maltese community in Egypt if a decision was not made about their future:

A warning of what may happen if these people are allowed to remain in this position is given by the 550 Maltese refugees from Greece and Turkey at present in Eritrea who have been drawing relief in some form or another for 7 or 8 years and who were recently reported by an Australian Government Immigration Officer as being 80% unemployable.⁶¹³

The Foreign Office was actually quite apologetic for adding to the burden of the British Embassy staff at Cairo. When writing to Chapman-Andrews to inform him that ‘we are now bringing you in on the question of resettlement of the Maltese evacuees’, Davidson acknowledged ‘I am afraid this is a rather tiresome question to add to the already existing resettlement problems with which you are concerned. I think, however, it is the most practical arrangement for disposing of these people in penny numbers while we are pursuing at this end the question of admission to Cyprus.’⁶¹⁴ In fact the BMA through the War Office were being instructed to refer only certain resettlement enquiries to the Consul General in Cairo from evacuees wishing to go to a foreign territory, Australia or the United Kingdom. Requests to travel to colonial territory or anywhere in the British Commonwealth remained with the BMA in Eritrea.⁶¹⁵ This separation was necessary as such cases would need to be referred to the Colonial or Commonwealth Relations Offices, and it did underline that these departments had a responsibility for resettlement of the Mai Habar Camp residents too.

For their part, the British Military Administration in Eritrea was relieved to pass the resettlement issue on (or at least part of it). In early September all available information

⁶¹³ Memorandum by Chapman-Andrews, 27 September 1948

⁶¹⁴ Davidson to Chapman-Andrews, 25 August 1948, TNA: FO 396/3960, K8573.

⁶¹⁵ Foreign Office to Cairo, 23 August 1948, TNA: FO 369/3960, K8573. It appears that an interdepartmental meeting had been held in London on 21 August 1948 where this was discussed and decisions taken. ‘Balkan and Maltese Evacuees’, Crawford to Consul General, British Embassy, Cairo, 7 September 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

about the evacuees – notes, lists and correspondence - was sent to the Consul-General Cairo with an update to follow: ‘A list is being prepared with full details (profession, degree of skill, physical state, education, etc, etc) and will be forwarded to you as soon as completed’.⁶¹⁶ It was also conveyed that while the evacuees were being well looked after most were ‘anxious to leave Eritrea’.⁶¹⁷ This information was duly received by the Acting Consul-General. In a letter to Davidson at the Foreign Office, Chapman-Andrews summarised the actions to be taken by the Consular Section to assist the resettlement of Balkan and Maltese evacuees. This involved a number of laborious steps to ascertain which persons could be sent where and would replicate much of the groundwork already carried out by the BMA.⁶¹⁸

There was particular concern over whether any of the evacuees could be sent immediately to Britain under the employment scheme set up for Egyptian Maltese:

It is unfortunately the case that few of them seem really qualified owing to advanced age, bad health, and family commitments. Nevertheless this possibility is already being investigated, for we have been fortunate enough to obtain the promised assistance of a Ministry of Labour Official who happens to be visiting various refugees’ camps in tropical Africa and will give the Labour counsellor here a report which should enable him to judge the employability in the United Kingdom of single persons, whether male or female, in the camp.⁶¹⁹

The tight selection criteria for this fledgling scheme – only single persons – which suited Britain’s urgent need for workers excluded young married couples with children. Such families should have been considered as both parents had an incentive to relocate, find employment and build a future for their children. Additionally, there was no certainty that young single men and women would want to leave their families to travel alone to Britain. These were children who had grown into adulthood during their time as evacuees but were not ready to strike out by themselves. Even families comprised of parents and children of

⁶¹⁶ Crawford to Consul-General, British Embassy, Cairo, 7 September 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52. See also War Office to Crawford, 16 September 1948, for its perspective on decisions taken at the interdepartmental meeting.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ A L Mayall for Chapman-Andrews, to Davidson, 23 September 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁶¹⁹ Mayall to Davidson, 23 September 1948. The Ministry of Labour representative was G. E. D. Ball who had attended the same conference as Wilcox at the British Embassy Cairo – Memorandum to Secretary, Department of Immigration, Canberra from Wilcox 13 September 1948.

working age preferred not to be separated from each other. However the issue was that even middle-aged men and women still capable of working were not such desirable migrants. They had fewer years of potential productivity and a greater risk of becoming a financial burden on the state.

Another drawback of this scheme was that for the Mai Habar Camp evacuees Australia was the most popular choice for resettlement. Unless there was some kind of connection to Britain, such as relatives already there who, no one was that keen to go. Married children could offer to support parents, for example, Jean Bugeja who left Eritrea in September 1948, was joining her daughter Celestine Lee who had married a British soldier in India and returned to the UK with him at the end of the war.⁶²⁰ Unfortunately, lack of shipping berths to Australia was holding up any possibility of a speedy resettlement. Chapman-Andrews also suggested that evacuees in Eritrea were eligible for resettlement expenses devised for British subjects in Egypt as set out in the financial formula described above. Although not receiving consular relief, he queried that they qualified by being ‘a charge to the taxpayer and in the Consular district of His Majesty’s consul-general, Cairo’.⁶²¹

This suggestion needed the agreement of the Foreign Office and Chapman-Andrews did point out that potentially it might cause a ‘tremendous debt load’ if authorised.⁶²² The financial responsibility for the Maltese and Balkan evacuees was in any case a contentious issue with government offices reluctant to accept this responsibility. As a scale of travel and maintenance allowances was already in place, this would have been an unnecessary change at this time. Surprisingly though, after consultation with the Treasury, Davidson at the Foreign Office replied:

We agree that those who are in other ways suitable for emigration to Australia may be treated in accordance with part I of your formula. Apart from the shipping difficulties with which we are grappling at the present time, I most certainly agree that there will be a large residue to cope with who will be unsuited for resettlement either here or in Australia. It is for that reason that we are doing our best to find a destination for them in Cyprus and we shall let you know just as soon as possible what the prospects are.⁶²³

⁶²⁰ See list of persons who have guaranteed maintenance and accommodation in the UK compiled by the British Evacuees Association, Mai Habar Camp, TNA: FO 1015/53.

⁶²¹ Mayall to Davidson, 23 September 1948.

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ Davidson to Chapman-Andrews, 21 October 1948, TNA: FO 369/3961, K11374.

It appeared the Foreign Office was banking not only on shipping difficulties preventing large-scale migration to Australia but also that many of the evacuees in Eritrea would be found unsuitable for resettlement anyway. Therefore, costs would be kept low, and no doubt the Foreign Office envisaged that the Colonial Office would bear the financial responsibility. Overall, though it was encouraging that Chapman-Andrews and the consular section at the British Embassy in Cairo now had a plan to put into action. However, things were not happening fast enough for the BMA, Eritrea.

In mid-October the Chief Administrator forwarded on more paperwork and advised that Trade Tests were being arranged - with results to follow - and that passports would be sent 'for renewal as they become due'.⁶²⁴ Trade Tests were used to gauge a person's skill levels to determine which type of employment (if any) they were suitable for. There were many craftsmen among the evacuees as well as others who had learnt a new trade during their time serving with British Armed Forces, so this hopefully worked in their favour even though it had been some time since they were in full-time work. Of the 250 evacuees interested in settling in Australia, Drew noted 'most of them have already completed forms of application, which I enclose herewith. I would be most grateful if you could take this matter up with the Australian representative in Cairo and let me know what the present position is, in order that I might be able to give these people some information regarding their chance of acceptance.'⁶²⁵

The problem was that the Consul-General and the BMA were following different agendas and time frames, with the latter expecting quick results, especially as from its perspective the migration process was well underway. The Consul-General, on the other hand, had only been brought into the mix in August, some two months previously and was starting from scratch with investigation of 'the case of every refugee'. Impatience spilled over and in late October the Chief Secretary, Crawford, sent a letter of complaint to the War Office explaining that the BMA had been following instructions to communicate directly with the Consul-General, but 'I regret to say that we are just getting no answer from him and so things are no better than they were before', and gave two examples of where resettlement was being held up: certain evacuees had been cleared to return to Turkey by the British Consul, Istanbul, but no authority had been received from Cairo, while a family could be moved to the UK once transport was available.⁶²⁶

⁶²⁴ Chief Administrator, BMA, Asmara, to HM Consul-General, Cairo, 16 October 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Crawford to Dolan, 27 October 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

He also drew attention to the fact that supporting paperwork became out-of-date and described the mood of the evacuees hoping to be able to leave Eritrea:

It would be of great assistance to us if little delay as possible could take place following our application for approval to resettle certain persons. Not only do passports and other documents become invalid in the interval, but guarantees of employment, accommodation and maintenance may be revoked or become invalid.

It would be appreciated if you could do anything to get the wheels moving a little faster, as the evacuees become very restless and difficult to handle when they have applied for resettlement and nothing happens.⁶²⁷

This request resulted in Brigadier J. F. Benoy, Director of Civil Affairs, writing a polite letter to Davidson at the Foreign Office which was more or less a verbatim copy of Crawford's letter.⁶²⁸ Benoy's missive was then forwarded to Cairo:

We enclose a copy of a letter from the War Office which you will see is a little peevish in tone, although we confess that we do not regard it with any high degree of seriousness we fully realise that the Maltese in Eritrea must form only a very small part of the general work on the Maltese problem and it was only in fact in the last resort that we inflicted you with this commitment in addition to the others which you already have. We think it is advisable, however, to refer this letter to you for any comments you may care to make. We ourselves are using the big stick on the Colonial Office's back at the moment on the subject of trying to get the residue of these Maltese into Cyprus so we do not want to leave the other departments here with any grounds for criticism on our own efforts on this very difficult subject.⁶²⁹

As this letter shows the Foreign Office was on the defensive, having a snipe at both the War Office and the Colonial Office. It had intervened in the resettlement arrangements for the Maltese and Balkan evacuees in Eritrea by channelling applications through Cairo to protect

⁶²⁷ Crawford to Dolan, 27 October 1948

⁶²⁸ Benoy to Davidson, 9 November 1948, TNA: FO 369/3961, K12223.

⁶²⁹ Foreign Office to British Embassy, Cairo, 22 November 1948, TNA: FO 361/3961, K12223.

its own interests, but now felt it was facing criticism. The reaction to Benoy's letter from the Consular Section at the British Embassy was more measured and highlighted some of the problems it was dealing with in regard to the Maltese and Balkan evacuees at Mai Habar Camp: 'We sympathise with BMA Eritrea when they complain that we have not been getting on with the job of dealing with the "penny numbers". We admit we have been very slow but that is inevitable unless we are given the fullest information from the very beginning'.⁶³⁰

As the BMA had forwarded copious amounts of paperwork including everything it had received from Captain Webb in India, as well as all documentation it had organised, it was a little unfair to blame delays on not having the 'fullest information from the very beginning'. Many evacuees, particularly those wishing to resettle in Australia had completed applications which might have needed a little updating but were basically sound. One sticking point was proof of British nationality which the Consular Section in Cairo required. As the Chief Administrator had previously pointed out 'other than passports and the presumed fact that they were registered as such in the British consulates from which they were evacuated, in the vast majority of cases none is available. Most of them however claim British nationality on the grounds of British Maltese parentage or grand parentage either on their paternal or maternal side'.⁶³¹ Although, he went on to suggest that 'proof of nationality, such as you require, could be obtained from enquiries made at the consulate at the place of birth of each individual case.'⁶³² It was a little late in the day to be checking their British credentials, however tenuous, as the evacuees had been accepted as British subjects when evacuated in 1941. In fact the Consular Section, Cairo was better placed to request for searches for proof of the British subject status of Balkan Maltese evacuees through the Consular Department at the Foreign Office. These were directed to the appropriate British Consul in Turkey who could consult local records. There was no reason to involve the British Embassy at Ankara, as this would have added more delay and been an unnecessary link in an already cumbersome (and confusing) chain of communication.

Demands from the Turkish Consul in Cairo, who was reluctant to authorise visas to Maltese wishing to return to Turkey, was also causing a hold up: 'He wants to know precisely where they are going to live and what they are going to do when they get there, and whether the mother is a Greek, Turkish or Armenian origin'.⁶³³ This is puzzling as the BMA had already provided much of this information directly to the Turkish Consul prior to the British

⁶³⁰ British Embassy, Cairo, to Foreign Office, 7 December 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁶³¹ Chief Administrator, BMA, Eritrea, to HM Consul, Cairo, 11 November 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁶³² Ibid.

⁶³³ Ibid.

Consul-General becoming involved. So it can be assumed that the whole process was started afresh when the Consular Section took over. Passports were another issue: 'He [the Turkish Consul] also says he cannot give visas without reference on the British Indian passports which most of the refugees seem to have.'⁶³⁴ In retrospect, it would have been useful for the Consul-General to review and re-issue evacuees with British passports where required as a starting point. While a time-consuming exercise, it would have provided a valid basis to support applications. It also gave the Mai Habar residents a formal identity, confirming their British subject status, the least that could be done considering how long they had been living in limbo since leaving their home countries.

While the Consular Section in Cairo and BMA Eritrea were both working towards the aim of resettling at least some residents of the Mai Habar Camp, the Foreign Office had indeed been 'using the big stick on the Colonial Office's back'. It was particularly peeved by a letter sent from P. A. Carter at the Colonial Office to Benoy at the War Office. The gist of it was to explain that no solution as yet had been found for the resettlement of the evacuees, but with extra time this situation could be resolved. The Colonial Office was still waiting for a 'definite reply' from the Governor of Cyprus but were 'not likely to get one until the question of Jewish camps in Cyprus [...] has been resolved.'⁶³⁵ Additionally there was no timescale for a decision about the future of Eritrea being made by the United Nations, which decreased the urgency to relocate the evacuees. As the letter delicately reasoned:

... it seems to us that there is no cogent reason for the immediate preparation of a paper by the Colonial Office for the Commonwealth Affairs Committee. The present Cyprus uncertainty would indeed make it impossible for us to submit a comprehensive statement at this moment without saying that no Colony could accept these people and that the problem would therefore have to be passed elsewhere. Whereas, if we can afford to wait a little longer, it seems to us that the prospects of a more hopeful solution of the problem are likely to improve, at least as compared to the present position.⁶³⁶

Carter was wise to suggest waiting as Cyprus was still the best option, but its agreement to take the Maltese and Balkan evacuees was dependent on when Jewish refugees now detained

⁶³⁴ Chief Administrator, BMA, Eritrea, to HM Consul, Cairo, 11 November 1948.

⁶³⁵ Carter to Benoy, 26 October 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

on the island were allowed to enter Palestine. However, if it was discounted now, then the process of finding another destination for the evacuee group would have to begin again.

The Foreign Office saw the situation a little differently and was keen to stress the (belated) efforts on its part to assist in the resettlement of the evacuees. There was also a tendency to using 'we' as in both departments working collaboratively: 'I do feel that we are ignoring the duty put upon us nearly a year ago by the decision of the Commonwealth Affairs Committee by sitting back and hoping that time will solve this problem,' wrote Davidson.⁶³⁷ Actually the Committee had given Arthur Creech Jones, the Colonial Secretary, responsibility for producing a 'comprehensive solution' for the resettlement of the Maltese and Balkan evacuees.⁶³⁸ Although there had been interdepartmental meetings since to discuss progress, the Colonial Office had been quietly endeavouring to gain assent from the Cyprus Government. In the post-war era, as its international authority and prestige waned, Britain was having to negotiate the challenge of dealing with increasing autonomous colonies. It understood the pressures Cyprus faced with the Jewish detainee camps still in operation and therefore was taking a soft approach rather than pushing the issue.

The Foreign Office did not appreciate this. Describing its efforts – that is the 'possible inclusion' of evacuees in the two schemes devised for resettlement of Maltese in Egypt in the UK or Australia – Davidson stated:

We are doing all we can on our side to keep things moving. I therefore think it is unsatisfactory that at this late hour we do not even know the attitude of the Cyprus Government in the matter. As far as I can see from your letter, no attempts have even now been made to get a firm reply from Cyprus. While I realise that the Governor's attitude is bound to depend on the question of the Jewish camps in Cyprus (that was foreseen months ago), is there no hope of getting something firm from him, even if it is only a conditional reply?⁶³⁹

This was just quibbling on the Foreign Office's part, as it is clear that Davidson understood that the closure of the Jewish camps in Cyprus was key to asking the Governor to consider taking the Maltese and Balkan evacuees. Despite this, it did not stop him suggesting that as

⁶³⁷ Davidson to Carter, 16 November 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁶³⁸ Carter to Benoy, 26 October 1948. This decision was given on 22nd December 1947.

⁶³⁹ Davidson to Carter, 16 November 1948.

the number of the Jewish detainees had ‘considerably diminished in the course of this year’ that it was worth approaching Cyprus.⁶⁴⁰

What the Foreign Office may not have been privy to was that the Governor of Cyprus – Reginald Fletcher (Lord Winster) - was actually in London around the time Davidson’s letter was written (mid-November), and the question of whether the Maltese and Balkan evacuees could relocate from Eritrea to Cyprus was raised with him, although only a ‘conditional reply’ was asked for.⁶⁴¹ It could only be conditional due to the Jewish camps still in Cyprus and if the United Nations decided about the future of Palestine at its General Assembly. Currently Palestine was under a British Military Mandate which was struggling to maintain order and security, so it was inadvisable to send internees there yet. The Colonial Office sent a summary of Lord Winster’s reaction to Davidson in reply to his rather pompous letter. This laid out very clearly all the commitments regarding refugees or evacuees that the colony of Cyprus was obligated to.⁶⁴² For example, as many as twelve thousand Cyprus-born British subjects were expected to return to the island from Egypt, while a group of German Templars were received from Palestine earlier in the year.⁶⁴³ Furthermore, the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office was ‘aware’ of arrangements for Cyprus to ‘provide a refuge for British subjects from Iraq and Syria should it be necessary to evacuate them owing to the internal situation there’.⁶⁴⁴ A mild rebuke then followed: ‘There is indeed a tendency to regard Cyprus as a dumping ground for anybody whom His Majesty’s Government has to provide in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East region.’⁶⁴⁵

In conclusion, the letter reiterated what the Colonial Office had already said – that the governor would not reconsider his decision to admit Maltese evacuees from Eritrea while the Jewish camps were still in operation: ‘we do not consider that we can press him further on this point,’ wrote J. S. Bennett. ‘Lord Winster is however, prepared to say, that, when the Jewish camps have been cleared and subject to satisfactory assurances regarding the

⁶⁴⁰ Davidson to Carter, 16 November 1948.

⁶⁴¹ J. S. Bennett, Colonial Office, to Davidson, 8 December 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52. Lord Winster served as Governor from 1946 to his resignation in February 1949. He was replaced in August 1949 by Sir Andrew Barkworth Wright.

⁶⁴² Bennett to Davidson, 8 December 1948.

⁶⁴³ Ibid. The German Templar Society were a Christian sect which set up colonies in Palestine during the early twentieth century. Members were interned during the Second World as they were considered enemy aliens by British authorities. Post-war around 500 were then transported to Australia while others returned to Germany under an exchange programme. With the formation of the State of Israel in 1948, it was decided to remove the remaining Templar Colony to Cyprus until they could be resettled elsewhere. They travelled to Australia in February 1949 on the same ship carrying a group of Maltese evacuees from Mai Habar Camp – See Chapter Six, ‘The *Misir* Incident.

⁶⁴⁴ Bennett to Davidson, 8 December 1948.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid.

financial aspect, he would agree to admit to Cyprus the hard core of the Maltese from Eritrea, i.e. those for whom it had not been possible to make alternative provision in the meanwhile'.⁶⁴⁶ The difficult internal situation in Cyprus was also cited as reason for delaying a decision.⁶⁴⁷ At this time Greek Cypriots were divided as to whether the island should unite with Greece or remain independent which sparked violence between Left and Right. The continuance of British rule was also disputed as was the presence of a Turkish-Cypriot minority. The arrival of yet more refugees might inflame the situation further.

Faced with this update which reinforced the contents of the letter to Benoy, the Foreign Office should have been suitably chastened. Its attempt to flog the Colonial Office over its slack approach was unnecessary. In due course the 'wait and see' strategy adopted by the Colonial Office finally paid off when in March 1949 the Governor of Cyprus agreed to take the evacuee group. The move of the 'hard core' of Balkan Maltese evacuees (around 400) from Mai Habar Camp to Cyprus is the focus of the next chapter.

Another tack tried by the Foreign Office to provoke a reaction from the Colonial Office was to call its bluff. This comprised of the suggestion that if no significant progress was made with the resettlement of the evacuees, then their situation might come to the attention of the Westminster Parliament:

A further point which might be considered is the position of the Maltese themselves. It is all very well for us to sit back in our chairs and expound wisely on political issues, but these people are in a very serious predicament and their needs are urgent. On these grounds alone I would like to emphasise that from the point of view of humanity the problem is an urgent one. And if something is not done soon their plight is going to reach the floor of the House. If it does, I very much doubt it we should have a leg to stand on.⁶⁴⁸

There is no record in *Hansard* that the situation of the evacuees during their time in Eritrea was ever discussed in Parliament, although it had been brought up while they were in India. By 1949 the attention of the House had turned to the position of British subjects domiciled in Egypt and their resettlement.⁶⁴⁹ While Davidson stressed that both departments would be subject to censure for their handling of the welfare and resettlement of the evacuee group,

⁶⁴⁶ Bennett to Davidson, 8 December 1948.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁸ Davidson, to Carter, 16 November 1948.

⁶⁴⁹ *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates, 30 April 1947, Volume 436. For the position of British subjects in Egypt see House of Commons Debates, 29 June 1949, Volume 466, available at: [Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

what is more significant about the paragraph is that he demonstrated compassion towards them. Perhaps this realisation that some humanity was required stemmed from information coming in via the British Embassy in Cairo and the War Office, but it is refreshing that at least one official recognised their vulnerability rather than regarding them as an inconvenience.

There is limited evidence among official documents about how the evacuees themselves viewed their situation apart from letters from the British Evacuees Association which have already been discussed. As the end of 1948 approached, they had been in Eritrea for nearly a year and were no closer to resettlement. The Chief Administrator did note that the Mai Habar evacuees who had applied for settlement in Australia were feeling ‘very grave discontent’ since the visit of the IRO.⁶⁵⁰ He continued:

It is now generally known that large numbers of displaced persons from Europe – many of them ex-enemy nationals – are being resettled in Australia, while they, who are British subjects, and therefore feel they have a prior claim, remain in Eritrea with apparently little hope of their case receiving attention at least for some time to come. Many are young people who it might be thought would be imminently suitable for settlement in Australia.⁶⁵¹

It must have felt very unlucky to have British subject status. The Maltese and Balkan evacuees had been passed over before in favour of displaced persons while in India; now it was happening again. However, the BMA was quietly exploring the possibility of getting some of the evacuees included in the IRO Air Sealift Scheme which was due to start in early 1949.⁶⁵² It put forward this idea to the Consul General in Cairo while Benoy approached the Foreign Office: ‘Boothby of your Refugee Department and Costley-White of the Commonwealth Relations Office have full particulars of the scheme, and you might like to consider whether it could not provide at any rate a partial answer to our problem in regard to the Maltese.’⁶⁵³ In fact these enquiries were fruitless as this scheme ended up being dead in the water.

⁶⁵⁰ ‘Maltese Evacuees for settlement in Australia’, Chief Administrator, to HM Consul-General, Cairo, [?] November 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52. This probably refers to the visit in late August by the reconnaissance party for the Air-Sealift scheme which included Wilcox, the Australian Information Officer

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

⁶⁵² Ibid.

⁶⁵³ Ibid., and Benoy to Davidson, 27 November 1948, TNA: FO 369/3961, K12223.

Maurice Lush, IRO Chief of Mission, Middle East and Africa, had led the reconnaissance mission to Eritrea and Kenya to assess the potential of the Air Sealift Scheme in November 1948. In his memoirs he recalls that at this time the scheme was ‘quite viable’ and was given approval by IRO, Geneva.⁶⁵⁴ Details were then finalised with all interested parties: His Majesty’s Government, Australia, the British Refugee Authorities and Airwork (London Ltd).⁶⁵⁵ However, during December the scheme was scrapped after the Australian Government – having read the reconnaissance mission report – proved ‘unwilling to provide the necessary finance’.⁶⁵⁶ This outcome was a great disappointment to all those concerned including Lush, but demonstrated that Australia had a financial limit when it came to facilitating migration. It also meant that there was no possibility of using the scheme for transporting any parties of evacuees from Eritrea. Instead, other options had to be explored for not only passages for Maltese and Balkan evacuees, but for other British subjects along the eastern Mediterranean seaboard who wished to resettle in Australia. How the ship *Misir* was chartered for this purpose deserves investigation. As will be seen in the next chapter the arrival of certain ‘British’ Maltese migrants on this ship came to the attention of Arthur Calwell and had a serious repercussion for future resettlement in the dominion.

From a personal perspective the year ended very badly for the residents of Mai Habar Camp and must have cemented in many minds that they needed to leave Eritrea as soon as possible. An army quarterly report describes a shocking incident which took place in mid-December involving a party of evacuees who had been outside the camp:

The Shifta gang known as the MOSASGHI brothers has been active during the quarter.

They held up a bus on the SAGANEITI – ADI CAIEH road on 4 Dec and in the resulting engagement two of the gang were killed.

On the 16 Dec the remaining members of the gang attacked four MALTESE DPs at MAI HABAR HFL 6788, three of whom escaped but the fourth was murdered.

⁶⁵⁴ A. J. M. Lush (ed.), *A Life of Service: The Memoirs of Maurice Lush* (London: A. J. M. Lush, c1992), p. 258.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

Police patrols are still searching for these shifta and as a result all shifta activity had practically ceased.⁶⁵⁷

Shifta was the name given to bandits operating in Eritrea and Ethiopia who carried out indiscriminate attacks on people and property. The victim who lost his life in such a vicious way was Harold Riddle whose mother and sister were also living in the camp. Their repatriation 'at the earliest opportunity' to England was requested by a brother after hearing about the murder.⁶⁵⁸

Margaret Reardon lived in Eritrea at this time with her husband Pat. As part of the BMA he had been temporarily posted to Adi Ugri during 1947. She gives a description of shifta activities and the precautions needed against attack in her memoir:

There was a problem with armed bandits in Eritrea, who were called *shifta*. They usually made short sharp raids on farms and small Police posts; the object being political harassment in most cases. They were almost impossible to catch and melted into the local scene. ...They regularly attacked cars travelling along roads to the remote farms, held up and occasionally killed the occupants. We too could have been raided and killed in our beds; it would have been relatively easy although we were usually armed. We got to know the Italian families, including some brave souls who farmed in nearby areas, who always had to be alert for *shifta*. We always travelled with a Police escort, whether going a few miles or back to Asmara for a weekend. Everyone was armed. I also used to do short visits with the patrols, with a machine gun resting across my lap while Pat drove.⁶⁵⁹

A question raised is why the Maltese evacuees were allowed unescorted while outside their camp which was actually guarded by British soldiers when it was known that shifta had been active nearby as indicated in the report.⁶⁶⁰ Perhaps it was simply a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time when the bandits seized an opportunity to attack Europeans. They

⁶⁵⁷ Quarterly Historical Report of the HQ Eritrea District, Asmara, for the quarter ending 31 December 1948, TNA: WO 261/167. The section 'General Security and Crime' in Annual Reports by the Chief Administrator, Eritrea, contain details of shifta activity. See for example, Annual Report 1949 Eritrea, TNA: FO 1015/600.

⁶⁵⁸ W. J. Riddle, Bristol, to War Office, 17 January 1949, TNA: FO 1015/52. Attached to the letter is a copy of the post-mortem which describes the ferocity of the attack.

⁶⁵⁹ Margaret Reardon, *An Unexpected Journey*, pp. 22-23.

⁶⁶⁰ Another report records that a platoon of the 2nd Battalion King's Own Regiment was at Mai Habar during 1948. See Quarterly Historical Report: Report ending 30 June 1948, TNA: WO 261/166

may well have been mistaken for Italians who were targets for politically motivated attacks. For example, in the following year it was recorded that thirteen Italians and one Indian were murdered by shifta gangs.⁶⁶¹

The incident left the camp shaken and increasingly desperate as Benoy described to Bennett at the Colonial Office:

From reports received from Eritrea, it appears that the Maltese are becoming more vociferous and difficult to handle, particularly when four of their number were involved in an incident last month in which one of them was brutally murdered by a gang of shifta. They have not unnaturally become very agitated and redoubled their cries for something to be done about them in the way of resettlement.⁶⁶²

It was without a doubt time for the government departments to pull together to get the Maltese and Balkan evacuees resettled permanently or at least moved to a less threatening environment.

⁶⁶¹ Annual Report, 1949 Eritrea, TNA: FO 1015/600, pp. 34-35.

⁶⁶² Benoy to Bennett, 29 January 1948, TNA: FO 1015/52.

Chapter 6

Eritrea, January to July 1949: Transfer to Cyprus

It is perhaps relevant to mention that in the course of twelve months only 12 out of the 550 evacuees have been resettled and the cost of maintaining them is still £4,000 per month.⁶⁶³

Brigadier Benoy was quite right to point out these two facts to Bennett at the Colonial Office in January 1949. As the previous chapter explained, attempts to resettle evacuees from the Mai Habar Camp had been dismal despite the efforts of the BMA, Eritrea, and assistance from the Foreign Office which actually hampered the process. All that had been established was that until Cyprus was ready to accept the majority of the evacuee group, the best way to dispose of them was in ‘penny numbers’. On the financial side it was costing the British government a considerable amount of money to maintain the evacuees at the camp. In Eritrea there was no opportunity for individuals to find employment as there had been in India, so all were dependent on state allowances. Also, there were the running costs for the camp facilities. At present no department had taken financial responsibility for the evacuee group, so the War Office was keeping a record of all spending while providing interim funding.

So while the Colonial Office played a waiting game with regard to Cyprus, the Foreign Office continued with its two resettlement schemes for Maltese domiciled in Egypt, hoping to incorporate suitable candidates from the Mai Habar Camp. As will be seen, the UK scheme was painfully slow to get started, while the Australian scheme initially got off to a good start with groups of British subjects being despatched from Egypt and Eritrea. However, the arrival of Balkan Maltese from Mai Habar Camp caused consternation in the dominion and threatened to de-rail future resettlement from East Africa. When Cyprus finally agreed to take the evacuees from Eritrea it was with the proviso that only ‘Maltese’ would be sent there. Here efforts to repatriate and resettle them continued. A small number of evacuees who were British subjects from elsewhere in the Balkans remained in Eritrea until arrangements could be made for their resettlement. Responsibility for those in Cyprus lay with the Colonial Office while the small group at Mai Habar remained under civil direction now administered by FOAAT.

⁶⁶³ Brigadier Benoy to Bennett, 29th January 1949.

‘Eminently Satisfactory’: Financial Liability for the Maltese Evacuees

Financial liability for the Balkan evacuees had been a matter of dispute between the Colonial and Foreign Offices ever since the transfer of the group to Eritrea. A record of all expenditure was being held by the War Office in a suspense account (or even suspense accounts). This was an inadequate arrangement as all that had happened was a substantial sum had now accrued which covered the quarterly figures submitted by the BMA for 1948. Rumblings about these arrears had begun late that year with the Foreign Office indicating to the Treasury that it considered the Colonial Office was liable.⁶⁶⁴ Matters came to head in January 1949 when the War Office approached the Treasury with a request from the BMA, Eritrea, for an ‘early settlement of the following accounts in respect of payments and expenses incurred by the Administration’ for the evacuee group:

January to March 1948	£ 7,814.8s 0d.
April to June 1948	£13,870.16s 1d.
July to September 1948	£11,137.17s 2d.
<u>Total:</u>	<u>£32, 823. 1s 3d.</u> ⁶⁶⁵

The letter stated that it appeared the War Office had never been notified as to which department it should send the accounts to be settled and asked for confirmation that these were recoverable from the Foreign Office.⁶⁶⁶ This assumption was justified by recollections of War Office representatives who had attended an interdepartmental meeting in August 1948 and stated that: ‘although no reference is made in the note of the conclusions of the meeting, the Treasury representative present indicated that the financial burden in respect of these people [Balkan and Maltese evacuees] would fall on Foreign Office funds’.⁶⁶⁷ In essence, the letter was a nudge for a decision to be made as well as a reminder that the BMA (and War Office) were out of pocket for the amounts already spent. Having implied that the Treasury had already indicated Foreign Office responsibility, it also put the onus on staff there to clarify the situation.

⁶⁶⁴ Margaret Mills, Treasury, to H. N. Minshull, Finance Department, Foreign Office, 8 January 1949, TNA: FO 369/3961, K427.

⁶⁶⁵ H. Rowan Walker, War Office, to Captain J. N. Knox, Treasury, 2 January 1949, copies to Minshull and Carter, TNA: FO 369/3961, K427.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid

Prior to the War Office intervention, both the Colonial and Foreign Offices had in fact been in correspondence with the Treasury about financial liability for the Balkan and Maltese evacuees. Margaret Mills had made enquiries to both departments about this matter. Carter at the Colonial Office stated that ‘we have never accepted any financial responsibility for this party from the time it was evacuated from Turkey and sent to India’. Moreover, the status of the evacuees as British subjects in a foreign country was beyond the ‘ambit’ of the Colonial and Middle East Service Vote, so no funding was available.⁶⁶⁸ In response, H. W. Minshull of the Foreign Office, referred Mills to several letters as evidence that the maintenance of the Maltese in Eritrea was ‘intended to be a CO commitment’.⁶⁶⁹ However, he also allowed that if it was decided that these costs ‘must be charged to [the] Diplomatic and Consular Vote we shall have to be given a direction accordingly. We can see no objection in principle to the charge of this expenditure to the D4 subhead (Relief of Distressed British subjects)’.⁶⁷⁰

Minshull’s intervention prompted an examination of all the papers on the subject. The conclusion reached, as Margaret Mills explained, was that ‘it is now quite clear that we intended the Colonial Office to be the Department to reimburse the War Office ... It is therefore very unfortunate that the Colonial Office have not made the provision in their Estimates to enable them to pay the War Office.’⁶⁷¹ Clearly the Colonial Office had never expected to pay for upkeep of the Balkan and Maltese evacuees while they were in Eritrea, but as there were no funds to draw upon this left a difficult situation. It was then suggested that the Foreign Office ‘could find the money from your provision for distressed British subjects. Would you please let us know whether you can agree to do this?’⁶⁷²

Given his previous reply, unsurprisingly, Minshull acquiesced agreeing to accept the charge of approximately £7,500 to be paid from the 1948-49 Distressed British Subjects provision. It was also stated that ‘current and future expenditure on the Maltese evacuees in Eritrea will likewise be chargeable to the Foreign Office’.⁶⁷³ He also asked Brigadier Benoy

⁶⁶⁸ Carter to Mills, Treasury, 2 November 1948, TNA: FO 369/3961, K12028.

⁶⁶⁹ H.W. Minshull, Foreign Office to Miss Mills, Treasury, 18 December 1948, TNA: FO 369/3961, K12028. The letters mentioned were Colonel W. Russell Edmunds, Treasury, to Lloyd, Colonial Office, 10 September 1947, and Gilchrist, Commonwealth Relations Office to Bennett, Colonial Office, 27 November 1947. These date from when arrangements were beginning to be made for the Balkan and Maltese evacuees to transfer from India to Eritrea.

⁶⁷⁰ Minshull to Mills, 18 December 1948, TNA. Minshull was Assistant to the head of General Finance in the Foreign Office Finance Department, L. R. Sherwood. The department was overseen by Superintending Under-Secretary H. A. Caccia (head clerk).

⁶⁷¹ Mills to Minshull, 8 January 1949, TNA: FO 369/3961, K427.

⁶⁷² Ibid.

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

for a summary of expenditure held in suspense of BMA accounts to be sent to the Foreign Office prior to the end of the financial year.⁶⁷⁴ The amount of £7,500 relates to the January to March 1948 expenditure which actually fell into the 1947-1948 financial year, so was very much in arrears. It is interesting to note that Minshull accepted that the Foreign Office was financially liable for the Balkan and Maltese evacuees. This did not mean that the department agreed about this, but knowing the Colonial Office could not pay, had no option but to step in.

Once this door had been opened, it was inevitable that the amount payable would rise. Acknowledging the offer of the Foreign Office to 'bear certain costs' (that is, £7,500), W. Field Robinson of the Treasury then, rather apologetically, asked for more:

This confusion over which department should be financially responsible is most unfortunate. I should be grateful if you would let me know whether it is possible for you to meet this expenditure of £32,823. 1s 3d from your vote for Distressed British Subjects. As it is a largish sum you may feel it difficult to do so.⁶⁷⁵

It was no doubt an awkward situation for the Treasury which had previously maintained that the Colonial Office was financially responsible. However, the money had to come from somewhere to reimburse BMA, Eritrea, for past and anticipated expenditure regarding the evacuee group. Field Robinson then explained that he would be contacting the War Office to ask about 'any other sums held in suspense as I do not think we should deal with outstanding debts piecemeal as we have been doing up to now'.⁶⁷⁶ The information duly came through from BMA, Eritrea. The total amount now accrued up to the end of December 1949 was £45,630. 6s. 3d, while an estimate of expenditure for the first quarter of 1949 (January to March) was given as £14,000.⁶⁷⁷

The response of various Foreign Office staff to Field Robinson's letter are recorded in hand-written notes. K. G. Ritchie of the Consular Department felt disposed 'on principle' to reject the suggestion that the Foreign Office bear certain costs in regard to the evacuees

⁶⁷⁴ Mills to Minshull, 8 January 1949. Benoy was now head of the Civil Affairs Directorate. The financial year – as now – runs from April to March, so the period ran from April 1948 to March 1949.

⁶⁷⁵ W. Field Robinson, Treasury, to Minshull, 2 February 1949, TNA: FO 369/4182, K1624.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁷ Rowan Walker to Minshull, 15 February 1949, TNA: FO 369/4182, K1624. The amount given for the last quarter of 1948 was £12,807/2s/0d.

in Eritrea: 'The whole thing looks like a glorious departmental muddle and we of course are again expected to come to the rescue', he wrote.⁶⁷⁸ Conversely, Minshull, who had already assented that the Foreign Office should take on the liability, commented: 'I am inclined to meet this expenditure' (1948-49) reasoning that arrangements were in hand to transfer the Maltese evacuees to Cyprus. He proposed to take the line at an upcoming interdepartmental meeting on 14 February to discuss the proposed move of the Balkan and Maltese evacuees to Cyprus, that once the group had transferred there the Foreign Office would have no responsibility.⁶⁷⁹ In other words, once on the island the Maltese evacuees would be firmly in Colonial Office hands financially and otherwise. However, his superior L. R. Sherwood, head of the Finance Department, concurred with Ritchie's view and was quite vociferous in his opinion. He categorically stated that the Foreign Office should not take any responsibility.⁶⁸⁰ As will be seen, of all three officials, Minshull had the best approach to minimising the inevitable cost to the Foreign Office. Ritchie, in the meantime, composed a long-winded letter to the Treasury.

The aim of the letter was to provide evidence that the Colonial Office had not only supported the evacuation of Maltese by insisting there should be no discrimination between all British subjects domiciled in Greece or Turkey, but that it had been agreed that the cost of maintaining the evacuees (in India) should come from its vote.⁶⁸¹ In fact due to the war situation at that time maintenance for the Balkan and Maltese evacuees in India was actually paid through India Office Vote and recouped from the Treasury. Ritchie also stated that the Foreign Office was 'only allowed to use funds available from the Diplomatic and Consular vote for financial assistance to British subjects in foreign countries only. This, coupled with the fact that, if it had not been for Colonial Office intervention, these people would never have gone to India in the first place, [which] justifies our firm stand on this matter.'⁶⁸² The firm stand being not to accept any responsibility for the evacuees now in Eritrea. His argument was in the main confusing and at times nonsensical especially in the light of the offer he put forward:

⁶⁷⁸ Hand-written notes, 'Treasury suggestion that the Foreign Office should bear certain costs in connection with Maltese evacuees now in Eritrea', TNA: FO 369/4182, K 1624.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid. See typed note regarding meeting on 14 February 1949 and minute from 'J M M'. J. M. Martin, Assistant Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office, to Bennett, 9 February 1949, TNA: CO 67/363/7. See also FO 369/4183, K2589.

⁶⁸⁰ Hand-written notes, 'Treasury suggestion that the Foreign Office should bear certain costs in connection with Maltese evacuees now in Eritrea'.

⁶⁸¹ Ritchie to Field Robinson, 5 March 1949, TNA: FO 1015/54; FO 369/4183, K2589. See also FO 369/4183, K3323 and K3434.

⁶⁸² Ibid.

... lest you and the Colonial Office think that we are being unnecessarily non-co-operative, we are prepared, without prejudice, and as an earnest [?] of our desire to help, to take the £60,000. 0s 0d incurred up to 31st March 1949 on the maintenance of these people now in Eritrea, if you agree that B.4 Sub-Head is the proper sub-head for it.⁶⁸³

The inference was clear: the Treasury had to take the decision on whether money could be used from the sub-head given from the Diplomatic and Consular Vote (Relief for Distressed British Subjects) or whether this would be considered a mis-use of funds. This was rather ironic given that the Balkan and Maltese evacuees could easily be described as distressed British subjects in a foreign country albeit one under a British administration which was actually in the process of transferring from War Office to Foreign Office control.⁶⁸⁴

Possibly, the Treasury were rather bamboozled by Ritchie's letter as it was passed on to the Accounts Department for a decision. Here it was deciphered by G. Bryant. It is worth reproducing an excerpt of his terse response as it takes apart Ritchie's reasoning:

I am afraid I do not follow the purpose of the long Foreign Office argument regarding the responsibility for removing these people from Turkey to India. If they had not gone to India, and then on to Eritrea, they would still be in Turkey, and, in present circumstances they would be distressed British subjects in a foreign country and no longer the responsibility of Malta. Any assistance given to them would, in accordance with the general Treasury ruling, have to come from Foreign Office funds. Their position in Eritrea is, in our view, no different to what their position would now be if they were in Turkey and we, therefore, as already indicated in Carter's letter mentioned above, are not prepared to accept any expenditure in respect of their stay in Eritrea against a Colonial Office vote.⁶⁸⁵

This letter also explained that a contribution towards assistance to the Maltese in Turkey had been made to the Malta government in the past from the Colonial and Middle Eastern Vote. This was at a time when the Maltese government had accepted responsibility for such people,

⁶⁸³ Ibid. There appears to be a mistake with the sub-head identification which should be D4.

⁶⁸⁴ Although the FOAAT was created in January 1949, it took several months to complete the transfer of administration from the Civil Affairs Directorate at the War Office to the new department. Changes in correspondence suggests that by late April 1949 FOAAT was up and running.

⁶⁸⁵ Bryant, Accounts Department, to Russell Edmunds, 26 April 1949, TNA: FO 369/4184, K4291. The letter mentioned from Carter is to Mills, 2 November 1948, TNA: FO369/3961, K12028.

although the present government had decided ‘they cannot hold themselves responsible for any non-Malta born beyond the first generation – thus ruling out the party in Eritrea’.⁶⁸⁶ The Foreign Office then became responsible for funding relief payments to destitute Maltese in Turkey, while the Colonial Office relinquished its commitment.

Bryant’s response, in effect, was the direction required to place financial liability with the Foreign Office which would be paid from the Diplomatic and Consular Vote allocation for Distressed British Subjects. Bryant then went on to discuss costs to be incurred by the Cyprus government while maintaining the evacuees if transferred from Eritrea (this was a certainty now), asking if this might be ‘more appropriate to the IRO?’. If the Treasury ruled this was not appropriate, ‘then I agree that this a special case, with quite exceptional features’.⁶⁸⁷ Therefore, he explained, it was applicable for provision to be made in the Colonial and Middle Eastern Service Vote; that is, a new subhead created from which to refund the Cyprus government.⁶⁸⁸

Apart from Carter’s letter there is little trace of how the Colonial Office viewed any financial obligations regarding the Balkan and Maltese evacuees. A clue comes from a note in a Colonial Office file about the interdepartmental meeting held in February which was attended by Minshull among others.⁶⁸⁹ Hosted by the Colonial Office, it was attended by representatives of the Treasury, Foreign Office, and War Office. Although the focus of the meeting was to discuss opposition from the Cyprus government to accepting the evacuees from Eritrea, some other points were agreed upon, the first of which was:

That the FO Vote should bear the cost of all expenditure incurred to date on this party and any future expenditure incurred. The CO it was agreed, were not involved in any way unless the Treasury, after further reflection, considered they had further views to express on the subject.⁶⁹⁰

As Minshull was amenable to the idea that the Foreign Office should bear the costs of expenditure in Eritrea, it is no surprise that the first part was agreed upon. However, it seems that the Colonial Office was holding out in the hope that it would be absolved of any financial

⁶⁸⁶ Bryant to Russell Edmunds, 26 April 1949. For more information on this issue see correspondence in TNA: FO 369/3960.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁹ Typed note regarding meeting on 14 February 1949 and minute from Martin to Bennett, 9th February 1949.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid.

responsibility. This turned out to be in vain as the Treasury concurred with Bryant's suggestions ruling firstly that the Foreign Office would bear the cost of all expenditure up to the arrival of the evacuees in Cyprus. This included transport from Eritrea to their new destination.⁶⁹¹ It was also explained that the Balkan and Maltese evacuees did not 'satisfy the terms of reference of IRO' and could not be admitted to IRO as refugees. In any case the organisation was beginning to wind down its operation.⁶⁹² Secondly, the Colonial Office 'should assume all responsibility for expenditure from the time of arrival in Cyprus'.⁶⁹³ There would be no difficulty opening a new subheading in Colonial and Middle East Service Vote to accommodate this.⁶⁹⁴

Naturally, the Foreign Office was delighted with this outcome: 'Eminently Satisfactory. Our financial liability is now limited to maintenance until the move to Cyprus including transport charges plus the disposal of 34 non-Maltese BS's...' crowed Ritchie.⁶⁹⁵ The non-Maltese BS's (British Subjects) referred to a small group of evacuees who would remain in Eritrea and needed to be resettled from there as Cyprus would only take Maltese evacuees. Both Minshull and Sherwood were also satisfied with the former noting that there 'should be no undue delay to transferring refugees to Cyprus - on financial as well as political grounds'.⁶⁹⁶ It was certainly fortunate that the Foreign Office had sufficient money (£120,000 for 1948-49) in the Distressed British Subjects subhead to repay the debt accrued in BMA expense accounts and any future costs until the majority of evacuees left Eritrea.⁶⁹⁷ This would, though, take a hefty chunk out of monies allocated for all distressed British subjects. On the other hand, the Colonial Office had had a small victory over the Foreign Office, as indeed had the War Office. Both believed that the Foreign Office had financial responsibility; at least this had been officially decided by the Treasury.

Unfortunately for the Colonial Office it would, in the end, bear a much greater financial burden for the maintenance of Maltese evacuees during their time in Cyprus than the Foreign Office ever did. Between July 1949 and March 1951 expenditure was estimated at £91,835 with another £30,596 calculated for the 1951-52 financial year.⁶⁹⁸ Even as the

⁶⁹¹ Field Robinson to Ritchie, 10 May 1949, TNA: FO 369/4184, K4711.

⁶⁹² Ibid.

⁶⁹³ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁵ Handwritten notes, 'Liability for expenditure in connection with distressed British subjects of Maltese origin in Eritrea, shortly to be transferred to Cyprus', TNA: FO 369/4184, K 4711.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁷ Figure given in note written by Sherwood, TNA: FO 369/4182, K1624.

⁶⁹⁸ Estimated figures given by Bryant to Russell Edmunds, 25 January 1950, TNA: CO 67/372/7.

number of Maltese evacuees was whittled down through successful resettlement this would be a long-term financial commitment. In 1960 the Colonial Office was still setting aside £6,000 for distressed Maltese in Cyprus, although not all of this amount was allocated.⁶⁹⁹ Once Cyprus gained independence later that year, financial responsibility then passed to the Commonwealth Relations Office. Through Minshull's canny intervention, the Foreign Office had minimised its financial obligation regarding the Balkan and Maltese evacuees and successfully passed the problem of these distressed British subjects on to the Colonial Office. As will be seen later in the chapter, the Cypriot authorities gamely took on the challenge of not only resettling as many as possible but also of trying to rehabilitate those who were considered a lost cause.

The *Misir* Incident: Maltese British Subjects Unwelcome in Australia?

United Kingdom High Commissioner in Australia reports arrival at Melbourne of 27 Maltese from Eritrea. Australian Department of Immigration say they have arrived without their consent or knowledge. Passage arrangements are said to have been made by BMA Eritrea.⁷⁰⁰

It was true that BMA, Eritrea, had arranged passages for a group of Maltese evacuees on the *Misir*. However, it was incorrect that the Department of Immigration had no prior knowledge of them, even if the arrival of some at Melbourne proved unexpected. In fact, there were forty-five Maltese evacuees on board the migrant ship; eighteen had disembarked at Fremantle, Western Australia, while the others had travelled on. It was only by chance that they had come to the attention of an immigration official at Melbourne who questioned their arrival. This section focuses on how the group of evacuees was included in the Australia scheme devised at the British Embassy, Cairo, and the attitude of the Australian Department of Immigration towards non-Malta-born Maltese British subjects. The *Misir* incident not only impacted on Foreign Office efforts to arrange migration to the dominion from Egypt, but also exposed flaws and inconsistencies in the Department of Immigration's approach to migrants with British subject status.

The Australia Scheme has been described in the previous chapter, but to recap, this was a plan devised by Chapman-Andrews at the British Embassy, Cairo, to assist the migration

⁶⁹⁹ See correspondence in the file 'Maltese in Cyprus', TNA: CO 926/1648.

⁷⁰⁰ Foreign Office to Consular Section, Cairo, 8 March 1949, TNA: CO 67/363/7; FO 369/4183, K2564.

of Maltese British subjects from Egypt to Australia. It aimed to provide a settlement allowance and paid passages to those who wanted to settle in the dominion. This scheme had been opened to include Balkan and Maltese evacuees at the Mai Habar camp, many of whom had already applied to resettle in Australia and had accumulated the necessary paperwork. The main practical issue facing Chapman-Andrews was finding available shipping. Actually there was a more serious stumbling block which the Foreign Office had been aware of since late 1948 and had been quietly trying to circumvent. This stemmed from a statement made by Arthur Calwell, Australian Minister for Immigration, during a parliamentary debate in the House of Representatives regarding immigration. He was answering a question raised by a member of the House, Mr. Beale, about 400 hundred Maltese in Egypt who wished to come to Australia – could the process of application be speeded up?⁷⁰¹

Calwell's rejoinder was lengthy beginning with an explanation of schemes currently in place. Australia had one with the government of Malta which granted assistance to Maltese people from Malta wanting to settle in the dominion. This was the same as an assisted passage scheme for people in Great Britain. There was also a 'scheme of free passages' which applied only in the United Kingdom. He emphasised that Australia had 'no agreement with the British Government in respect of Maltese citizens who desire to come...'⁷⁰² This referred to any Maltese citizens, that is, those living in Malta. However, his initial answer did not cover the Maltese domiciled in Egypt so the question was put to him again. Calwell's response, given below, clearly demonstrates how he viewed members of this community:

We are applying the scheme only to Maltese subjects resident in Malta. Requests made to us to extend the scheme to persons of Maltese origin who have been living in Egypt have been refused. Many of these people may be of Maltese face, but they are Egyptian subjects. Similarly, many Greeks living in Egypt are also Egyptian subjects. We are not concerning ourselves about people of other races living in Egypt. All we desire to do is carry out our agreement in respect of Maltese living in Malta only. We made the agreement as a gesture of goodwill towards the Maltese people for their splendid efforts during the war... Because of that and because the Maltese are British subjects,

⁷⁰¹ Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, Question: Immigration. Speech, 28 September 1948, p. 883.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*

we believe we should grant them special concessions; but we do not feel bound to follow Maltese people around the globe and bring them to Australia.⁷⁰³

An important point here is that Calwell clearly differentiated between Maltese British subjects from Malta and the foreignness of Maltese domiciled elsewhere. This was problematic for British government departments as Maltese – wherever they lived – could claim British subject status and were recognised as such. However, this, as will be explained later, became somewhat of an escape door for those arranging resettlement of non-Malta-born Maltese in Australia: as British subjects they could be and were described as ‘British’ on passenger lists, for example, on the *Misr*.

As can be imagined this caused a major panic. It is not possible to go into all the correspondence in depth here, but in late 1948, letters were to-ing and fro-ing between the Foreign Office, Colonial Office, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Labour and National Service and the Chief Migration Officer at Australia House, London, Noel Lamidey.⁷⁰⁴ This mainly focused on the shipping issue, which was the responsibility of the Ministry of Transport - a problem which also impacted on the resettlement of the Balkan and Maltese evacuees in Eritrea. The department had a sound understanding not only of the frustration felt about the lack of shipping, but also the vagaries of Australian immigration requirements. This is demonstrated in a letter sent by N. A. Guttery to Sir Guildhaume Mryddin-Evans at the Ministry of Labour.⁷⁰⁵ The latter became involved through the intervention of Audsley, the Labour Attaché at the British Embassy, Cairo who was heavily supporting the resettlement of Maltese British subjects in Egypt. He wrote to the Ministry of Labour asking for assistance with securing shipping.⁷⁰⁶ Guttery advised Mryddin-Evans that:

The trouble is that it is not just a straight question of finding shipping for these people [Maltese in Egypt] – by far the most important question is that of securing entry into Australia and here I must emphasise to you, from our not inconsiderable experience on the subject, that there is all the difference in the world between permission from the Australians for any one individual to

⁷⁰³ Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, Question: Immigration. Speech, 28 September 1948.

⁷⁰⁴ See Correspondence in TNA: MT 73/30. For more information about Lamidey, see Barbara MacKay-Cruise, *Immigrants and Spies: My Father, My Memories. Noel W Lamidey and the Birth of Australian Migration* (Sydney: Xoum Publishing, 2017).

⁷⁰⁵ N. A. Guttery, Ministry of Transport, to Sir Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans, Ministry of Labour, 8 November 1948, TNA: MT 73/30.

⁷⁰⁶ See letter from Audsley to Sir Godfrey Inoe, Ministry of Labour, 20 September 1948 and other correspondence in TNA: MT 73/30.

arrive in Australia and their attitude towards the arrival of one ship of any considerable number of immigrants of non-UK origin.⁷⁰⁷

From the Ministry of Transport's perspective it was easier to arrange a 'special sailing' rather than find small numbers of berths on regular commercial sailings; but as the dominion was unsettled by and resistant to blocks of non-British migrants arriving (unless, of course, in sanctioned DP ships of hand-picked migrants) this was hard to arrange.⁷⁰⁸ It required a delicate balancing act of blending different groups of migrants to hopefully gain Australian approval for entry and avoid upsetting the federal immigration department.

To this end J.N. Wood of the Ministry of Transport wrote to Lamidey, Chief Australian Migration Officer in London, outlining the difficulties posed with finding passages to Australia for Maltese in the Middle East, specifically from Egypt. He could see no way round this apart from sending a block group. He made a proposal that a special sailing could be arranged 'which would cover these 173 Maltese and at the same time take a considerable number of DPs, which I feel would appeal to Mr Calwell's heart'.⁷⁰⁹ In an additional sweetener, Wood also suggested to make up an 'economic shipload' to combine this group with the 250 or so Templars in Cyprus (and further 'odds and ends paying their own passages'). Wood continued: 'I know your Government are interested in the movement of these Templars and I wonder whether in all circumstances they would be prepared to agree to such an agreement as I have suggested'. The German Templars were the responsibility of the Colonial Office which was, at this time, trying to obtain passage to Australia for them. The latest ships under consideration were the Egyptian-owned *Misr* and *Al Sudan*, which could accommodate 750 people each, but their availability was not secure.⁷¹⁰ The Foreign Office was also making its own enquiries about transport to Australia for Maltese in Egypt. A suggestion to the Colonial Office that the Maltese government could be asked to include these Maltese in their migration scheme allocation, and that the Maltese Commissioner in Australia could assist with securing accommodation, was knocked firmly on the head by Sir Thomas Lloyd. Aside from the shipping issue, there was not much hope in compelling Malta to accept responsibility for 'Maltese' abroad, he explained.⁷¹¹ An

⁷⁰⁷ Guttery, Ministry of Transport, to Myrddin-Evans, 8 November 1948.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁹ Wood, Ministry of Transport, to Lamidey, Chief Migration Officer, Australia House, 5 November 1948, TNA: FO 369/3961, K12133. No reply to this letter has been found on file.

⁷¹⁰ Typed note re information from Ritchie, 5 November 1948, TNA: MT 73/30.

⁷¹¹ T. Lloyd, Permanent Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office, to Sir Orme Sergeant, Permanent Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 26 November 1948, TNA: MT 73/30.

approach was also made directly to Lamidey by Sir Noel Charles, the reply to which firmly stated:

I think I should intimate to you that we feel our migration plans are based on fairly generous lines as affecting all nationals and that Maltese (who are residents of Malta) are well catered for in the arrangements now concluded, but so far as Maltese living elsewhere are concerned I am sure my Minister's view would be that he would not be prepared to accept as a principle any Maltese other than those already mentioned.⁷¹²

It also directed him to the statement made by Calwell in September 1948 just to make clear the Minister for Immigration's stance on the matter. Meanwhile, there was a 'special gesture' mentioned along the lines that he (Calwell) might 'entertain a proposal for the lifting of a few Maltese as suggested in the plans regarding German Templars'.⁷¹³

The fact that senior officials from various British governmental departments had become involved highlights how desperate those handling the resettlement of Maltese British subjects in Egypt had become. Whichever way this was approached, it seemed impossible to break the Australian stance on this issue. No mention was made in all the letters quoted about the group of Balkan and Maltese evacuees in Eritrea. Their predicament was definitely on the periphery of both Foreign Office and Colonial Office efforts which centred, respectively, on the Maltese in Egypt and German Templars who had been moved temporarily to Cyprus. It seemed unfair that the evacuees in Eritrea who had been waiting for resettlement since 1945 were apparently being side-lined again. As a move to Cyprus in 1949 was being anticipated for the evacuee group, it may well have been thought that there was no need to include any if passages to Australia became available. On the other hand, the Foreign Office were of the opinion that the Colonial Office was responsible for their resettlement despite intervening in this previously.

As 1949 began, Chapman-Andrews at the British Embassy in Cairo continued his efforts to arrange transportation to Australia for the Maltese in Egypt. After 'consulting' with the Thomas Cook Agent, Hislop, it was recommended the Yugoslavian vessel *Partizanka* could provide some accommodation and there was also the possibility of the *Misir* which had dormitory berths.⁷¹⁴ Small parties would be sent of persons with definite

⁷¹² Lamidey to Charles, Foreign Office, 6 January 1949, TNA: MT 73/30.

⁷¹³ Ibid.

⁷¹⁴ Chapman-Andrews to Sir Harold Caccia, Foreign Office, 7 January 1949, TNA: MT 73/30. Sir Harold Caccia was Assistant Under-Secretary, then Deputy Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Both ships are

guarantees of accommodation and who were prepared to repay the British government for costs involved.⁷¹⁵ Chapman-Andrews had also enlisted the help of the Australian Trade Commissioner, C. L. Steele, who was visiting Australia: ‘he will try to persuade the Ministry of Immigration to adopt a more sympathetic attitude to Maltese in Egypt. He has been fully briefed on the situation’. This met with approval by Sir Noel Charles who felt that the Australian Trade Commissioner was a better bet than the Chief Immigration Officer (Lamidey):

... it is just possible that by pressing the subject in London we may defeat our own object by giving the Australians cause to believe that we intend to get all the Maltese out of Egypt into Australia by the simple process of dumping them. Steele, with his personal contacts can probably do more to explain the actual position.⁷¹⁶

This was doubtful, but officials at the Australian Trade Commission had been helpful before and would have a better understanding of the situation facing Maltese British subjects in Egypt after changes in company laws, in particular, those regarding unemployment.⁷¹⁷ However, Calwell was unequivocal about non-Malta-born Maltese entering Australia, and this stance was being firmly upheld by his representative in London.

At some point in January a ship was finally chartered. By whom is rather a mystery, but Chapman-Andrews must have had a hand in it as the vessel was the *Misr* which had been suggested to him by a Thomas Cook Agent. It is possible it was chartered by the Ministry of Transport as a general migrant ship from the east Mediterranean area to Australia. Ports of embarkation were Limassol and Famagusta (Cyprus); Alexandria, Suez and Port Said (Egypt); Beyrouth (Beirut, Lebanon) and Massawa (Eritrea).⁷¹⁸ Several Australian newspapers briefly reported its arrival with the *Daily News* (Perth) noting that migrants onboard came from nine countries – actually nine nationalities - and some stateless: 101

listed in Peter Plowman, *Australian Migrant Ships 1946 – 1977* (Duval: Rosenberg Publishing, 2006), pp. 9 and 15.

⁷¹⁵ Chapman-Andrews to Caccia, 7 January 1949.

⁷¹⁶ Charles to Chapman-Andrews, 28 January 1949, TNA: MT 73/30.

⁷¹⁷ See earlier discussion of this in Chapter Five – A Foreign Office Intervention. Also, ‘Position of British Subjects in Egypt’, TNA: MT 73/30.

⁷¹⁸ See Incoming Passenger List, *Misr*, 21 February 1949, NAA: K269 Series, digital copy.

German Templars; 382 Britons; 160 Greeks; 59 Lebanese; 7 Italians; 9 Poles; 7 Yugoslavs, 3 Spaniards, 3 Egyptians; and 9 stateless.⁷¹⁹

The German Templars had embarked at Famagusta, Cyprus, and were the party which the Colonial Office had been seeking passage. Greek passengers joined the ship at Port Said as did several European nationalities such as Polish, Yugoslav and the stateless persons. Lebanese migrants came aboard at Beyrouth.⁷²⁰ This left the 382 Britons to be accounted for: 119 at Limassol, 45 at Massawa and the remainder from Egyptian ports, predominately Port Said where around 218 embarked.⁷²¹ All these passengers were listed as 'British' under nationality, which is a little misleading, as 'British subjects' would be more accurate. It included Cypriots, Balkan Maltese evacuees from Eritrea, and also Maltese from Egypt, identifiable by distinctive Maltese surnames such as Borg, Attard, Cassar, Esposito, and Camilleri.⁷²² Presumably the Maltese embarking at Port Said included the 173 which the Consular Section in Cairo was keen to resettle in Australia. In effect, this was a 'block' group of what Calwell labelled 'Egyptian Maltese'; that is, non-Malta-born Maltese. Equally possible was that they were self-funded Maltese migrants, or even a combination of both. As it had been discussed about using a ship for transporting German Templars and Maltese British subjects from Egypt, it is likely the 173 were included. Certainly, the ports visited indicated a planned route.

Remarkably, no one noticed that the Maltese specifically excluded by the Minister for Immigration had arrived. Firstly, they had the cover of British nationality and secondly all had addresses to go to which indicated that guarantees of accommodation had been set up before leaving.⁷²³ Therefore, with this and correct documentation as British subjects - unless there was a hiccup - their arrival would not be questioned. However, what drew the attention of immigration authorities in Melbourne to Maltese evacuees from Eritrea who travelled on was a lack of accommodation. Fourteen had disembarked at Fremantle with no apparent issues, including the large Toctan family: 'Eighty-year-old Mrs Mary Toctan arrived from East Africa with her two sons, their wives and children to join relatives in Lord St, Perth', reported the *Daily News*.⁷²⁴ Two other relatives (Mary Tocton and her son John) proceeded to Melbourne where they came into contact with an official, R. V. Rees, who in the course

⁷¹⁹ 'Migrants from Nine Countries' Perth *Daily News*, 22 February 1949, p.6. See also 'Migrant Ship Due soon' Melbourne *Age*, 21 February 1949, p. 3; 'Hopes for Peace: No Passengers Shot Aboard *Misir*', *West Australian*, 23 February 1949, p. 12.

⁷²⁰ Information derived from analysis of *Misir* passenger list, NAA: K269 Series.

⁷²¹ Figures calculated from analysis of *Misir* passenger list and those given in the *Daily News*.

⁷²² Surnames identified in the *Misir* passenger list and commonly found amongst the Balkan Maltese.

⁷²³ Many British subjects from Cyprus gave the Cyprus Club, Melbourne, as their address.

⁷²⁴ 'Migrants from Nine Countries'.

of his duties had come across ‘a number of families (schedule of names attached) who claim to be British Assisted Migrants’:

It appears that these people were Maltese and were evacuees from Massawa, East Africa, full passages had been paid for by British Military Administration, Eritrea. Although each person was emphatic that no ticket was sighted, merely put on board the ship, granted £25.0.0 expense allowance per person, and told that the Immigration Department, Melbourne, would be responsible for their welfare and reception. I sighted passports which had travel visas endorsed by the Principal Immigration Officer, Eritrea...⁷²⁵

27 individuals were involved in total including Joesph Portelli and family – in transit to Adelaide – and married couple Nicolas and Josephine Portelli who were travelling to Sydney. Both families had given names (i.e. an unofficial sponsor) at their destinations – Mr. Cilia, Adelaide and Joseph Portelli, Sydney.⁷²⁶

On berthing, contact was made with the Maltese Commissioner who knew nothing about the arrival of these Maltese - not unexpected as they were not assisted migrants and part of an official scheme. However it was felt by another official (Mr Joynes) that he should be ‘fully responsible for these people and his representative who later arrived at the ship made arrangements for overnight accommodation and future welfare of the people’.⁷²⁷ This report was referred for information to Tas Heyes, Secretary of the Department of Immigration, Canberra, and immediately set the cat amongst the pigeons.⁷²⁸ A cablegram was sent to the BMA, Eritrea, via the British Embassy in Cairo and copied to the Australian Trade Commissioner. Contact was also made with the UK High Commissioner (Ted Williams) in Australia.⁷²⁹ The gist of the cablegram was that no notice had been given about the twenty-seven Maltese from Eritrea arriving on the *Misr*, who claimed they were told reception, accommodation and onward movement would be arranged for them. This had caused ‘embarrassment’ as the Commonwealth did not take responsibility for organising this

⁷²⁵ Memorandum for: Commonwealth Migration Officer, Melbourne, signed R. V. Rees, NAA: A445, 217/1/16, digital copy.

⁷²⁶ Ibid. See *Misr* Passenger List.

⁷²⁷ Ibid.

⁷²⁸ Report was referred by A. H. Priest, Commonwealth Migration Officer, Melbourne, 1 March 1949, NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

⁷²⁹ See correspondence in NAA: A445, 217/1/16, and in TNA: CO 67/363/7; FO 1015/54; FO 369/4183.

unless by ‘special arrangement’.⁷³⁰ Lastly, it stated: ‘After full consideration Commonwealth has decided not to accept any further Maltese from Eritrea Group’.⁷³¹

At the same time the UK High Commissioner, Ted Williams, was despatching a telegram to the BMA, Eritrea, and the Commonwealth Relations Office in London.⁷³² It reiterated the contents of Heyes’s cablegram, and stated that the Maltese Commissioner, a Mr Curmi, had explained that the group from Eritrea were ‘no responsibility of the Malta Government’. He also enquired as to whether he should pay any railway fares or make ‘any further advances in special cases.’⁷³³ The tone of the telegram suggests that Williams was not that perturbed by what had happened; his main concern was to give financial assistance if required as both the Australian and Maltese governments had made it clear it was not their responsibility. Although he had only contacted the BMA, Eritrea, and CRO in London, news of the unexpected Maltese passengers quickly disseminated. The Foreign Office wanted to know if the Consular Section in Cairo had been involved in sending the Maltese evacuee party to the dominion but was also anxious about protecting its own Australia Scheme: ‘Please report whether you are concerned in these arrangements. Meanwhile in view of the possibility of homes being found in Cyprus for these evacuees ... no further batches should go to Australia in case landing of Maltese from Egypt is prejudiced thereby’. It was also noted that the Department of Immigration (Canberra) had cabled the BMA to stop them sending any more.⁷³⁴

The Consul-General in Cairo had indeed authorised the departure of the Balkan Maltese evacuees on the *Misir* as well as endorsement of passports, but he would investigate what documents ‘were, in fact, held’.⁷³⁵ The Consular Department at the Foreign Office also knew that some evacuees from Mai Habar had departed for Australia as it had received a letter from the British Embassy, Cairo stating ‘You may be glad to know that nine camp inmates sailed for Fremantle, Australia, on February 3rd by the S.S. “Misr”’.⁷³⁶ This figure was far short of the number who actually travelled, suggesting that it did not have up-to-date

⁷³⁰ Australian Department of External Affairs to British Embassy, Cairo, for BMA, Eritrea, 4 March 1949, NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

⁷³¹ Ibid.

⁷³² UK High Commissioner, Australia, to BMA, Eritrea, and CRO, 2 March 1949, TNA: CO 67/363/7; FO 369/4183, K2564.

⁷³³ Ibid.

⁷³⁴ Foreign Office to Cairo, 8 March 1949, TNA: CO 67/363/7; FO 369/4183, K2564. The Colonial Office and War Office were also put in the loop.

⁷³⁵ Sir R. Campbell, Cairo, to Foreign Office, 11 March 1948, TNA: CO 67/363/7; FO 1015/54; FO 369/4183, K2860.

⁷³⁶ Letter from British Embassy, Cairo to Consular Department, Foreign Office, 2 March 1949, FO 369/4183, K2860.

information from Asmara. In the present circumstances, with the Australian scheme for Maltese from Egypt at stake, British consular staff in both Egypt and in London could be facing the wrath of the Foreign Office for their part in this. However, BMA, Eritrea, was not troubled, stating the following to the UK High Commissioner to Australia:

Maltese Immigrants

1. Persons dispatched SS *Misir* possessed letters from Department of Immigration Canberra signed Hayes [Heyes] stating as British subjects could enter Australia without formality provided good health, character, etc. Departure authorised by British Consul General Cairo.
2. All were provided funds before departure from 25 pounds per person to 150 per family and all stated had friends or relatives able to provide accommodation Australia. Consider no further funds should be provided. All gave signed undertakings not (repeat not) apply further funds.
3. No arrangements made dispatch further batches pending reply our CA287 addressed Department Immigration Canberra asking for advice.⁷³⁷

It is clear that the BMA had followed the necessary procedure for the entry of British subjects to Australia and this was validated by letters signed by Heyes. As already mentioned, about half of the Balkan Maltese evacuees from the *Misir* had dispersed unnoticed on disembarkation. Confusion arose when an official came across twenty-seven at Melbourne who mistakenly thought they would be the responsibility of the Maltese Commissioner and queried claims made by the evacuees themselves. Had the BMA been a bit careless and not checked sufficiently whether all had guarantees of accommodation? Or had the evacuees, not wishing to lose the opportunity to resettle in Australia, just said they had? As noted in the last chapter, this had been the case with some returning to Turkey. Each individual or family had been given an expense allowance too, so had money to tide them over until work and permanent accommodation were found.

As to the complaint that the Australian authorities had not been notified about the Maltese from Eritrea being booked on the *Misir*, this did not appear to have been required. All were travelling as British subjects and although there were forty-five on board in total

⁷³⁷ CRO for UK High Commissioner, Australia, from BMA, Eritrea, 5 March 1949, TNA: FO 1015/54. See also correspondence in FO 369/4183, K3656.

they were officially travelling as individuals or families. It is probable that the BMA was suddenly told that there were berths available on the ship and hurriedly filled these. The administration had, in fact, sent two telegrams in February 1949 to the Department of Immigration asking about entry of 'British Subjects of Maltese Extraction'. The wording of the first - 'Grateful you cable willingness accept immigrants approx 27 families under 40 years of age and 20 single persons under 30 with temporary accommodation available Australia who fulfil conditions health, good character and selected suitable' – suggests the BMA was acting responsibly. It also asked to be advised about suitable 'persons between 40 and 60 who wish to join families already settled in Australia' but without accommodation.⁷³⁸ However this cannot refer to those on the *Misir* as the ship had just left Massawa, arriving at Fremantle on 21 February.⁷³⁹ As the British Consul-General had authorised their departure from Massawa then surely it should have notified the Australian Immigration Department?

The BMA did not receive a reply to this enquiry and sent another telegram asking for one.⁷⁴⁰ It was explained that possibly Maltese at present in Eritrea might shortly be moved, and 'previous experience shows if no arrangements finalised before move from one camp to another all arrangements for resettlement must be started afresh'.⁷⁴¹ If any were approved for Australia they could be sent in April.⁷⁴² This was telegram 'CA 200' mentioned above. After the *Misir* incident the BMA was informed not to send any further Maltese evacuees from Eritrea to Australia. This in effect was a response to their enquiry. No further Balkan Maltese evacuees were resettled anywhere from Eritrea prior to the move to Cyprus.

In the aftermath, the Australian Trade Commissioner in Cairo had asked for clarity about how Maltese were eligible for entry to Australia.⁷⁴³ Generally - advised the Department of Immigration - as British subjects they could travel to Australia at their own expense providing that they were healthy, of good character, had a valid passport, and were unlikely to become a financial burden to the country.⁷⁴⁴ However:

⁷³⁸ Telegram (CA 200) from Asmara to Department of Immigration, 4 February 1949, copied to BEMA, NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

⁷³⁹ Letter from British Embassy to Consular Department, 2 March 1949.

⁷⁴⁰ Asmara to Australian Department of Immigration, 18 February 1949, NAA:A445, 217/1/16.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid.

⁷⁴² Ibid.

⁷⁴³ Australian Trade Commissioner, Cairo, to Department of Immigration, 4 March 1949, NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

⁷⁴⁴ Immigration via External Affairs to Australian Trade Commissioner, 15 March 1949, NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

Maltese in Eritrea and Egypt have been a charge on UK public funds while in those countries and their movement from Egypt or Eritrea while solving United Kingdom's problem would only create new problem in Australia. We are therefore not prepared to accept as a group any Maltese from Eritrea or Egypt who will impose a further drain on already limited housing and who are without funds or sponsors to assist them in becoming self-supporting.⁷⁴⁵

Sir Noel Charles' warning that Australia might feel itself being used for dumping Maltese from Egypt proved accurate. There was a stigma attached to destitute Maltese reliant on some form of UK relief payments, even if the situation was not of their own making but rather a political one. While concerns about such British subjects becoming a burden on the Australian government are understandable, Calwell's stance in imposing a blanket ban of non-Malta-born Maltese was discriminatory and technically contradictory to immigration criteria regarding British subjects.

It is interesting to read correspondence about this problem as it highlights there was some internal disagreement within the Department of Immigration over this. The Encouraged Migration Division was responsible for individual applications from Maltese domiciled outside Malta for admission to Australia 'on the grounds that they are British subjects'.⁷⁴⁶ In line with Calwell's decision, the Assistant Secretary of this division, G. C. Watson, proposed that Maltese not eligible to apply through an assisted scheme should be 'dealt with by the Restricted Division, and the Restricted Division should be responsible for formulation of the procedure to be followed in dealing with such applications'.⁷⁴⁷ It is difficult to uncover any information about this Division but it seems that it dealt with applications from classes of people who had restrictions placed upon them, for example, needing guarantees of work and accommodation.⁷⁴⁸ Such a move, as J. Horgan of the Restricted Division pointed out, would compromise a decision made by the Australian cabinet in 1944. This was 'that Maltese were to be treated on exactly the same footing as other British subjects of non-restrictive classes.'⁷⁴⁹ Until a decision was made (if any), he

⁷⁴⁵ Immigration via External Affairs to Australian Trade Commissioner, 15 March 1949

⁷⁴⁶ Statement by G. C. Watson, Assistant Secretary, Encouraged Migration Division, 9 March 1949, NAA, A445, item 217/1/16.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁸ Gleaned from memorandum by J. Horgan, Assistant Secretary, Restricted Immigration Division, Australian Department of Immigration, 13 May 1949, NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid.

felt it best for all applications from Maltese to continue to be processed by the Encouraged Division.⁷⁵⁰

This was a sensible approach and no changes were made to the current arrangement. Had the Restricted Division taken over and restrictions been implemented there would undoubtedly have been a protest from the British government. Calwell's preference of banning entry to non-Malta-born Maltese underlines the difference between who was accepted as a British subject by the Australian and British governments. It could be argued that the '*Misir* Incident' was just a storm in a teacup, but from this point any authority arranging the resettlement of Maltese evacuees in Australia had to be especially sure they had certain guarantees of accommodation and sufficient funds to start their new lives there. This challenge would soon fall to the Cypriot government. As for the most recent arrivals, they seem to have dispersed and settled into their new country – at least, none were rejected and returned to Eritrea. The venerable Mrs Mary Toctan and her family remained in Perth. Her travels had taken her from Turkey to India, then Eritrea, and finally Australia, where she died in 1953, mourned by family and friends.⁷⁵¹

Transfer to Cyprus, 1949

I have the honour to state that agreeable to a recent communication of the relevant authorities in Eritrea to the inmates of this camp, through our transit camp Commandant, there is a likelihood to move, in the near future, for the return to normal life in the Crown Island CYPRUS about 540 British subjects of Maltese descent, evacuated from Turkey and the Balkans in 1941 for whom the Government have accepted responsibility.

The object of my bold address is to thank you heartily for the judicious selection of the place which, in my humble opinion geographically, economically and socially answers admirably the expectation of the body of men, women and children concerned. While I shall feel grateful to you for this further instance of interest evinced by the Government in the welfare of the evacuees involved.⁷⁵²

⁷⁵⁰ Gleaned from memorandum by J. Horgan.

⁷⁵¹ Bereavements, *West Australian*, 26 March 1953, p.32.

⁷⁵² Anthony Bonnici, Maltese Camp, Mai Habar, to Creech Jones, 1 May 1949, TNA: CO 67/372/7.

Anthony Bonnici, wrote this letter to Creech Jones, Secretary of State for the Colonies, in early May 1949. It is rare to find any expression of how any evacuee in Eritrea felt about their position. While the language used is very formal and a little flowery, the letter gives insight into how at least one viewed a likely move to Cyprus - as a 'return to normal life' and one that would be 'geographically, economically and socially suitable'. It would certainly bring Maltese evacuees very close to the homes in Turkey they had left in 1941. As will be explained later, the main intention of the move to Cyprus was one of permanent resettlement rather than a temporary measure. This would involve only Maltese British subjects, though as the government of Cyprus stipulated it would only take these evacuees. Balkan British subjects - those with family connections to the UK - remained in Eritrea to be repatriated by the Foreign Office. What is surprising is that Bonnici, who by now was in his sixties, was writing to Creech Jones even before official announcements were made in both Eritrea and Cyprus about the move in mid-May.

There were it seems rumours and leaks abounding at the Mai Habar Camp. This was something the British government had wished to avoid in order to minimise any possible dissention in Cyprus at their arrival. The camp commandant may have thought that after a discreet visit from a Cypriot government representative in late April to assess the evacuees and their needs, and after the formal confirmation around the same time that they would be accepted in the Crown Colony, that there was no need for absolute secrecy. The BMA had been informed by the War Office in February that the move to Cyprus had been agreed 'in principle' after the interdepartmental meeting held on 14 February 1949 to discuss this.⁷⁵³ It also stated that the contents of the (secret) telegram were 'for information only. Will confirm as soon as formal acceptance by Cyprus Government is known'.⁷⁵⁴ Again in March, the War Office reiterated that there should be no publicity and 'you will be instructed when appropriate to inform evacuees of the plan'.⁷⁵⁵ It appears that at least the BMA was able to contain itself until April but jumped before the Foreign Office gave official sanction for the announcement to be given.⁷⁵⁶ Had there been any leakage about the proposed move to Cyprus, which spread out of Eritrea before this, it may well have jeopardised negotiations between the Colonial Office and Cypriot authorities.

⁷⁵³ War Office to BEMA, 15 February 1949, TNA: FO 369/4182, K2094. See typed note regarding meeting on 14 February 1949 and minute from Martin to Bennett, 9 February 1949, TNA: CO 67/363/7.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵ War Office to BMA, 8 March 1949; Dolan to Bennett, 8 March 1949, TNA: CO 67/363/7.

⁷⁵⁶ As evidenced by Bonnici's letter dated 1 May 1949.

For its part, the Foreign Office remained discrete. In the first months of 1949, it was pre-occupied with steering clear of financial responsibility for the Balkan and Maltese evacuees and trying to persuade the Australian government to accept Maltese British subjects from Egypt. However, the Consular Department still found time to nudge the Colonial Office about the continuing presence of the Balkan and Maltese in Eritrea. This was prompted by a letter from R. W. Mason, Political Adviser, Asmara. He wrote to C. C. Kemball, head of the Consular Department, to flag up the problem the group would pose if a decision were taken about the future of Eritrea and the BMA left. Mason felt that Cyprus was a good option to avoid this happening: 'Is it possible to move them in the meantime to Cyprus? I do not suppose that Cyprus either would be pleased to have another batch of displaced persons dumped on them but at any rate they are well-behaved and peaceable on the whole and an improvement no doubt on the previous displaced persons sent to Cyprus'.⁷⁵⁷ The 'previous displaced persons' meaning the Jewish detainees sent from Palestine to camps on the island.

Unusually, he also commented upon the impact that being kept in a camp was having on the Balkan and Maltese evacuees:

It is now over a year since they arrived here from India. They did not want to come and the Administration did not want them. They have been kept all that time in the camp at Mai Habar. It is a pleasant enough place and they are well fed, but the aimless life combined with the uncertainty of the future which overshadows their lives has had a weakening effect on their morale and the longer they are kept kicking their heels in an African camp, the more their value as citizens and British subjects will decline. This is partly a human problem but there is also the aspect that the longer they are kept there rotting in the sun, the worse problem they will become for you.⁷⁵⁸

Mason had made a salient point. The Balkan and Maltese evacuees had by now spent the best part of eight years living in a camp community, financially supported by the British government - a situation with no positive end in sight. It would be hard to present them as ideal migrants, as witnessed by the Australian Department of Immigration, which was extremely reluctant to accept any and banned them from entering the country.

⁷⁵⁷ Mason to Kemball, 11 January 1949, TNA: FO 1015/52. Mason was later posted by the Foreign Office as Political Adviser in Eritrea and Somaliland to Chief Civil Affairs Officer, MELF.

⁷⁵⁸ Mason to Kemball, 11 January 1949.

Kemball appreciated Mason's anxiety that something should be done about the Balkan and Maltese evacuees and assured him the matter was being taken seriously.⁷⁵⁹ He also forwarded Mason's letter on to Bennett at the Colonial Office advising that, 'you will see that it is becoming more and more imperative to get them moving in the very near future. As I see that some of the Jews are now moving out of Cyprus, I wonder if it would be worthwhile tackling the Governor again. ... Could you let me know the latest position?'.⁷⁶⁰ From the Foreign Office perspective it was no doubt the political aspect which concerned it the most, especially as Mason had, in addition, stated that 'the continual presence of these British subjects, harmless and able-bodied for the most part but in complete idleness, in what appears to be to the Italians and native populations to be a concentration camp, is bad for British prestige'. However, the Colonial Office did pay attention to what was written about the condition of the evacuees themselves. Provision was made for the rehabilitation of Maltese evacuees in the proposal for their resettlement in Cyprus.

Before then, the task of smoothing the way for the evacuees to transfer to the Crown Colony fell upon the shoulders of the Colonial Secretary, R. E. Turnbull. It was a challenge he did not relish, but as Acting Governor, he had to take the lead.

Mr Turnbull Steps Up...

The transfer of the 'hard core' of Maltese evacuees from Eritrea to Cyprus took almost six months to achieve. Although, the then Governor of Cyprus, Lord Winster, in late 1948 had agreed in principle for the inhabitants of Mai Habar Camp to be accommodated on the island after the departure of remaining Jewish detainees, in reality this was a more complicated process than imagined. Final official agreement was given in April 1949 after several months of careful negotiations involving Colonial Office officials, Acting Governor Turnbull and the Executive Council of the Cypriot government. As ever, the Foreign Office was critical of the delay in arranging the transfer which seemed to be happening at a snail's pace. However, the Colonial Office was aware it simply could not impose a decision on Cyprus, a colony experiencing much social and political upheaval at this point. Once the government of Cyprus, after a visit of a representative to Eritrea, was satisfied that it could accept the Maltese evacuees, and financial terms had been agreed, plans were put into action

⁷⁵⁹ Kemball to Mason, 27 January 1949, TNA: FO 1015/52.

⁷⁶⁰ Kemball to Bennett, 27 January 1949 enclosing copies of Mason letter and Kemball's reply, TNA: FO 369/3961, K878.

to ready accommodation and arrange their transportation to the island. As with previous transfers this happened rather hurriedly and chaotically in late July. The evacuees found themselves in another camp close to Larnaca facing a future that was not quite as uncertain as before.

There was no question of this transfer happening before Jewish Camps had been closed. From August 1946, the British government had deported around 51,500 Jewish 'illegal immigrants' from Palestine (then under a British Mandate) who had passed through Cyprus where they were held in guarded detainment camps. The majority of these people were Holocaust survivors who had been living in DP camps and were desperate to resettle in their historic homeland.⁷⁶¹ There was much opposition from the Arab population in Palestine to the resettlement of Jews there especially in reaction to Zionist agitation and lobbying for the creation of the state of Israel. The British government, although agreeing to allow the entry of 100,000 Jewish settlers, imposed conditions which were defied by Zionist organisations who arranged ships to bring them to Palestine. Many were intercepted by Royal Navy vessels and those on board detained as 'illegal immigrants', and then transferred to Cyprus.⁷⁶² The whole episode was mishandled by the British government which came under increasing international criticism. The volatile situation in Palestine and increasing friction between Zionists and Arabs eventually led to the end of the British mandate in November 1947.

A controlled entry into Palestine of detainees now in Cyprus had been allowed from November 1946 and by the end of 1948 the majority had left for the newly-recognised state of Israel. The remaining 11,000 (approximately) were transported in groups during January and February 1949.⁷⁶³ In theory, then, the island was clear to accommodate around 500 Balkan and Maltese evacuees from Eritrea. However, a complication arose with the resignation (in February) of Governor Winster, who had given his reluctant assent to them coming. Although his decision still stood, it also required the agreement of the Cyprus government, in particular the Executive Council. Lord Winster's resignation came after a failure to establish a constitution for the island due to dissension between Greek and Turkish Cypriot political blocs. This presented something of a crisis for the British government and meant an interim governor had to be appointed. The vacuum was filled by colonial secretary,

⁷⁶¹ Dalia Offer, 'Holocaust Survivors as Immigrants: The Case of Israel and the Cyprus Detainees', *Modern Judaism* 16:1 (1996), pp. 1-23, especially p. 3.

⁷⁶² Shephard, *Long Road Home*, pp.345-63.

⁷⁶³ Dalia Offer, 'Holocaust Survivors as Immigrants', p. 3.

R. E. Turnbull, who judging from available correspondence, felt somewhat overwhelmed by the task in hand.⁷⁶⁴

J. M. Martin at the Colonial Office had spoken to Turnbull in person during a visit to the island. In a memorandum he noted that during the conversation Turnbull had ‘protested strongly against the decision to send these refugees to Cyprus and explained the strong objections of the Cyprus Government to this course.’ He also felt that he would have ‘considerable difficulty in reconciling the unofficial members of the Executive Council to the proposal’.⁷⁶⁵ This was understandable as the island had been used for several years for detention camps and as a temporary home for other groups such as the German Templars. Fundamentally, Cyprus was weary of being used as a dumping ground by the British government, so the appearance of a large group of Balkan and Maltese evacuees might be the last straw.

The unofficial or additional members of the Executive Council (a committee which advised the governor) were either Greek or Turkish Cypriots. In 1949 the Council comprised of the following members: The Governor – President; R. E. Turnbull, Colonial Secretary; S. Pavlides, Attorney General; C. J. Thorne, Financial Secretary; Additional Members: G. N. Chryssafinis, P. G. Pavlides, and M. Halid.⁷⁶⁶

In response to the concerns raised by Turnbull, Martin suggested that he would arrange for ‘an unofficial communication’ to be sent to him ‘setting out the position and conveying the decision as tactfully as possible in a form suitable for showing to members of the Executive Council.’ It would also make absolutely clear that financial liability for the evacuees lay with His Majesty’s government.⁷⁶⁷ Finally, Martin put forward the idea that a representative of the Cyprus government should visit the Balkan and Maltese camp in Eritrea, one which was welcomed by Turnbull.⁷⁶⁸ It was now up to the Colonial Office to draft a suitable letter to the Acting Governor asking for formal acceptance of the Balkan and Maltese evacuees for resettlement there. After consultation with other government departments and careful redrafting this was sent in early March.⁷⁶⁹

In the meantime, other British government departments were keen to move things forward and start planning the transfer. As the now absent Lord Winster had given his

⁷⁶⁴ See correspondence in TNA: CO 67/363/7.

⁷⁶⁵ Memorandum to Bennett from Martin, 9 February 1949, TNA: CO 67/363/7.

⁷⁶⁶ *The Colonial Office List 1949* (London: HMSO, 1949). Clerk of the Council was M. N. Davidson.

⁷⁶⁷ Memorandum to Bennett from Martin, 9 February 1949.

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁹ Creech Jones to OAG, Cyprus, 2 March 1949; See also J. R. Butler, War Office, to Bennett, 24 February 1949, which gives a comment on the draft in TNA: FO 1015/54. Draft copy also available in FO 369/4183, K2300.

consent and the condition attached to it had been fulfilled (closure of Jewish camps) it was taken for granted that it would go ahead even though formal acceptance was required from Nicosia. At the February inter-departmental meeting the Treasury undertook to look into what accounting arrangements would be needed from the Cyprus government; the War Office to find out what payments and pocket money were being given to evacuees and pass this information on to Cyprus; and to enquire about transport movements and arrangements.⁷⁷⁰ The BMA in Eritrea was then contacted by the War Office and advised that: ‘Arrangements for transfer will be made in direct communication with you by Cyprus authorities. Latter will require an up-to-date nominal roll of all evacuees which should be as comprehensive as possible’.⁷⁷¹ It also forewarned that a Cyprus official would be ‘despatched to Eritrea to liaise with the BMA and that possibly a “conducting officer” would be required to accompany the evacuee group and stay for a few weeks to ‘facilitate [a] handover’.⁷⁷² This was a sensible suggestion and followed what had happened when the Balkan and Maltese evacuees had relocated from India to Eritrea with their camp commandant (although he had been dismissed very quickly). However, it was noted that nothing should be done until official consent had been received from Cyprus.⁷⁷³

The process to gain this began with a letter which was sent from Creech Jones to the Officer Administering the Government (OAG) of Cyprus. It was eleven pages long and covered all aspects of the resettlement of ‘520 British subjects of Maltese extraction in a refugee camp in Eritrea’ in the Crown Colony.⁷⁷⁴ Below is a summary of what was covered in the letter:

- History of the Maltese evacuees including their evacuation from Turkey and Greece, and time spent in India and Eritrea.
- Desire of evacuees to return to these countries and concern they will become destitute and end up a financial burden upon the British Government. Also noted that some wish to go to Australia. Colonial Office decision therefore is to resettle group in British territory ‘where there is the prospect of those who

⁷⁷⁰ See typed note regarding meeting on 14 February 1949 and minute from Martin to Bennett, 9 February 1949.

⁷⁷¹ War Office to BEMA, Eritrea, 15 February 1949. The War Office also required duplicate copies of the nominal roll.

⁷⁷² Ibid.

⁷⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁴ Creech Jones to OAG, Cyprus, 2 March 1949. The number of evacuees tends to fluctuate, but this figure should be fairly accurate. Not all were ‘of Maltese extraction’ which had become a blanket description. Some were Greek or had British ancestry.

are capable of supporting themselves, gaining employment and in the course of time being assimilated into the local community.

- Description of group including categories such as: aged or invalid people; able bodied persons both skilled and semi-skilled; others capable of learning a trade.
- Careful consideration has been given by HMG as to where this party could be settled and reasons why other options have been discounted, i.e. the dominions (immigration laws) and colonies (unsuitable climate and diet): 'I have therefore reached the conclusion that the only territory within the Colonial Empire where there is any reasonable prospect of effecting permanent settlement is Cyprus. Climate and social conditions generally in Cyprus are the nearest approach to those to which the people were accustomed before 1941 and there is the great advantage that the language would present no difficulty. Even making allowances for the necessity of the aged and unemployable being maintained on relief indefinitely, wherever they are, it still appears that Cyprus is the best destination from the humanitarian point of view'.
- Acknowledgement of the contribution made by Cyprus in the past to solving refugee problems and that it is currently dealing with repatriation of distressed Cypriots from Egypt. Appreciation for all that Cyprus did regarding the Jewish illegal immigrant camps. Reminder of Lord Winster's agreement to admit the 'hard core of the party in Eritrea ... subject of course to satisfactory assurances regarding the financial aspect (and after the Jewish camps had closed)'.
- HMG will bear and refund to the Cyprus Government the following costs:
 - (a) transport of party from Eritrea to Cyprus
 - (b) fitting out a reception centre in Cyprus in a camp or similar accommodation. Jewish illegal immigrant camps should not be used as negotiations are ongoing about the cost of these with Israeli authorities.
 - (c) Payment of any staff employed for 'reception, administration and welfare' of party if required.
 - (d) Maintenance or relief payments of all members of the party: 'This financial assurance is put forward on the understanding that the Cyprus Government, for their part, would make every effort to absorb the maximum possible number of employable into the economy of the Island as soon as this becomes practicable in each individual case'.

- (e) Evacuees would become more employable if retraining, apprenticeships, and education provision is provided for those who will benefit especially young people within the evacuee group. HMG would pay for any scheme set up but hoped that the Cyprus Government might fund training for the youth.
- (f) If, after training people cannot find employment then the British Government would consider offering resettlement grants.
- (g) Suggests sending a Cyprus Government representative to Eritrea to liaise with the Chief Administrator and ‘in order to acquaint himself with the nature of the problem and to assist in making arrangements for the move of the party to Cyprus’.⁷⁷⁵

Creech Jones also emphasised that finding and keeping employment was a key objective in order to encourage evacuees to be self-supporting and stop relying on relief payments.⁷⁷⁶ Another point covered was that once in Cyprus evacuees did not have to stay there forever. They were free to leave and resettlement grants could be offered to those who had improved their prospects through training and wished to migrate elsewhere. The Secretary of State then made it clear that ‘His Majesty’s Government would regard with great disfavour any attempt which these people might be tempted to make towards a large-scale migration from Cyprus back to Turkey or Greece, since once in those countries there is every probability they would again fall on Consular Relief’.⁷⁷⁷ Grants would not be available to anyone who wanted to travel to a banned country – Greece, Turkey, or Egypt – and if they still went, they would forfeit any rights to relief available for British subjects.⁷⁷⁸

Finally, the letter then asked the question of whether Cyprus would accept the party and hoped that the move would take place as soon as possible. There was certainly a lot for Turnbull to digest before presenting the formal request to the Executive Council of the Cyprus government for deliberation in mid-March. The Colonial Office would then have to wait for a reply. In the meantime, there was a bit of a panic about the timing of announcements to be made in Eritrea and Cyprus about the transfer of the evacuees once it had been agreed. As mentioned previously, the BMA had been warned not to give any information to the evacuees unless instructed by the War Office. The Colonial Office was quite concerned that nothing was said prematurely anywhere: ‘I think that you will agree

⁷⁷⁵ Creech Jones to OAG, Cyprus, 2 March 1949.

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid.

that it would be a mistake for anything to be said in public ... until the inmates of the camp in Eritrea have themselves been told. This is only courtesy to them, and it might cause justifiable complaint and possibly embarrassment to the Military Administration, if they hear about it in a roundabout way'.⁷⁷⁹ The War Office agreed that announcements needed to be timed carefully but was 'satisfied that the risk of a "premature leakage" of the news has been minimised'.⁷⁸⁰

Creech Jones wrote again to the OAG this time about proposals for publicity in Cyprus. He asked to see any statement composed by Cypriot authorities so it could be reviewed by departments involved prior to its release. This had to be co-ordinated with an announcement made in Eritrea, which had to be made first.⁷⁸¹ It was as well to be prepared, but it would be some time before any announcements could even be contemplated. The Colonial Office also asked that a nominal roll be sent to Cyprus as soon as possible explaining that 'indeed without them it is difficult for the Cyprus Government to get a proper idea of what the party is like in detail and consequently to make up their minds about their willingness to receive them'.⁷⁸² However, these, if sent, would not have arrived in time as the meeting of the Executive Council had already taken place. Furthermore, as the Cypriot government would be sending its own representative to Eritrea, he would be able to gather information then. Possibly, Turnbull too, would have balked at receiving comprehensive details about the evacuees when he had enough to contend with already.

On the eve of the meeting of the Executive Council (15 March), Turnbull sent a letter to Martin at the Colonial Office:

As the mail leaves this afternoon, I am taking the opportunity to warn you that there is every indication that tomorrow I shall be faced with something near to insurrection with the Executive Council over the question of the Maltese from Eritrea. I have tried to prepare the way for acceptance of your request but as yet the reaction has been more antagonistic than even I expected.⁷⁸³

Three issues in particular were not helpful: the suggestion that the Maltese might eventually be an 'asset' to the Cypriot economy and that the island would pay some training costs; the mention of Lord Winster's acceptance of the commitment; and additionally the 'imminent

⁷⁷⁹ Colonial Office to Junior Commander Butler, War Office, 3 March 1949, TNA, FO 1015/54.

⁷⁸⁰ Dolan to Bennett, 8 March 1949, TNA: FO 1015/54; FO 369/4183, K2613.

⁷⁸¹ Creech Jones to OAG, Cyprus, 6 March 1949, TNA: FO 1015/54; FO 369/4183, K2613.

⁷⁸² Bennett to Butler, 16 March 1949, TNA: CO 67/363/7.

⁷⁸³ Turnbull to Martin, 12 March 1949, TNA: CO 67/363/7.

return of non-Templar Germans.’⁷⁸⁴ Naturally, the Council would want to protect employment opportunities for Cypriots rather than seeing them given to outsiders. Turnbull also inferred that Lord Winster had been high-handed in his decision. This had caused a feeling of resentment amongst council members, ‘and which I have had trouble in controlling in the past – because of Lord Winster’s sometimes brusque and cavalier treatment of the council’.⁷⁸⁵ It also seemed that Australia had rejected non-Templar Germans from the party who had recently travelled there, probably on the *Misir*. Yet again, Cyprus was being used as a dumping ground. Turnbull ended his letter by conceding that there was no ‘possibility whatsoever’ that the proposal to transfer the evacuees might be dropped. However, he cautioned ‘it will be a pretty costly one if it alienates the few elements in the local population who are openly with us. The only slight hope of getting over the inevitable rumpus lies in the fact that we have at least not presented them with a *fait accompli*. That, as far as Ex[ecutive] Co[uncil] is concerned would certainly have been the last straw.’⁷⁸⁶

It was as well that Turnbull was not aware that British government departments were forward planning for the transfer, taking for granted that the Executive Council would rubber stamp the decision of a governor who had abruptly resigned. The Council did agree not to object to the proposal to accommodate the Maltese evacuees in Cyprus although there were four conditions attached to this agreement: first, that there was no alternative destination possible; second, that they would only be removed from Eritrea when the UN had made a decision about its future; third, Cyprus would not be ‘disadvantaged’ by this proposal and would accept no financial responsibility; and, finally, Cyprus would not agree to finance any facilities (i.e. for training) if not available for Cypriots.⁷⁸⁷ These terms appear to be minor, but reflect that the Executive Council was asserting its authority and attempting to have some control over a decision that affected Cyprus as a nation. Turnbull reinforced this with the following statement:

I ask you not (repeat not) to minimise the reactions of the council. Grave misgivings were expressed even by expatriate members and the outcome was only made possible by declaration by one Cypriot Member that despite inevitable political reactions (e.g. representation as a further attempt to

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁵ Turnbull to Martin, 12 March 1949

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁷ OAG, Cyprus, to Creech Jones, 17 January 1949, TNA: CO 67/363/7; FO 369/4183, K3604.

‘bastardise’ Greek population of Cyprus) he would be ‘proud’ to defend this latest contribution to the responsibilities of Empire membership.⁷⁸⁸

It was fortunate that there was still some value to Empire membership, although this relationship, as in other British colonies across the world, was beginning to disintegrate. The remainder of the letter dealt with details such as publicity, visit of a government official to Eritrea, and advice that there would be less public hostility if the stay in Cyprus was of a temporary nature. Lastly, it was emphasised that the island ‘should not (repeat not) be regarded as available accommodation for other displaced persons in years to come’.⁷⁸⁹ Turnbull was putting his foot down.

It is clear from a subsequent letter that now Acting Governor Turnbull was getting quite riled by the proposal to transfer the evacuees from Eritrea to Cyprus. The tone of the eight-page letter was quite hostile and raised many negative points. These included that ‘the Maltese will be seen as sponsored alien invaders, subject to no special form of control, when trade recession makes the threat of unemployment a serious anxiety to many workers’. Assuming that most of the Maltese were Roman Catholic, this would ‘render them unacceptable to the leaders of the Greek Orthodox Church’.⁷⁹⁰ This letter was necessarily detailed as it was the official reply to Creech Jones’ formal proposal which had been equally comprehensive. Although the latter had written that social conditions in Cyprus were similar to those in Turkey from where the evacuees had come, Turnbull was right to point out the religious divide between Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic. Both may have been Christian denominations, but intolerance was rife, especially when a majority Church like the Greek Orthodox was the dominant religion on the island.

The main desire of the Executive Council was to ‘fend off an evil day’, that is the transfer of the Maltese evacuees to Cyprus. As previously mentioned, it was asked that this must not happen until a decision was made about the future of Eritrea by the UN. In a sense, the Executive Council was hedging its bets if this condition was agreed to. By the time the British Administration was dissolved, Cyprus might not be in a position to receive them or an alternative destination for resettlement might be found. Turnbull did note, rather astutely though: ‘I assume that the fact that their ultimate accommodation in Cyprus is a possibility will save His Majesty’s Government from any embarrassment in the course of negotiations

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁹ OAG, Cyprus, to Creech Jones, 17 January 1949

⁷⁹⁰ Acting Governor Turnbull to Creech Jones, 29 March 1949, TNA: CO 67/363/7.

in the United Nations'.⁷⁹¹ 'It would be useful', he continued, 'if efforts were made to reduce the size of the group coming to Cyprus', something which the BMA and Foreign Office had been attempting to do.⁷⁹²

Neither would be pleased if this condition had been agreed to. The BMA had been keen to rid itself of the Balkan and Maltese evacuees since they had arrived – temporarily – over a year ago. While always keen to stress that the Colonial Office was responsible for the resettlement of this group, the Foreign Office was becoming aware by the end of March 1949 that it would probably have to bear the cost of their stay in Eritrea. Therefore, the quicker the transfer to Cyprus took place, the less their financial liability would be. Before the relocation could happen, however, the representative of the Cyprus government needed to visit Mai Habar Camp. A. H. Dutton, Senior Assistant Secretary of the Secretariat, Cyprus government, arrived on his covert fact-finding mission in late April.

Dutton was acting as liaison between his government and the British Administration, Eritrea, to discuss the transfer of the 'Maltese refugees'. His findings and arrangements made with the BAE were all recorded in a comprehensive report. The aims of his visit were to establish which categories of evacuees should be transferred from Eritrea; to come to a joint decision about the move with the BAE; and to obtain information about any problems which the reception and accommodation of evacuees would raise.⁷⁹³ On learning that not all the evacuees were Maltese, he made it clear that Cyprus would only accept Maltese as per the Executive Council decision.⁷⁹⁴ The description of the group had always been confused and inaccurate as there were still a number Greek British subjects and British subjects who had been domiciled in Balkan countries prior to evacuation included. As a minority, they were gradually forgotten about, but it also simplified the matter to refer to them all as 'Maltese'.

Dutton also noted that the BAE had thought that the move to Cyprus was to a temporary camp rather than permanent resettlement.⁷⁹⁵ It had arranged and was still processing applications from evacuees to return to Cyprus and Greece 'with the approval and assistance of the Foreign Office and is in accordance with normal consular practices'.⁷⁹⁶ It was anticipated that a batch would be despatched very soon, but Dutton foresaw a problem: 'New

⁷⁹¹ Ibid.

⁷⁹² Acting Governor Turnbull to Creech Jones, 29 March 1949.

⁷⁹³ Report by Dutton 'Transfer of British Evacuees from Eritrea to Cyprus', TNA: FO 369/4184, K4666. The visit took place from 22 to 26 April 1949.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.

applications will almost certainly be made and many of the Maltese, who already have knowledge of their probable move to Cyprus regard the Island as a stepping stone to the Balkans'.⁷⁹⁷ This was something which the Colonial Office wished to avoid happening. However, if applications were underway when the transfer happened, evacuees might become troublesome if told they could not return to Greece and Turkey from Cyprus. His view was that this needed to be clarified to the evacuees, but he assumed they would be allowed to go.⁷⁹⁸

In a related issue, Dutton was made aware that it was only recently that some evacuees had been resettled and that prior to September 1948, the BAE had been given no guidance about this. He also knew that that there was a problem with resettlement in Australia with Maltese who had arrived from Eritrea being regarded as 'unsatisfactory immigrants, and in future similar persons would be treated as non-British immigrants'.⁷⁹⁹ This obviously referred to the '*Misir* Incident'. This information may have come from the Australian Trade Commission who was party to the ongoing discussion at the Department for Immigration, Canberra. BAE had tried to resettle evacuees but was told that it was not its responsibility and the Foreign Office had then intervened. His concern was that more than a 'hard core' of evacuees remained: 'given more time and earlier guidance BAE might have got more away. I have arranged that all the records of outstanding applications for admission to their countries together with any personal documents or history sheets will be handed over'.⁸⁰⁰ At present it was a bleak outlook for those Maltese evacuees wishing to resettle in Australia, although the information about entry to the dominion was not quite accurate.

Points agreed with the British Administration, Eritrea, regarding the transfer were:

- The present Camp Commandant did not want to continue in the post after transfer (and 'would not be entirely suitable' anyway).
- A target date of 1st July was agreed upon as it would give time for Cyprus to prepare: 'I have reserved the right to put the date back if the DPW [Department of Public Works] cannot have a camp ready by then'. The final date to be fixed by BAE which is responsible for arranging transport.

⁷⁹⁷ Report by Dutton 'Transfer of British Evacuees from Eritrea to Cyprus'

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid.

- The wording of the statement to be given to the evacuees must be carefully thought out to avoid misunderstandings. Imperative that statements should be released in Eritrea and Cyprus ‘without delay’ because of leak in Eritrea.⁸⁰¹

Cyprus would not only have to fit out a camp for the Maltese evacuees but also appoint a new camp commandant. The site chosen was a guard camp close to a former Jewish Camp at Xylytymbou, near Larnaca. G. R. Walker was appointed camp commandant prior to the arrival of the evacuee group. He had formerly served with the Palestine Police and originally came to Cyprus with the group of German Templars. As he had recently left the Crown Colony and ‘proceeded’ to the UK leaving no address, there was a bit of a chase to track him down and offer him the post, which he accepted.⁸⁰² The target date gave the Cypriot authorities around two months to prepare the camp, but even if ready by the beginning of July the arrival of the Maltese evacuees was very dependent on available shipping. Judging by comments made by Dutton in his report, it was evident that despite the assurance by the War Office that ‘premature leakage’ of the proposed transfer to Cyprus had been minimised, it evidently had not. Approval for release of statements was given by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Cyprus and the Foreign Office to BAE in mid-May.⁸⁰³

Dutton’s visit to Mai Habar camp and discussions with BAE did speed up preparations for the transfer. Cyprus was certainly better informed than the Military Administration had been when the evacuees had arrived from India in Eritrea. The Cyprus representative also had the chance to observe the evacuees at first hand. His observations were similar to those of Mason:

Nothing I heard or saw led me to believe that the impression of a collection of shiftless people given by the correspondence on them was any way incorrect. Some are a great deal better than others but there seems to be a general tendency to clamour for the rights of British subjection and screw the last penny out of the charity box. Reading their petitions and representations of their Central Committee forcibly reminded me of dealings with the Jews. ... Unquestionably the only hope of rehabilitating those who are capable of becoming useful citizens is in removing them from the atmosphere of a

⁸⁰¹ Ibid.

⁸⁰² Governor of Cyprus to Creech Jones, 2 December 1949. This was a report on the care of Maltese evacuees since being transferred to Cyprus. A telegram was sent asking the Colonial Office to track down Walker, both found in TNA: CO 67/372/8.

⁸⁰³ Creech Jones to Government of Cyprus, 14 May 1949; and Foreign Office to Asmara, 16 May 1949, TNA: FO 369/4184, K4666.

refugee camp but it will be a hard struggle to efface the results of their having lived for so long with nothing more to do than argue about the amount of public relief to which they were entitled.⁸⁰⁴

The racist tone is unpleasant to read and it is an unflattering description of the Maltese evacuees themselves, but one that was perpetuated throughout their time in camp. The majority had become conditioned to relying on and expecting monetary support during their lengthy time as ‘evacuees’. They had also been moved from pillar to post with seemingly no regard for their wishes, and with little hope of ever being resettled. No doubt their behaviour partly stemmed from resentment toward the British government for the unsatisfactory and demoralising situation they were trapped in. The move to Cyprus, as Anthony Bonnici saw it, offered some hope. The BAE must have only felt relief that they could pass the problem of the evacuees on to someone else. As Dutton drily put it: ‘I should like to end this report by recording how very helpful all the BAE officers were; their willingness to help exceeded even what could be expected from those interested in unloading an unpleasant commitment’.⁸⁰⁵

Overall, Turnbull was pleased with the outcome of Dutton’s visit to Eritrea. Apart from some comments about the timing of statements to be released in Cyprus and Eritrea, and the repatriation of evacuees to Turkey and Greece, his attention was focused on the preparation of a camp for their reception.⁸⁰⁶ However, the Foreign Office, on hearing that Cyprus would only take Maltese evacuees was not happy. This would leave thirty-four families (around sixty people in total) not of Maltese origin left in Eritrea.⁸⁰⁷ These would remain the responsibility of BAE, and through FOAAT of the Foreign Office. The latter would be financially responsible so this was an incentive to resettle them as soon as possible. After accepting that it would have to arrange the repatriation of this group, the Foreign Office Consular Department set about organising this.⁸⁰⁸ Among those scheduled for return to England were Mary and Elsie Riddle, the mother and sister of Harold who was murdered by a Shifta gang.⁸⁰⁹ Despite some expressing a preference to go to other destinations such as

⁸⁰⁴ Report by Dutton ‘Transfer of British Evacuees from Eritrea to Cyprus’.

⁸⁰⁵ Report by Dutton ‘Transfer of British Evacuees from Eritrea to Cyprus’.

⁸⁰⁶ Acting Governor, Cyprus, to Creech Jones, 3 May 1949, TNA: FO 369/4184, K4666.

⁸⁰⁷ See TNA: FO 369/3960, K 4353. Also FO 369/4183, K3753.

⁸⁰⁸ See correspondence between the Consular Section, British Embassy, Cairo and BAE, Asmara, in TNA: FO 369/4184.

⁸⁰⁹ Mary and Elsie Riddle named in ‘Maltese Evacuees – List of persons interviewed’ attached to Letter from Consul Section, British Embassy, Cairo to Consular Department, Foreign Office, 4 April 1949, TNA: FO 369/4183, K3753.

Australia, the Consul Section (Cairo) classified the remaining evacuees as Distressed British Subjects, which compelled them to be sent to the UK.⁸¹⁰ After the departure of the Maltese group to Cyprus and the repatriation of some of the remaining evacuees to the United Kingdom and elsewhere, Mai Habar Camp was closed. Those left (44 in total) were transferred to Ghinda Camp halfway between Asmara and Massawa.⁸¹¹ By the end of 1950 only eight remained here: ‘Authority has been received to repatriate them to the United Kingdom, and they will leave as shipping becomes available. On their departure, the Italians at present in Ghinda on relief will be transferred to Asmara and the camp will be closed’.⁸¹² After three years in Eritrea these evacuees had finally moved on.

The majority had left in July 1949. Four hundred and eight Balkan Maltese evacuees embarked on the *MV Surriento* on 21 July at Massawa and were due to arrive in Larnaca on 1 August.⁸¹³ Included in the group were a number of people being repatriated to Greece and Turkey from Cyprus.⁸¹⁴ An advanced party was despatched – comprising of Frank Buttegieg and John Galleya - by air from Cairo to Nicosia, with an arrival date of 27 July.⁸¹⁵ They should have had several days to acquaint themselves with the camp and oversee any final preparations, but the main group arrived earlier than expected. The BAE had managed to obtain some reduced shipping rates ‘on the strength of a promise that disembarkation would be completed within 12 hours of arrival’.⁸¹⁶ Their arrival date had been moved several times and as the new Governor of Cyprus, Sir Andrew Barkworth Wright commented, the lack of precise information had ‘caused much inconvenience’.⁸¹⁷ However, the Maltese evacuees were soon ‘installed in their camp with some grumbling from themselves and hostile comment from the local press such as had been expected’.⁸¹⁸

In a sense the Maltese evacuees had almost come full circle, so close to where they had left in 1941. From Istanbul and Izmir they had travelled to India, then on to Eritrea, and finally Cyprus. For some, it was not their journey’s end despite the intention that the Crown Colony would be a permanent home. With assistance from the Cyprus government, evacuees

⁸¹⁰ Letter from Consul Section to Consular Department, 4 April 1949.

⁸¹¹ ‘Repatriation and Reception of Refugees’, *Annual Report, Eritrea, 1949*, p.18, TNA: FO 1015/600. Ghinda Camp was a repatriation camp used for Italian expatriates in East Africa.

⁸¹² ‘Repatriation of Refugees’, *Annual Report, Eritrea, 1950*, p.15, TNA: FO 1015/853.

⁸¹³ Asmara to Foreign Office, 21 July 1949, TNA: FO 369/4184, K7078. This was considerably less than the figure of 520 generally estimated.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁵ Asmara to Foreign Office, 15 July 1949, TNA: CO 67/363/7.

⁸¹⁶ Governor of Cyprus to Creech Jones, 2 December 1949. They actually arrived on 29th July.

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*

would later disperse not only back to Greece and Turkey, but also to the United Kingdom and Australia. Although the group was not wanted in Cyprus any more than it had been in Eritrea, the British authorities did make considerable efforts to provide opportunities for training and education in an effort to better their prospects and to encourage them to be self-supporting. The trouble was they were still misplaced persons.

From a British government perspective, the transfer of the Balkan Maltese evacuees from Eritrea to Cyprus was a success, but only moved the problem they posed to another setting. No department really wanted responsibility for them and the Colonial Office only took on their resettlement reluctantly. The Foreign Office does not come out with much credit having tried its best to avoid any financial responsibility for distressed British subjects in a foreign country which technically, the Balkan and Maltese evacuees were, while in Eritrea. And while it is understandable that the Consular Department was preoccupied with arranging the resettlement of Maltese British subjects in Egypt, who needed to leave a country where they were increasingly unwelcome, it does not excuse their lack of care or sympathy towards the group in Eritrea. After all, whatever excuses were made, their evacuation from Turkey had been instigated by the British ambassador there, a Foreign Office diplomat.

The British Military Administration (later the British Administration) in Eritrea stands out as acting without thought when it came to resettlement. Its main aim was to 'rid itself' of these unwanted charges and, as a result, sometimes made rushed decisions. Although it cannot bear all the blame for the *Misir* incident, it no doubt embarked a number of evacuees whose claims of accommodation should have been checked more thoroughly in an effort to dispose of as many as possible. It was certainly not wise to upset the Australian Immigration Department. Consequently, future applications from Maltese British subjects in Cyprus would be scrutinised carefully. On the upside, evacuees from the *Misir* (and the *Manoora*) established themselves successfully in Australia and went on to provide accommodation and financial guarantees for family and acquaintances who wanted to emigrate. This success is surely an optimistic end to what had been a lengthy, transnational journey for these members of the Balkan Maltese diaspora.

Epilogue

‘New (and Old) Australians’

The Camp at Dhekalia (near Xylotymbou)

The accommodation is not luxurious and probably below the standard of the camp they occupied in Eritrea but it is adequate for its temporary purpose. Communal messing was arranged through a contractor but after their arrival the Maltese who in Eritrea received a food allowance and catered and cooked for themselves, asked to be allowed to follow the former practice and their request was granted from 1st September.⁸¹⁹

As with the previous camps, a school had been started and a Catholic priest found to attend to the evacuees’ spiritual needs. The Governor also reported that money allowances given to the Maltese had been adjusted ‘to conform to local conditions’. In fact, these had been reduced as they were considered to be excessive and a deterrent for anyone to accept an employment opportunity. Furthermore, jobs had been turned down in Cyprus because many evacuees were hoping to be allowed to emigrate or wished to return to Turkey.⁸²⁰ It was clear that most did not want to put down roots here, and the Governor, Andrew Barkworth Wright, acknowledged that there was little hope of assimilating the evacuees into the island’s population. He also thought it was extremely unlikely that any would achieve ‘any form of self-support’ and noted their ‘shiftlessness’.⁸²¹

However, the Government of Cyprus quickly set about arranging resettlement for Balkan Maltese who wanted to leave. By June 1951, fifty two individuals and family units had been resettled in the United Kingdom or Australia and repatriated to Turkey or other places.⁸²² Almost half had gone to Britain, with Turkey the next most popular destination. Only seven had made it to Australia: Theresa Callus, Emmanuel Ellul, Jules Bugeja and

⁸¹⁹ Letter from Governor of Cyprus to Creech Jones, 2 December 1949. The location of the camp was Dhekelia which formerly housed guards for the Jewish detainment camp at nearby Xylotymbou.

⁸²⁰ Ibid.

⁸²¹ Ibid.

⁸²² ‘List of Maltese Refugees repatriated during the period 1.8.1949 to 15.6.1951 who have signed undertakings to repay advances, etc’, TNA: CO 67/372/8. Other locations were Greece, French Morocco, Tunis, Dominica, and Cyrenaica.

family, Helen Greck, Gregory Cauchi and wife, Lucie Aicolina and Lucas Aicolina.⁸²³ In the wake of the *Misir* incident, the dominion was proving to be a tough nut to crack. Liaising first with the Australian Legation in Cairo, then the Australian Migration Officer in Athens, the Cyprus administration persevered, putting forward candidates for migration.⁸²⁴ Among these were Victoria Briguglio's parents – Stephen and Maria Borg, her brother (Simon), and her uncle Lucas Borg and his family: wife Carmela, daughters Emmanuella, Clementine and Catherine, and son Spiridion.⁸²⁵ By early 1952, accommodation guarantees had been obtained for both, with Victoria and her husband, Natale acting as maintenance guarantors.⁸²⁶ Both families were interviewed by V.D.P. McInnes, the Australian Migration Officer during a visit to the Maltese camp in Cyprus in spring 1952.⁸²⁷ Unfortunately, Stephen, Mary and Simon Borg's applications were 'not approved'. The reasons for rejection were 'medical' for Stephen and 'appearance' for all three.⁸²⁸ They were simply not white enough, and it is shocking that such discrimination was still evident in the application process. Victoria Briguglio received a letter from the Department of Immigration informing her of the decision. It must have been cutting to read her family had been rejected:

As you no doubt appreciate, before any individual migrant can be approved for admission into Australia, he or she must comply with certain stringent requirements in regard to general suitability, good health and sound character, and it appears that it is the case of your relatives, all of these conditions have unfortunately not been satisfied.⁸²⁹

⁸²³ List of Maltese refugees repatriated during the period 1.8.1949 to 15.6.1951.

⁸²⁴ See correspondence between Government of Cyprus, Department of Immigration, Canberra, Australian Legation, Cairo and Australian Migration Officer, Cairo, NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

⁸²⁵ Letter from V.D.P. McInnes, Australian Migration Officer to The Secretary, Department of Immigration, Canberra dated 27 March 1952, NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

⁸²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁸ 'Decision in regard to applications for admissions to Australia arrived at after interviews on 30/4/52 and 1/5/52', NAA: A 445, 217/1/16.

⁸²⁹ Letter from A. L. Nutt, Department of Immigration to Mrs N. Briguglio dated 26 June 1952, NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

Lucas Borg and his family - except for his two eldest daughters – were also rejected by McInnes for entry to the dominion on the unofficial grounds of ‘appearance’.⁸³⁰ It is unlikely that the two daughters (single women of working age) went to Australia alone as Maltese families were very close knit, but one – Clementine (a dressmaker) – eventually emigrated with her own family to Australia from the UK in the 1960s. It is unclear when she arrived in Britain, however, in 1954 she married Ozyp Pich, and the couple went on to have three children: Anne, Emile and Luke.⁸³¹ As a stateless Pole, Pich successfully applied via an assisted passage scheme for entry to Australia in 1966 and the family arrived in February of the following year.⁸³² It had taken fifteen years, but Clementine (née Borg) had finally resettled where she had wished to go in 1952.

The process of migration to Australia was more straightforward for other Balkan Maltese at Dhekelia Camp although it may have taken several years to achieve. The Cini family finally arrived in January 1953 despite having confirmed accommodation in Melbourne verified two years previously.⁸³³ Sadly, by this time Laurence Cini had passed away, but his widow, two sons and a daughter were approved to come to Australia after some stringent checks by the Australian Migration Officer in Athens.⁸³⁴ These were needed as the two sons, Joseph and Natale, who were only in their mid-teens, had been reported as ‘very bad types’ while in Eritrea. However, since coming to Cyprus their conduct had been good. Overall, McInnes concluded ‘the family are of good appearance, speak enough English to be assimilated quickly, have been medically approved and have clear police records.’⁸³⁵ Subject to checking guarantees of accommodation and maintenance he recommended that the family could be admitted to Australia, additionally noting two married daughters and son were already resident there: Carmen Cauchi, Mary Deboo and Anthony Cini.⁸³⁶

⁸³⁰ Decision in regard to application for admissions to Australia, NAA: A 445, 217/1/16.

⁸³¹ Ann V. (b.1956), Emile Luke (b.1958) and Luke Ozyp (b.1964). Information gathered from [FreeBMD Home Page](#)

⁸³² See Pich, Ozyp born 16 November 1924, NAA: A2561, 2269; Incoming Passenger Cards, July-December 1967, NAA: A1197, Pha – Pierce, digital copy. The family travelled on the *Fairstar* from Southampton.

⁸³³ See ‘list of nominations submitted through the Melbourne Immigration Office for admission to Australia of Maltese residents in Cyprus’, dated 8th February 1951, NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

⁸³⁴ Letter from McInnes to The Secretary, Department of Immigration regarding the Cini family dated 23rd June 1952, NAA: A445, 217/1/16, digital copy.

⁸³⁵ Ibid.

⁸³⁶ Ibid.

Polychronia Cini, along her daughter Michelina and sons Joseph and Natale was finally able to resettle permanently and join other family members in Melbourne.⁸³⁷ As it was for European migrants, the family connection was of essential importance for any Maltese from Cyprus applying to come to Australia. Family members already settled in the dominion could themselves provide maintenance and accommodation guarantees or arrange a promise of accommodation. Former Maltese evacuees also supported friends' applications.⁸³⁸ In particular many adult children wanted to be reunited with their parents. Although by no means as elderly as Mary Toctan, the Australian Department of Immigration was reluctant to admit any that could potentially be a burden on the state due to health conditions. Those over the age of fifty did not have much of a working life left and therefore would contribute less to the national economy. Despite this, some got through as these examples show.

Pascal and Mary Cillia were hoping to join their son, John, who had settled in Seaton Park, Adelaide. He had remained in India when the Balkan and Maltese evacuees transferred to Eritrea, determined to migrate to Australia from there. Writing to the Secretary of the Department of Immigration about their application McInnes noted:

Included ... is an aged couple, Paschal Chilliah [Cillia] and his wife Mary. The decision on this couple had been deferred pending advice from you as to whether they should be admitted. They are both of good appearance and acceptable, except from a medical point of view. The husband (65 years) speaks Greek, French and Turkish, but does not read and write any language, while the wife (60 years) can speak, read and write, English, French, Greek and Turkish.⁸³⁹

A medical officer, after examinations, reported that Pascal suffered hypertension while Mary had numerous TB lesions and concluded they should be rejected on medical grounds.⁸⁴⁰ Surprisingly, their application to come to Australia was approved.⁸⁴¹ They joined a group

⁸³⁷ Polychronia, Michelina and Joseph travelled on the *Toscana* while Natale arrived on the *Oceania*. See Incoming Passenger Lists for *Toscana* (8 January 1953) and *Oceania* (9 January 1953), NAA: K269 Series, digital copies.

⁸³⁸ See correspondence in NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

⁸³⁹ Letter from McInnes to The Secretary, Department of Immigration, Canberra dated 22 May 1952, NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁴¹ Letter from T.H.E. Heyes, Department of Immigration to Australian Migration Officer, Athens dated 25 June 1952, NAA: A445, 217/1/16, digital copy.

of nineteen Balkan Maltese evacuees travelling on the same ship to Australia in September 1952.⁸⁴² This included Salvatore and Hortense Vella, both in their fifties, who were part of an extended family on board comprising two Vella families, two Portelli families and the Calleya family.⁸⁴³ Mr. and Mrs. Vella's son George and his family travelled, as did their daughter, Margaret with her husband Paul Calleya and baby.⁸⁴⁴ All were destined for Adelaide where they had relatives and friends.⁸⁴⁵ The extended family dynamics are complicated to explain, but George Vella's wife, Madeline was a Portelli prior to marriage, hence the connection to the Portellis. Members of the extended Portelli family had been settling in Adelaide since 1947 arriving on the *Manoora* and also on the *Misir* (1948).

Perhaps the most extraordinary arrival of former Balkan Maltese evacuees was chronicled in Australian newspapers in September and October of 1950. It involved Salvatore and Ursula Callus and their daughter Pierette who were turned back after arriving on the *Toscana*. They were hoping to join another daughter, Mrs. Eric Kristall, now living in Sydney. The family had been at the British Evacuee Camp at Coimbatore where Josephine Callus married Eric Kristall (see Chapter Three). However in late 1947 it was recorded by Captain Webb that Callus would shortly be returning to Turkey.⁸⁴⁶ The *Sydney Morning Herald* related their story:

A British Migrant family who says they spent their life savings to come to Australia sailed last night for Italy after being refused permission to land. They reached here last Monday in the Italian liner *Toscana*.

The family are Salvatore Callus of Maltese parentage (55), his wife Ursula, and 22-year old daughter, Pierette.

Immigration authorities detained the family on board. They claimed, according to the family, that the father was suffering from a lung complaint.

The family say they have no country to go to, because they will not be permitted to land in Turkey, where they have lived for the past 15 years.

Pierette said last night:-

⁸⁴² See Incoming Passenger List, *Toscana*, 15 September 1952, NAA: K269 Series, digital copy.

⁸⁴³ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁵ McInnes to The Secretary, Department of Immigration, dated 27 March 1952, NAA: A445, 217/1/16.

⁸⁴⁶ Letter from Webb, Principal Refugee and Repatriation Officer, Office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in India to Gilchrist, Commonwealth Relations Office, 20 September 1947, 'Claim – Callus – Loss of leg', IOR/L/PJ/7/12454.

‘There is nothing wrong with my father. First your Government says it is sending him back because he has lost one leg. Then it is because he has bad lungs. It is all lies. He has a good heart and lungs.’

Mr Callus, who was in tears for the last few hours, refused to be interviewed. His other daughter, Mrs. E Kristall, of Brighton Boulevard, Bondi, said after farewelling her father:-

‘He told me he wanted to kill himself.’⁸⁴⁷

The image accompanying the newspaper article is emotive.⁸⁴⁸ It shows Josephine Kristall comforting her mother, whose distress is evident. Although the Callus family were no longer evacuees, and had financed their own passages to Australia, they were there because of their time at the British Evacuee Camp at Coimbatore. They had just taken a more circuitous route in the hope of starting a new life.



It is amazing what a bit of publicity can do. The story came to the attention of Mr. Holt, Minister for Immigration who sent an official to interview the family when the ship stopped at Melbourne.⁸⁴⁹ When he had seen the report, he would come to a decision: ‘I was somewhat puzzled about how a man in Mr Callus’s alleged condition could come here in the first instance’ [he explained.] ‘Then I discovered that he was a British subject and would not require a visa. His first medical examination therefore was at Fremantle.’⁸⁵⁰ It was announced the next day (4th October) that Mr Callus and his family could remain.⁸⁵¹

⁸⁴⁷ ‘Migrant Family Sent Away after 4 Days’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 September 1950, p.1. See also ‘Migrant Family not Allowed to Land’, *Adelaide Advertiser*, 30 September 1950, p.1.

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid. ‘Mrs. Callus is comforted by her daughter, Mrs. E. Kristall, on the wharf last night.’

⁸⁴⁹ ‘Minister to Rule on Family’ *Advertiser*, 3 October 1950, p.4.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁵¹ ‘Maltese migrant broke but happy’, *Brisbane Telegraph*, 4 October 1950, p.14.



A newspaper reported: ‘Mr Callus said today: - “I have been messed around. Now I am left with no money. But Mr. Holt is a good man and I am very happy.

When I get to Sydney again I will work hard in my printing job. Now I must play cards to calm myself, I am so excited.”

Mr Callus and his family will leave tonight for Sydney by train.’⁸⁵²

For all the Maltese evacuees mentioned above, resettlement in Australia was a chance to become a ‘New (or Old) Australian.’ Despite the Department of Immigration’s tough and unfair vetting procedures it was possible for families to be reunited and finally put down proper roots. And as Mr Callus’s experience demonstrated it was ‘a bit of luck to be British’ (and Maltese) and he was going to make the most of the opportunity he had been given.

⁸⁵² ‘Maltese “Broke But Happy” (with image), Melbourne *Herald*, 4 October 1950, p.3.

Conclusion

This thesis has been refined from a much grander project. Initially the aim was to produce an overview of evacuations within the British Empire during the Second World War, but as research progressed the focus narrowed down to a particular group. As mentioned in the introduction, it was the length of time that the Balkan Maltese evacuees spent in transit which set them apart, and the fact that they traversed several continents. Although civilians from Gibraltar spent a longer period as evacuees in accommodation in London and camps in Northern Island the majority - over time - returned home.⁸⁵³ Between 1941 to 1949 the Balkan Maltese were moved from location to location and housed in temporary camps beginning with Cairo, then India, Eritrea, and finally Cyprus. The difficulty for the British Government was to find a colony within the Empire which would accept them on a permanent basis. This was never intended to be a temporary evacuation, but rather a resettlement project.

As explained in Chapter One, there was a Foreign Office agenda instigated by the British Ambassador in Turkey, Knatchbull-Hugessen to remove destitute and unemployed Maltese from Smyrna (Izmir) and Istanbul under the umbrella of evacuation of British subjects from the Balkan states. With a change in Turkish employment laws forbidding foreigners to work in the country, a significant number of the Maltese community were claiming relief payments through British consuls. Prior to the beginning of evacuation in June 1941 it was estimated that 700 of 1,000 Maltese in Istanbul were on the relief roll, while in Smyrna there was 256 people out of a population of 400 receiving payments.⁸⁵⁴ It was too good an opportunity to miss, but because of the war situation it was badly mistimed. Once in transit it became clear that it would be extremely hard to find anywhere for the Maltese evacuees to go.

In a pattern that was repeated several times in the coming years, an attempt was made to get British colonies in East Africa to accept them with no positive outcome. After a long stopover in Egypt, India eventually agreed to accommodate the Balkan Maltese (around 600) on the understanding they would be removed as soon as possible. In 1947, as Indian Independence approached, the evacuees were still at the British Evacuee Camp at Coimbatore. Other groups of evacuees, for example British civilians from Burma, Malaya

⁸⁵³ See Finlayson, *The Fortress Came First*. This is an excellent and comprehensive account of the evacuation of Gibraltar, detailing the battle evacuees had to be allowed to return.

⁸⁵⁴ Numbers given in 'Maltese communities in Mediterranean Area', note to Mr. Acheson from Arthur Mayhew dated 1 January 1942, Maltese and Gibraltarians in North Africa, TNA: CO 926/1/18.

and Singapore had long since dispersed. The difficulty – again – was finding somewhere to resettle the entire group. Much responsibility, as before, fell upon the shoulders of the Colonial Office, but certainly none of the East African colonies were keen to resettle ‘poor whites’ and several were still maintaining Polish refugee camps. Although many of the Maltese would have happily returned to Turkey, this was not considered a good option as it was feared they would rely on relief payments again to subsist. This would cost a considerable amount of money whereas resettlement, it was hoped, would lead to self-support.

This overlooked the fact that tens of thousands of pounds had already been spent on constructing a camp at Coimbatore and maintaining the evacuees there. More expenditure would follow for the camp in Eritrea, then in Cyprus as well as paying for passages and travel allowances for those who migrated. Furthermore, the evacuees themselves had become conditioned to being financially supported by the British Government, receiving maintenance and other monetary allowances for everyday living expenses. It was a habit that was hard to break and reinforced a widely held opinion that Balkan Maltese were exploitative and financially grasping. Not all were like this though; a significant number of men had served during the Second World War or found some work locally while in India. Others (men and women) had been employed within the camp. Had the evacuees been resettled or repatriated from India, as Captain Webb had urged, the apathy and stagnation which began here could have been stopped. Instead it continued to characterise their time in future camps. The fact that the group of Maltese who migrated to Australia on the *Manoora* in August 1947 successfully resettled demonstrates that they had potential to turn their lives around. As explained in the epilogue some of these former evacuees were able to help others resettle in the dominion.

In retrospect, 1941 was not a good time to think about a permanent resettlement scheme for Balkan Maltese. As British subjects it was right that they were included in the Mackereth evacuation scheme although participation was on a voluntary basis. As it turned out it was unnecessary as Turkey maintained an air of neutrality and was not invaded by Axis forces. In addition it was impossible to anticipate the length of the war itself, and whether Turkey would allow foreigners domiciled there to return. It would definitely have been an advantage to secure agreement from a colony, territory, or dominion to accept the Balkan Maltese evacuees prior to organising their removal. Unfortunately many were already fully committed to the imperial war effort and besides which, British government departments were already aware that none were keen to accept any Maltese domiciled outside of Malta.

In June 1939, prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, an interdepartmental meeting was held at the Colonial Office to discuss the position of distressed Maltese communities in the Mediterranean area.⁸⁵⁵ This included Maltese living in Turkey, Greece, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Algiers. Possible resettlement within the British Empire was brought up, and the Foreign Office was keen to explore this option rather than the suggestion that Maltese communities might be absorbed into the national populations of where they lived.⁸⁵⁶ However, other departments expressed doubt as to whether colonies or territories would accept any Maltese.⁸⁵⁷ It was decided to establish a standing committee to further investigate how to resolve the issue of distressed Maltese, but this was abandoned due to the outbreak of war, having met at least once.⁸⁵⁸ This meeting had given ‘special reference’ to a petition from Maltese in Turkey backed by the Ambassador and by the Malta Government, which asked if they could be moved to Cyprus or anywhere within the British Empire.⁸⁵⁹ This explains why the Foreign Office and Knatchbull-Hugessen pushed forward with their evacuation/resettlement. Despite the good intentions, all that happened was that the Balkan Maltese evacuees were moved from pillar to post while the Colonial Office tried to find a colony to take them en masse. Effectively they became misplaced British subjects.

It is possible to see cracks which hint at the empire’s fragmentation and the acceleration of the process of decolonisation in the resettlement issue. In the post-war era British colonies were experiencing their own internal political struggles with challenges from indigenous populations against British rule. Why would any want to accept a group of white British subjects with a dubious reputation and whose presence could damage imperial prestige further at a time when it was waning? Moreover, many of the Maltese evacuees were uneducated and lacking English language skills which made them less desirable settlers, especially in the dominions. This problem was never properly addressed during their time in the evacuation camps, although attempts were made to provide technical training for male evacuees (young men and boys) in India and Cyprus. It can be assumed

⁸⁵⁵ Notes of a meeting to discuss the position of distressed Maltese communities in the Mediterranean, held on 27 June 1939 at the Colonial Office, TNA: CO 926/1/18; FO 369/2523. Departments attending were the Colonial Office, Foreign Office, British Council, War Office, Air Ministry, and Dominions Office.

⁸⁵⁶ Part VI of ‘Maltese communities in Mediterranean Area’, note to Mr. Acheson from Arthur Mayhew, 1 January 1942, TNA: CO 926/1/18.

⁸⁵⁷ Notes of a meeting held on 27 June at the Colonial Office, TNA: CO 926/1/18.

⁸⁵⁸ Part VI of ‘Maltese communities in Mediterranean Area’, note to Acheson from Mayhew, 1 January 1942; Record of the first meeting of the Inter-departmental Committee on Maltese Communities in the Levant, held at the Colonial Office on 20 July 1939, TNA: FO369/2523, K13077.

⁸⁵⁹ Mentioned in ‘Maltese communities in Mediterranean Area’, note to Acheson from Mayhew dated 1 January 1942.

though that evacuees were able to pick up or improve their knowledge of English, for example through lessons at the camp schools or during time spent with the British armed forces.

Even if not fluent speakers of English, many evacuees were bi- or multi-lingual, and working-aged men were skilled artisans or tradesmen – blacksmiths, decorators, carpenters, shoemakers, printers, tilers – while others benefitted from training in mechanics. These skills could have been transferred to any location. The major difficulty was that their prospects as useful migrants were dulled after a period of inactivity while held in camps. Young men and teenagers were a significant problem as the majority had never had the opportunity to work. Women were not in the same situation as during this historical period they were confined to traditional gender roles in the home, but some had nursing training, teaching or administration experience, as well as dressmaking and hairdressing skills.

The real issue when it came to resettlement was that non-Malta-born Maltese were regarded as undesirable migrants because of their tenuous claim to be British subjects, their destitution, and that they were not considered white enough. Although the British government accepted members of Maltese communities domiciled in foreign countries as British subjects they were not imperial citizens. Despite strong cultural links to Malta, communities within the Maltese diaspora had developed their own identities. They were nostalgic about the island and were proud of their Maltese heritage, but this connection weakened through the generations in the eyes of the Malta government. This is why it refused to take any financial or resettlement responsibility for the Balkan Maltese evacuees in the post-war era. They were, for the most part, simply too far removed temporally from Malta so would not be recognised as its nationals. This explains why Curmi, the Maltese Commissioner in Australia refused to help Balkan Maltese who arrived on the *Misir*. This identity presented a conundrum, but the British government, once committed, always maintained their British subjects status.

It was firmly the British Government's fault - and this can be narrowed down to the Foreign Office – that the Balkan Maltese evacuees' prospects for resettlement were marred by their destitution. Much blame was put on the evacuees themselves for their predicament, and their exploitation of British subject status to tap into relief payments while living in Turkey. They also clamoured for their right to financial allowances during their time as evacuees and protested when they believed they were deprived of a decent travel allowance. British officials complained that the Balkan Maltese were out to wring every penny they could get out of the government. Yet consider this point: Maltese communities in Turkey had petitioned for resettlement within the British Empire prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. Examples of these petitions are found in Foreign Office Consular Department

files for the years 1937 to 1939.⁸⁶⁰ They understood their situation there was unviable when they lost the right to work in Turkey (although many probably continued to work unofficially after the law was changed) and made multiple appeals for help. This was articulately expressed by Antonio Borg on behalf of the Maltese community in Istanbul:

We do not ask for increased sums in relief and we are not like men in their own country who, if unemployed, can go out day by day in search of work, with the possibility of finding it.

Our earnest petition is that we be removed from this country to some place where, like other British subjects, we can enjoy the privilege of petition to work, denied us here, and the possibility of obtaining it, so that we can rehabilitate ourselves, recovering our self-respect and, at the same time fulfilling our responsibilities to our children and other dependants.⁸⁶¹

From their perspective the evacuation was a starting point for this resettlement. This view was encouraged by the questionnaire they were asked to fill out by Captain Webb while in India. It asked where they would like to go - back to Turkey, to the UK, or to resettle in a dominion or somewhere within the British Empire post-war. No doubt they believed that this was an indication that the British Government was prepared to act in their best interests and fulfil their request. This led to protests about their continued state in limbo especially when they were fully aware that the resettlement of other groups – European displaced persons and refugees – was happening apace. This does not excuse their tendency to demand their rights to monetary support but puts forward another explanation for their behaviour.

Compared with certain displaced persons, the Balkan Maltese evacuees were less desirable migrants. The United Kingdom and Australia both favoured northern Europeans, with those from the Baltic states and Poland at the top of the list. The preference was for Anglo-Saxon types – fair skinned and physically robust - who would assimilate well into mainstream society and contribute to the economy through hard work. As southern Europeans, the Balkan Maltese did not fit these criteria, their appearance was darker (or ‘swarthy’) and many were not fit or in the best of health. In addition others were now beyond

⁸⁶⁰ For examples of petitions see J. A. Ellul, Istanbul to Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 25 April 1937, and Anthony J. Borg to Consul-General, Istanbul, 27 April 1937, TNA: FO 369/2477, K5321 and K5882; Petition from Michael Tocton et al to C. Greig, Consul-General, Izmir, 3 June 1938, FO 369/2515, K8112; Letter from Michael Tocton, Izmir to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, 17 January 1939, FO 369/2523, K1499.

⁸⁶¹ Petition from Antonio Borg to Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 24 January 1937, TNA: FO 369/2477, K1472.

the age preferred for migrants. Their children, now in their twenties with their own families, were the more suitable candidates. Generally, their status as distressed British subjects as well as their apathetic state damaged their suitability for resettlement, especially when it came to Australia.

It became clear while writing this thesis that Australian immigration policy was discriminatory but also fickle. On the surface the dominion accepted all British subjects from the imperial world, but in reality white settlers were most desired, or at least those who looked white. In the post-war era, the Department of Immigration under Calwell could cherry pick the best displaced persons but could not (officially) do the same with British imperial subjects. All had British subject status, or perhaps more accurately imperial citizenship, and could apply for entry into Australia as 'British' nationals. Maltese from Malta fell into this category and could migrate to the dominion through an assisted passage agreement between the two governments (May 1948). Because the Balkan Maltese originated from Turkey – a foreign country – Calwell, Minister for Immigration, did not consider them to be British subjects. This caused considerable difficulty when the British Military Administration and the Consulate Section in Cairo were trying to arrange the resettlement of the evacuees who were now in Eritrea.

The *Misr* incident, when a group of evacuees was despatched to Australia as British subjects with all the correct paperwork caused a bit of a ruckus and Calwell's ire. He effectively banned any Balkan Maltese (at least those in Eritrea) from entering the dominion. Yet, when Maltese evacuees had arrived from India on the *Manoora* in 1947 the authorities had not taken any notice even though some required temporary accommodation. In contrast the arrival of Anglo Indians on the same ship caused more of a stir. Why was one party of Balkan Maltese welcome, but the other not? Possibly, the answer is that the first group was travelling as British subjects from part of the Commonwealth (India had recently gained independence) and were travelling on a ship carrying an assortment of Britishers.⁸⁶² The second group came, even though British government departments knew that Calwell had stated he would not allow entry of non-Malta-born Maltese. However, the case of the Balkan Maltese evacuees was not that straightforward. They were not applying for entry to Australia from Turkey, but from under the jurisdiction of a British Military Administration in East Africa. The group did not belong there but had no means of changing their situation. As such the evacuee group was often described now as 'displaced persons' or 'refugees', but they did not really fit into either category.

⁸⁶² Travelling in the ship were, for example, British-born British, Australian British, Anglo Indian British and Maltese British.

Although it was suggested that the United Nations' agency for refugees (IRO) was approached for help, the Foreign Office did not think this was a good idea. Ostensibly this was because IRO had capped the number of displaced persons it could maintain in camps and resettle, but it would have been inappropriate for British subjects to be placed under its care, especially as funding came from many countries. Moreover, there was a potential for much embarrassment for the British Government if it was discovered that it could not look after its own people. The solution for this misplaced group of British subjects was to find a colony to accept them. Cyprus had been in the frame several times before; this time the governor agreed (provisionally) to accept the Balkan Maltese. After further negotiation the group moved here in mid-July 1949.

The remaining Balkan Maltese (numbering around four hundred) were now back in the Mediterranean, but still in a camp. Despite Anthony Bonnici's praise for this latest move evacuees remained despondent and indifferent to their new situation and any opportunities for employment or training. Recognising that there was little hope of assimilating them into the local population, the Government of Cyprus committed to repatriating or resettling as many evacuees as possible. It successfully returned many to Turkey and assisted the resettlement of individual and families in the United Kingdom and Australia. Even the latter, despite implementing stringent checks, permitted the entry of Balkan Maltese from Cyprus during the 1950s, and occasionally showed it had a little compassion for older migrants and their adult children who wished to be reunited.

There is definitely scope for further research in this area to discover how the Balkan Maltese evacuees built new lives wherever they settled. This would move the narrative started here forward, and also discover whether they merged into Maltese communities already established there, but still maintained an identity as Balkan Maltese. It would also connect into the work already done on the Maltese diaspora by Frendo, Attard, and Cauchi.

Attention now turns to the role of British Government departments in the care and resettlement of the Balkan Maltese evacuees. A good starting point here is to define which departments had responsibility for them prior to the Second World War. On the surface, the Malta Government undertook to make relief payments to destitute Maltese in foreign countries which were paid through British consuls. However this was mostly funded by the Colonial Office, which allocated money to Malta for this purpose. The former contributed 75% and the latter 25% towards the costs.⁸⁶³ As Maltese were claiming relief as distressed British subjects, they were technically the responsibility of the Foreign Office. It was rather

⁸⁶³ This is explained in a letter from A.C. Acheson, Colonial Office to G. H. Barrington Chance, Treasury, dated 15 January 1943, TNA: CO 926/1/18.

a grey area, but A.B. Acheson (Pacific and Mediterranean Department) believed that the Foreign Office should actually be paying, but the Colonial Office had never claimed the 75% back.⁸⁶⁴ It was pity that this was never properly clarified because financial liability for the Balkan Maltese evacuees became a contentious issue which was only resolved in mid-1949.

It left other government departments carrying the cost until repaid. All monies would ultimately come from the Treasury, but there had to be provision made within department votes for the Balkan Maltese. For example, in the Foreign Office budget they would come under the 'distressed British subjects' sub-section. During the war, any cost of accommodation and maintenance was guaranteed by the imperial government.⁸⁶⁵ In other words the India Office was reimbursed directly from the Treasury. Problems arose when the evacuee group moved to Eritrea. By this point the Government of Malta had relinquished any responsibility for Maltese communities overseas, so there was no point approaching it for funds. The Colonial Office believed the Foreign Office was responsible and vice-versa. After much prevarication on the part of the latter, the Treasury ruled on financial liability. As the War Office had accrued a considerable amount of expenditure it must have been a relief to know that the Foreign Office would be footing the bill. Financial responsibility then passed to the Colonial Office when the evacuees moved to Cyprus. This was a fair arrangement as this was intended to be permanent settlement in a British colony.

During their time at the British Evacuee Camp at Coimbatore, the Balkan Maltese were under the care of the Home Department of the Government of India. Directly responsible was Captain Archibald Webb who was appointed Principal Refugee Officer, who also oversaw arrangements for other evacuees temporarily in India and Polish refugees who arrived in 1942. Although he found the Maltese evacuees frustrating and claimed most were unpleasant characters, he did note that there were decent and hard-working families within the group as well as scoundrels. They were well cared for at the camp and received generous living allowances while here. Webb did his utmost to push forward the resettlement or repatriation of the evacuees which is to his credit but ultimately the decision lay with the British Government. He saw them through until their departure in January 1948, having himself moved from the Government of India to the Office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom.

The War Office, its Directorate of Civil Affairs and the British Military Administration, Eritrea did not want the Balkan and Balkan Maltese evacuees deposited into their care. It was a 'temporary' arrangement that lasted eighteen months. The fact that the

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁵ 'Maltese Communities in Mediterranean Area', note to Acheson from Mayhew dated 1 January 1942.

BMA, Eritrea openly stated it wanted to be rid of the evacuees as soon as possible underlines their attitude toward them. This was not helped by derogatory information about the Balkan Maltese supplied by Captain Webb when they transferred to East Africa. However, military authorities were not generally tolerant or sympathetic when dealing with civilians, let alone a group of disaffected evacuees. But the treatment of members of the British Evacuees Association after an altercation about travel allowances was very badly handled.

Although it was accepted that the evacuee group would be moved to another location, no guidance was given to the BMA about whether they should continue the work started by Captain Webb in arranging resettlement or repatriation of the evacuees at Mai Habar Camp. They even asked for a resettlement officer to be appointed to take charge of this by whichever government department was responsible for them. In the end the BMA just set about this themselves when nothing happened. An official (Gamble) was tasked with processing applications and making sure paperwork was in order. It may have been a bit of a haphazard approach and was motivated by the desire to get the evacuees off their hands, but the BMA was actually doing what so many of the Balkan Maltese were hoping for – to be repatriated or resettled. Unfortunately, in doing so they stepped on the toes of the Foreign Office, which then intervened to take control. In reality it just wanted to protect its own interests.

This centred on its own schemes to resettle Maltese British subjects domiciled in Egypt, many of whom were facing increasing hardship and relying on relief payments. It half-heartedly agreed it would include the Balkan Maltese evacuees in these schemes to resettle Maltese in Britain or Australia. The first scheme was incredibly slow to get started, and the Australia scheme was held back by the Department of Immigration's stance on non-Malta-born Maltese (see discussion above). Yet Egyptian Maltese and Balkan Maltese were both classed as distressed British subjects, so what was the difference? In its opinion the latter were firmly the responsibility of the Colonial Office financially and with regard to resettlement. Going back to the complicated way relief payments to destitute Maltese were funded, this changed in 1948 when the Colonial Office stopped the allocation it was making to the Government of Malta as the island would no longer support Maltese communities overseas. Therefore the Balkan Maltese, whether in Turkey or in Eritrea, came under the Foreign Office umbrella. This accounts for a lot of Foreign Office blustering and criticism of the Colonial Office; it ultimately knew it would have to take at least some financial responsibility.

It was evident when researching and writing this thesis that the Foreign Office was an insufferable and rather arrogant department. Openly critical of the Colonial Office, it went to great lengths to discredit this department to the Treasury and disparaged its search for a colony which would accept the Balkan Maltese evacuees for permanent resettlement. This

was no easy task, and the Colonial Office went about it patiently. It could not impose a decision on any colony or territory that was asked. In the post-war era, as mentioned previously the British Empire was in a period of change, heading towards decolonisation. Dominions, colonies and territories were focused on autonomy and establishing their own national identities. Eventually, it did succeed in its task with Cyprus agreeing – albeit reluctantly – to take the Balkan Maltese evacuees. The process, in this case, could not move any faster than it did due to Jewish detainment camps on the island which needed to be cleared. This, of course was dependent on the situation in Palestine, but that is another story.

While the Colonial Office had a pragmatic response to Foreign Office antagonism over issues surrounding the resettlement of the Balkan Maltese evacuees, it was of course, protecting the interests of the colonies and territories under its supervision. However, reading between the lines there seems to have been an alliance between this department and the War Office against the Foreign Office, or at least a shared agreement that the latter was not as fault free as it thought it was. Overall, the British Government made a bit of a shambles of the resettlement of the Balkan Maltese evacuees. Hopefully though, it learnt from its mistakes when it came to the future resettlement of Maltese communities in the Mediterranean area, for example from Egypt and Libya during the 1950s. It would be interesting to make comparisons and also to discover whether the Maltese communities in Turkey were ever helped to resettle. Another area for investigation.

Ultimately, this thesis is an investigation and narrative about misplaced British subjects. The Balkan Maltese evacuated from Turkey in 1941 and in transit until 1949, were described in many ways: as ‘evacuees’, ‘destitutes’, ‘refugees’, ‘displaced persons’, ‘distressed British subjects’ and even ‘sponsored alien invaders’. What they became in this time was a Maltese community on the move, made up of close-knit extended families. Over time, this community grew as children were born in India, Eritrea, and even Cyprus. And sadly members were lost through death. Another kind of loss was experienced by parents when young women married out of the community to British servicemen they had met while at Coimbatore Camp. They returned to the United Kingdom with their husbands to start new lives and raise families. Others left for Australia or were repatriated to Turkey. However this dispersal did not sever family ties or dismantle the Balkan Maltese evacuee group completely; it just branched out, especially to Britain and Australia. Over time, using networks of family and friends, it gathered members in once more, and melded into the Maltese diaspora across the world.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACA	Acting Chief Administrator (Eritrea)
BAE	British Administration Eritrea
BEA	British Evacuees Association
BEC	British Evacuee Camp, Coimbatore
BEMA	British Eritrea Military Administration
BL	British Library
BMA	British Military Administration (Eritrea)
CA	Chief Administrator (BMA)
CAB	Civil Affairs Branch (Cairo)
CAD	Civil Affairs Directorate, War Office
CO	Colonial Office
CRD	Commonwealth Relations Department
CRO	Commonwealth Relations Office
DBS	Distressed British Subject
DCA	Director of Civil Affairs (War Office)
DDCA	Deputy Director, Civil Affairs
EVW	European Voluntary Worker
FO	Foreign Office
FOA	Foreign Office Administration
FOAAT	Foreign Office Administration of Africa Territories
GHQ	General Headquarters
HMG	His Majesty's Government
HMS	His Majesty's Ship
HQ	Headquarters
ICR	Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees
IGCR	Inter-Governmental Committee on Refugees
IOR	India Office Records
IRO	International Refugee Organisation
MELF	Middle East Land Forces
MERRA	Middle East Relief and Refugee Administration

MNLA	Malayan National Liberation Army
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NAB	National Assistance Board (UK)
NAI	National Archives of Australia
OAG	Officer Administering the Government (of Cyprus)
PCIRO	Preparatory Commission of the International Refugee Organisation
POW	Prisoner of War
RASC	Royal Army Service Corps
REME	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
ROAC	Royal Army Ordnance Corps
TB	Tuberculosis
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHRC	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
WAC (I)	Women's Auxiliary Service (India)
WHO	World Health Organisation
WO	War Office

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