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## Imperial Bending of Rules: The British Empire, the Treaty of Lausanne, and Cypriot Immigration to Turkey

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### ABSTRACT

The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne has been the most consequential treaty for the Eastern Mediterranean during the past century. It established the borders of the newly founded Republic of Turkey and defined its relations with Cyprus. Yet, a provision of the treaty has escaped scholarly scrutiny. This analysis explores the violation of Lausanne's Article 21 that provided for emigration of Moslem Cypriots to Turkey by British Imperial officials in Cyprus. There are three significant issues about Moslem Cypriots acquiring Turkish citizenship. First, it demonstrated the newly formed Turkish Republic's stance towards the Moslem community of the former Ottoman Empire. Second, it underlined the aspiration of a large portion of Moslem Cypriots to join newly formed Turkey. Third, and most important, it upheld British Imperial strategy on the island and the significance of the continuation of the existence of a Moslem minority. The value of the Lausanne treaty for Cyprus and the relationship between the British rule and the Moslem community of the island was paramount.

The disastrous entry of the Ottoman Empire into the First World War, siding with Imperial Germany and Austria–Hungary, led to its ultimate dissolution. At the Paris Peace Conference, the victorious Allied Powers and the defeated Ottomans signed the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres. With that agreement, Britain, France, Italy, and Greece managed to make significant territorial gains in Anatolia. However, Sèvres was short lived as Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and his emerging national regime reorganised the remnants of the army, abolished the sultan's government, and successfully led the Turkish War of Independence. A conference at Lausanne followed to recognise the Turkish victory and revise the Treaty of Sèvres. This new peace treaty, signed at Lausanne on 24 July 1923, put an end to the 'Eastern Question' and established the borders of modern Turkey.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, the nationalist Turkish government agreed to renounce 'all rights and titles whatsoever over or respecting the territories outside the frontiers laid down in the present Treaty' – Article 16. The under-populated Turkey,

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keen on immigration of the Moslem populations of the former Ottoman territories to Anatolia, agreed to include a special provision in the treaty for the Moslem minority in Cyprus. Although leasing the island from the Ottomans in 1878, Britain annexed Cyprus when the Ottoman Empire entered the First World War on the side of the Central Powers in 1914. Article 21 of Lausanne allowed Moslem Cypriots to opt for Turkish nationality and immigrate to the new Republic. Whilst Ankara actively encouraged Moslem Cypriots to move to deserted Anatolian lands, the subsequent immigration wave of the island's population was of great concern for British rule in Cyprus. This analysis sheds light on these British Imperial concerns in the face of uprooting the island's Moslems. As the continuous presence of the minority was a *sine qua* condition for maintaining Imperial rule on Cyprus, the British Colonial Office throughout the 1920s and 1930s prepared a 'flexible' reading of the legal provisions of the Treaty to maintain the minority population on Cyprus and, subsequently, their political control.

The outcome of First World War brought many developments to the Middle East. As part of the Paris Peace Settlement, Sèvres contained three articles that focused on Cyprus. Article 115 provided that Turkey recognised the annexation of the island by Britain and renounced all rights and title over or relating to Cyprus; including the right to the tribute formerly paid by the island to the sultan – Article 116. Article 117 held that 'Turkish nationals born or habitually resident in Cyprus will acquire British nationality and lose their Turkish nationality, subject to the conditions laid down in the local law'.<sup>2</sup> There was no provision for Moslem Cypriots to opt for Turkish nationality and immigrate to Turkey. However, after Turkish victory in the 'Turkish-Greek war' of 1919–1922, the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne replaced Sèvres. Selected instead of Geneva to accommodate all interested countries, the city had the benefit to be *en route* of the Orient Express.<sup>3</sup> Lord Curzon, the British foreign secretary, explained the suitability Lausanne over Geneva, the headquarters of the newly created League of Nations. It could accommodate United States and Soviet Union delegations without creating the false impression that the whole process and conference had any association with new organisation – neither Power was a League member.<sup>4</sup>

Britain did not quite achieve what it sought at Lausanne, especially retaining maritime supremacy and total control over key oil rich regions like Mosul<sup>5</sup>; and for British interests in Cyprus, Articles 16 and 21 eventually proved troublesome. Different from Sèvres, Lausanne included a provision for the right of Moslem Cypriots to choose their residence and nationality.<sup>6</sup> As stated in Article 16, and through the provisions of Lausanne and subsequent nationality legislation in the various League-mandated states, habitual residents of the territories separated from Ottoman rule who were former Ottoman subjects automatically became citizens of new political expressions: Cypriots,

Palestinians, Syrians, and so on. However, they could opt to become Turkish citizens with 2 years to exercise the option and, if they did so, required to take up residence in Turkey.

The British did not fully respect Article 16. In the 1950s, Britain arguably violated the Treaty of Lausanne, and this article in particular, by involving Turkey in negotiations for the political future of the island.<sup>7</sup> Yet, Article 16 was not the only key provision of the treaty that Britain failed to implement; this occurred with Article 21. According to this provision, Cypriots could conditionally opt for Turkish nationality:

Turkish nationals ordinarily resident in Cyprus on the 5th November, 1914, will acquire British nationality subject to the conditions laid down in the local law, and will thereupon lose their Turkish nationality. They will, however, have the right to opt for Turkish nationality within two years from the coming into force of the present Treaty, provided that they leave Cyprus within twelve months after having so opted.

Turkish nationals ordinarily resident in Cyprus on the coming into force of the present Treaty who, at that date, have acquired or are in process of acquiring British nationality in consequence of a request made in accordance with the local law, will also thereupon lose their Turkish nationality.

It is understood that the Government of Cyprus will be entitled to refuse British nationality to inhabitants of the island who, being Turkish nationals, had formerly acquired another nationality without the consent of the Turkish Government.<sup>8</sup>

The importance of Article 21 remains clear by looking at the populations of the Ottoman Empire and post-Ottoman Turkey. According to a 1923 British War Office special intelligence report, Turkey, after its victory in the Turkish-Greek war, had to establish peace as it was literally ‘bankrupted in men’.<sup>9</sup> Turkish involvement in continuous conflict for almost 8 years between 1914 and 1922 had resulted in a horrifyingly enormous Turkish population decline. This decline followed a trend where for decades, the purely Turkish population of the Ottoman Empire had been rapidly decreasing. Prolonged conflict meant not only many lives were lost during lengthy conflict, but also a sharp decline in the number of births.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the Christian population of the Empire, which had produced money for the Turkish government’s sinews of war, ‘had been decimated by massacre, or removed bodily by deportation’.<sup>11</sup> The report estimated that by 1923, the population of Anatolia was ‘probably only 30% of what it was in 1914’.<sup>12</sup> Hence, in a bid to arrest a demographic crisis, the new Turkey adopted an immigration policy that encouraged Moslem populations that remained outside of its borders to emigrate to Turkey.<sup>13</sup> This policy was consistent with the idea of Turkification then gaining momentum.

The National Pact, the *Misak-ı Milli*, adopted on 28 January 1920 by the Imperial Assembly in Istanbul – and later by the new National Assembly in Ankara – consisted of six principles that largely defined the ethno-political

aims of the war of independence and the nationalist programme pursued during the first decades of the Republic.<sup>14</sup> It provided that whilst the 'territories inhabited by Ottoman Muslim majority formed an indivisible whole',<sup>15</sup> the fate of the ones where there was an Arab or non-Ottoman Moslem majority should be determined by plebiscite. The virtue of necessity dictated this ostensible rejection of imperial ambitions. The Turkish delegation in Lausanne moved its demands and red lines regarding the Republic's ethnic minorities and drawing of its new borders on a firm axis.<sup>16</sup>

The ideal of a homogenous and 'Turkified' Anatolia was the aim of Turkey's leaders.<sup>17</sup> The compulsory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey in the 1920s resulted into a mass-immigration of almost one-half million Moslems from Greece moving to Anatolia whilst over one million Orthodox Christians moved from Turkey to Greece. Ankara also established an immigration programme encouraging Moslem populations from the territories of the former Ottoman Empire to settle in Turkey.<sup>18</sup> There are several estimates for the number of immigrants that poured into Turkey from 1923 to 1938, pointing to circa 800,000 people.<sup>19</sup> With the prolonged wars of the 1910s and 1920s resulting in an under-populated Turkey, the Kemalist government soon realised that the human capital of these populations would be significant for ideological, demographic, and economic reasons.<sup>20</sup> That dire situation along with the necessity to boost the declining population of Anatolia are important to grasp fully both the contradictions and evolution of the Turkish policy *vis-à-vis* Cyprus from the early 1920s until the 1950s.

The British understood the Turkish predicament even when Turkey would officially downplay the dire situation of a decimated population. In 1927, for example, Reginald Hoare, at the Embassy in Constantinople, wrote to Sir Austen Chamberlain, the foreign secretary, with a copy to the British governor of Cyprus, questioning the population figures provided by the Turkish government.<sup>21</sup> Whilst it was usually stated that Turkey had a population of circa 14 million, Hoare observed that 'well-informed foreign observers usually reckon it at 7 or 8 millions' and 'others put it as low as under 5'. At the same time, press reports indicated an infant mortality of a rate 75%, but the Turkish minister of health 'stated that it was probably about 30%'. For addressing the shrinking population, the government's 'chief hope' lay in 'inducing Moslems from other countries to settle in Turkey'. Turkey hoped to welcome more than 100,000 immigrants in the next year: '50,000 from Russia, 15,000 from Syria, 9,000 from Cyprus, 9,000 from Yugoslavia, 8,000 from Bulgaria and so on'. The Turks planned to provide the immigrants with 'land, houses, oxen and two years' exemption from military service'. The plan included specific locations for settlement. Consequently, whilst Russian Moslems would be settled in 'Kurdish districts like Diyarbakir, Kharput, and Mush', those from Cyprus and Syria were to 'be put along the Mediterranean coast'. The Turkish consuls who probably had 'instructions to carry on quiet propaganda' facilitated this

plan. Hoare concluded, 'it would be a kindness if intending immigrants in Cyprus could be given a discreet word of warning' about the dire situation they were bound to face on arriving in Anatolia.

The exact number of Cypriot emigrants to Anatolia is difficult to specify. British authorities in Cyprus in their annual reports disclosed numbers for both immigrants and emigrants. Yet, all figures are essentially doubtful. Until 1924, the approximate the number of Cypriot emigrants to Anatolia derived from the number of issued visas. However, many emigrants did not have visas and, according to official figures provided by the Turkish Consulate, 9,327 opted for Turkish nationality. However, the official British annual report estimated around only 5,000 people. This discrepancy is explicable by the fact that many Moslem Cypriots whilst initially opting for Turkish nationality eventually did not travel to Anatolia or returned to Cyprus. As Hoare reported in 1927, '[whilst] a number of Cypriot Moslems had already arrived [in Turkey]', following the 'specious promises made to them by the Turkish consul', it was clear that 'their disillusionment on arrival in Turkey' was immense. Although the situation was better than the 'chaotic' conditions that the exchanged Moslem population faced arriving from Greece, with the population 'sent to abandoned villages up country to die off like flies or left in compounds to much the same fate', the situation remained dire. Whilst the task remained decidedly Herculean, there were 'no adequate funds or organisation for the settlement of immigrants'.<sup>22</sup>

The difficulty in estimating the exact number of Cypriot emigrants to Anatolia demonstrates the lack of consensus in the academic literature. There are historical accounts that follow the official figures provided by the Turkish Consulate and suggest that over 9,000 Cypriots left the island for Anatolia.<sup>23</sup> Yet, other scholarly works assert that the number of emigrants who opted to leave Cyprus for Anatolia was closer to 5,000; and, after 1928, many returned to the island frustrated by the poor conditions they met in Anatolia.<sup>24</sup> In this case, the clear instructions that Ankara sent to Ali Asaf Güvenir, the first Turkish consul appointed to the island, were consistent in advancing Turkey's immigration policy in the 1920s when the campaign for Moslem populations to migrate to the new Republic began. This immigration policy followed the principles stipulated in the *Misak-ı Milli*. Arguably, the leadership of the newly formed Turkish state understood that the British would rule Cyprus for the foreseeable future and not grant national self-determination to the island's majority population. Accordingly, in the 1920s, Turkey's urgency was to resettle as many Moslem Cypriots as possible to Anatolia. Hence, the Turkish Consulate in Cyprus under this immigration policy was actively encouraging Moslem Cypriots to migrate there.<sup>25</sup> From the perspective of the Cypriots who opted to emigrate to Anatolia, there is a need to understand the reasons behind their decision by taking into account six important parameters. These are: the desire to live a more secure and stable life in Turkey; the

prospect of better future; the drought of Cypriot land; their affinity towards Turkey; Greek domination of the Cypriot economy; and the lack of higher education institutions in Cyprus.<sup>26</sup>

Those Moslem Cypriots who took the opportunity provided by Lausanne and immigrated to Anatolia had soon to confront another dilemma. As noted above, the dire conditions faced in their new homeland disappointed many. According to Article 21, there was an ultimatum either to opt for Turkish or Cypriot nationality. The British Colonial Office was agitated about this development, and its internal discussions demonstrate concern about this issue. In 1927, Grey Hazlerigg, a Colonial Office official, gave a report to two colleagues: Arthur Dawe and John Risley, the principal legal advisor. It concerned the general question raised by the Cypriot optants for Turkish nationality who then chose to return to the island.<sup>27</sup> Hazlerigg reckoned that at that moment, it appeared that out of 9,000 'odd persons' who opted for Turkish nationality under Article 21 of Lausanne, only 2,500 to 3,000 had actually left Cyprus for Turkey. There was, therefore, as the Foreign Office observed, 'a Turkish Colony of some 5,000 or 6,000 people in the island who, for this and the succeeding generation, may be a source of anxiety to the authorities'.<sup>28</sup> It concluded that this was 'clearly not desirable if it can be avoided' but, presumably, 'it would not be possible for those who opted during the period laid down to cancel their options?'

To understand how the British rule came to view the Moslem community in Cyprus as an Imperial asset, it is important to understand the significance of the island for the British Empire. Following Ottoman defeat by the Russians in 1878, Sultan Abdul Hamid sought British support by transferring the administration of Cyprus to London in June that year. Until 1914, Britain assumed the possession and administration of the island, but the Ottoman sultan retained a *de jure* jurisdiction. Nevertheless, following the Ottoman entry into the First World War on its enemies' side, Britain formally annexed the island in 1914.

The strategic importance of the island for British Imperial defence evolved throughout the first five decades of Britain's control of Cyprus.<sup>29</sup> A British historian once famously held that whoever wanted to control the Eastern Mediterranean throughout the centuries had to control Cyprus.<sup>30</sup> The long history of foreign domination of the island illustrates that claim.<sup>31</sup> The First World War marked a decisive change in Britain's control over its Empire: by 1919, the Empire has reached its territorial peak by adding territories from Africa and the Middle East. The latter included territories under Ottoman rule largely divided along the lines of the secret 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement between Britain and France. The acquisition of several resource-rich lands gave Cyprus an additional geopolitical value as gateway, partly explained by the fact that during the war, London had unsuccessfully offered the island to Greece in return of its support against Germany. But with the war's end, it



became clear to British policy-makers that Cyprus was of intrinsic geostrategic value with an even greater potential given the fluidity of other British possessions and spheres of influence in the area like Egypt. Many scholars argue that for Britain, the island had a so-called negative strategic value where its strategic importance ultimately lay in denying it to a rival like Russia.<sup>32</sup>

Since the advent of their rule in Cyprus, the British followed the well-established strategy of 'divide and rule', the mechanism that exploited coordination problems between the Greek and Turkish communities by making either discriminatory offers or threats.<sup>33</sup> The divide and rule policy had been operating in both a vertical and horizontal way fostering hostility along ethnic, religious, and class lines.<sup>34</sup> In Cyprus, the two communities divided by developing separate political, social, and educational institutions. The British denied the assertion of the Greek majority for national self-determination with the pretext of securing the rights of the Moslem minority, especially from the 1920s onwards.

Cyprus acquired additional value for British Empire in the 1920s. After the Turks relinquished their rights in Cyprus – Article 16 of Lausanne – and recognised Britain's annexation – Article 20 – London declared the island a Crown Colony in 1925. This act meant that a governor not a high commissioner led the island under the full sovereignty of the British government – independent dominions like Canada and Australia had high commissioners, in effect ambassadors. London now resisted the ensuing Greek nationalist movement for union with Greece; and Imperial political institutions put in place, like the legislative and executive councils, pitted Greek and Moslem elected officials against each other. However, in 1931, when a Moslem member of the legislative council voted with the Greek representatives, a colonial taxation motion was blocked. When British authorities ignored this vote, riots erupted. Giving the long-awaited pretext for London to establish an autocratic regime on the island, this context helps in understanding British obstacles to Moslem Cypriot emigration to Anatolia.

During the interwar period, Turkish strategy towards Cyprus was twofold. On one hand, Ankara supported the continuation of the British rule on the island and, on the other, encouraged Moslem Cypriots to immigrate to Anatolia.<sup>35</sup> To facilitate the latter, Ankara established the Turkish Consulate on 10 July 1925, with Ali Asaf Güvenir appointed first consul. In July 1927, it closed temporarily after the passage of the time limit for emigration ended, but reopened in summer 1928.<sup>36</sup> In these circumstances, the largest immigrant flow from Cyprus to Turkey took place between 6 August 1924 and 6 August 1926. The emigration of Moslems to Anatolia continued but on a smaller scale than in previous years, the right to opt for Turkish nationality provided by the emigration provisions of Lausanne having terminated on 5 August 1926. The 1926 annual report for the colony of Cyprus stated that 'some 3,000 Turks had availed themselves of the right'.<sup>37</sup> The pro-Kemalist



Cypriot newspaper, *Söz*, was calling for emigration to Anatolia where 'employment has increased and labourers are in great demand'.<sup>38</sup> Encouraging Cypriots not to emigrate to London or Australia, *Söz* argued, 'in Turkey, conditions of living and climate' were 'almost the same as in Cyprus. And we wonder whether the labourers in Cyprus cannot establish an Association and seek for employment in Turkey through the medium of the Government of Cyprus'.<sup>39</sup> However, the Moslem Cypriot political elites did not share this view. For instance, the editor of the weekly nationalist newspaper, *Birlik*, Ahmet Cevdet, published an article in 14 August 1926 arguing against Cypriot migration to Anatolia.<sup>40</sup>

Many Moslem Cypriots, whilst initially opting for the Turkish nationality, eventually either did not travel to Anatolia or returned to Cyprus. Regarding Turkish Cypriots who did not leave, there was a special notice published in the *Cyprus Gazette* on 2 September 1927, reminding readers that according to the Treaty of Lausanne, a window of 12-months existed for those who choose Turkish citizenship.<sup>41</sup> Whether leaving Cyprus or not, they would be considered Turkish citizens.

In 1926, Articles 20 and 21 of Lausanne sparked a discussion between the Colonial Office and Treasury Solicitor concerning the Inter-Allied Convention for reparations<sup>42</sup> – specifically, Cypriots finding themselves excluded from participation in the awards of the Commission for the Assessment of Damage suffered in Turkey. The French and Italian delegates put forward arguments about the status of Cypriots: that they were British nationals only after Lausanne and not since Britain's annexation in 1914. Therefore, those affected by damages in Turkey were not eligible to apply for reparations.<sup>43</sup>

After the re-establishment of the Turkish Consul in Cyprus in June 1928, the emigration waves increased to the same level as between 1924 and 1926. The governor of Cyprus, Ronald Storrs, concerned about these flows, asked the Colonial Office about the legality of the process.<sup>44</sup> Between 1924 and 1926, the procedure was 'for an optant to obtain a Turkish Emergency Pass', sign 'papers before the Turkish consul, and bring the Pass to the colonial secretary's office for a visa'. In that way, the British administration would keep a record of all optants as no one was 'allowed to leave Cyprus without a visa'. However, in May 1926, it was 'discovered that there was no legal sanction for preventing persons from leaving' Cyprus without visa. Accordingly, by September 1926, the police received instructions 'to ask all persons leaving for Turkey with Turkish Emergency Passes not vise by the Colonial Secretary whether they had opted for Turkish Nationality'. For Storrs, there should be a procedural change for the requirement for opting to leave under Lausanne, something made clear to the Turkish consul. The Turkish government should not recognise the Turkish nationality of Cypriots who were British subjects under the 1914 Cyprus Annexation Orders-in-Council and who would leave Cyprus on Turkish Emergency Passes issued after 5 August 1926 unless they had

recorded their desire within the two-year time limit or obtained naturalisation in Turkey. Storrs concluded that nobody should leave Cyprus without a 'valid passport correctly describing his nationality and personal particulars'. Accordingly, he proposed that Cypriots bearing Turkish passports could not leave Cyprus without a visa obtained by the colonial secretary's office.

According to Legislative Council minutes, it seems that Greek Cypriot elected members were paying more attention to the potential emigration of Greek Christian populations of other former Ottoman territories like Alexandretta and Egypt. They often enquired of the British government whether these populations could acquire British nationality under provisions of Articles 34 and 35 of Lausanne.<sup>45</sup> The island's attorney general argued that these articles did not concern those cases.<sup>46</sup>

After the promulgation of a new Egyptian nationality law, there was discussion in the Foreign Office whether the Cyprus (Annexation) Amendment Order-in-Council 1917 needed alteration to permit Cypriots in Egypt acquiring British nationality. That extension would ultimately include not only Cypriots resident in Egypt and the Sudan but also in Turkey and Greece. The British ambassador at Constantinople reported that the 'Turkish Government claim all Cypriots resident in Turkey as Turkish subjects'.<sup>47</sup> The Foreign Office held that 'to confer British nationality' on Cypriots resident in Turkey would 'merely create double nationality' and undesirable 'claims to be treated as British subjects'.<sup>48</sup> That view eventually evolved.

London attempted to do whatever possible to retain the Moslem population on the island. Accordingly, in violation of the previous arrangements, it facilitated the process of Moslem Cypriots who regretted opting for Turkish nationality. In 1930, a law published in the *Cyprus Gazette* gave the option even to those Moslem Cypriots that had acquired Turkish nationality under Article 21 of Lausanne but had not moved to Turkey to apply for British nationality.<sup>49</sup> The previous year, the Colonial Office had considered the regulation of departures from Cyprus to prevent the flight of Moslems from the island. As Dawe held, it was practically impossible to prevent an individual leaving a country when carrying a passport. Suggesting 'the only method by which a person can be prevented from leaving' was 'by due process of law, i.e. the issue of a warrant', he argued that it was 'very desirable' that they should 'bring within the British fold the Turkish optants' who wished to remain in Cyprus.<sup>50</sup> Clearly alluding to the divide and rule tactics, he held that 'the presence of the Turkish community is an asset from a political standpoint'.

A discussion occurred on the issue of nationality of Moslem Cypriot optants in Risley's room at the Colonial Office on 28 October 1929. Risley, several Colonial Office officials, and Charles Geraht, the attorney general of Cyprus, attended. Agreeing that these optants were already British subjects and therefore 'no question of naturalization' could arise, they reckoned the legal basis of the claim was that whilst the optants 'opted for Turkish nationality under

Section 21 of the Treaty of Lausanne, this clause was not law and therefore did not affect' the Cyprus Annexation Orders-in-Council.<sup>51</sup> They held that 'since no legislation had been passed implementing' Article 21 of Lausanne, these persons 'remained British subjects in spite of their opting for Turkish nationality'. The only anticipated issue was the possibility that 'the Turkish Government would raise objections on the grounds that we failed to implement the Treaty of Lausanne'.

On 21 August 1931, Geraht enquired about the Colonial Office legal opinion on the position of Cypriot optants seeking Turkish nationality. The Colonial Office answered:

that Ottoman subjects who were ordinarily resident in Cyprus on 5.11.14, but who opted for Turkish nationality under Article 21 of the Treaty of Lausanne and went to Turkey with Turkish passports obtained from the Turkish Consul in Cyprus, must still be regarded as British subjects by virtue of Article 1(1) of the Cyprus (Annexation) Orders in Council, 1914-17, because Article 21 of the Treaty of Lausanne has never been implemented by domestic legislation; but (2) that such persons may lose their British nationality if, when in Turkey, and not under disability, they obtain "a certificate of naturalization, or by any other voluntary and formal act" become naturalized in that country within the meaning of section 13 of the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act, 1914. This seems to be a question of fact which would have to be determined according to the particular circumstances of each case.<sup>52</sup>

Three years later, issues still existed. On 26 October 1934, the acting commissioner in Cyprus, C.E. Rooke, sent an urgent message to Philip Cunliffe-Lister, the colonial secretary.<sup>53</sup> He reported that '142 persons' were embarking that night for Turkey. Whilst all had Turkish passports but unsure 'whether they were all Turkish subjects or British subjects under the 1927 notification', he also indicated that 150 families had applied to the Turkish consul 'for moving to Turkey'. He offered an explanation that because of the ejection of all foreigners from Turkey, 'they are working up replacement by Moslem or Turk'.<sup>54</sup> London asked the Turkish consul to explain 'the circumstances under which Turkish passports were issued to them', since these people were British subjects. Mehmed Muhittine, the consul, replied that those departing Cyprus be considered Turkish nationals.<sup>55</sup> According to Muhittine, this was legal for two reasons. First, even if it was stated in 'Article 21 of the Treaty of Lausanne that all those opting for Turkish nationality shall leave Cyprus within 12 months after having so opted, no mention is made therein as to their reversion to British nationality by failing to do so'. Second, 'those who opted for Turkish nationality under the Treaty of Lausanne were not forced by the Government of Cyprus to leave the Island within 12 months. It was, moreover, published in the Cyprus Gazette No. 1867 of 2nd September 1927, that all such persons were considered as Turkish subjects whether they left Cyprus within 12 months of the date of the option or not'. Muhittine then referred to Turkish nationals resident in territories

detached from Turkey, like Syria and the Dodecanese, which under another provision of Lausanne had also to 'leave within a fixed time'. However, because there were 'no provisions to the contrary', those who did not leave 'within the stipulated time' could maintain their Turkish nationality.<sup>56</sup> He also supplied the requested information regarding the emigration of Cypriot Turkish villagers to Turkey: 'the total number of Cypriots who opted for Turkish nationality' within 2 years after Lausanne was 9,327; but 'of these only about 2000 have left the Island' with 'the rest . . . still residing in Cyprus'.<sup>57</sup>

A 1934 report prepared for the Colonial Office exposed a division amongst Turkish Cypriots regarding immigration to Anatolia. It referred to a recent visit by a Turkish member of parliament, Sirrı Bey, to the Turkish Club in Cyprus. There, Bey argued against emigration to Turkey, holding that 'the Cyprus Turks should remain in Cyprus as one day they will be useful to Turkey'. At the same time, *Söz* published several letters on the issue of the emigration to Turkey signed with the pseudonym 'Cypriot' putting forward arguments against emigration. The Kemalist Necati Bey, a former elected member of the Legislative Council, also published a letter condemning emigration. *Söz's* editor, Remzi Bey, similarly changed his view on immigration. Whereas in the 1920s he had been one of the most vociferous supporters of emigration to Anatolia, by 1934 he was writing against immigration.<sup>58</sup>

In 1933, according to *Söz*, Moslem residents of an entire Cypriot village applied to Turkey to immigrate to Anatolia. Ankara reportedly accepted their applications and replied by informing them that they would settle at Elaziz – Elazığ – in Anatolia with land allotted to them.<sup>59</sup> *Söz* predicted that more villages would likely seek similar solutions. However, the British government had already established a major impediment to contain such emigration flows: as a British subject, each emigrant would need to furnish a security of £50, an exceedingly high sum and almost impossible for ordinary people to collect and pay.<sup>60</sup>

Whilst the British were setting obstacles to contain emigration flows from Cyprus, the Turks were actively facilitating the migration flux. Throughout the 1930s, Ankara recognised as a Turkish subject every individual who opted for Turkish nationality under Lausanne irrespective of whether they had left within 12 months of their option or not. The publication of a notice in the *Cyprus Gazette* in 1930 drew Turkish attention.<sup>61</sup> The governor of Cyprus after November 1933, Richmond Palmer, persistently iterated his unease at the possibility of losing the invaluable Turkish community, the Imperial asset for guaranteeing the continuation of British rule. Considering the local implications and possible reactions of a large-scale emigration, he concluded it 'desirable as far as properly may be done, to discourage any considerable proportion of the Muslim element and its racial composition'.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, wider political considerations dictated doing nothing that would 'weaken the part that the Turk played in the racial composition of the

island'.<sup>63</sup> Palmer continued by suggesting that he was 'very anxious' and 'every effort should be made to retain within its shores the whole of the present industrious, loyal and hardworking, albeit poor, Muslim community'.<sup>64</sup>

Colonial officials and their masters shared Palmer's concerns. In 1935, H.T. Allen, a senior Colonial Office official, told his under-secretary that for political reasons, James Ramsay MacDonald, the prime minister, thought it undesirable to enact legislation to indicate to optants of Turkish nationality the period prescribed in the treaty.<sup>65</sup> The political reasons to which Allen referred was the continuing existence of the Moslem minority on the island. Convinced that 'anything in the nature of a large-scale emigration to Turkey' be discouraged, Palmer considered 'demanding a large cash deposit from each prospective emigrant'. Nonetheless, he was advised, it would 'not be legitimate to require a deposit greater than the estimated cost of repatriation from Turkey'. Palmer and the Colonial Office tried finding alternative ways to block immigration by asking applicants 'for a cash deposit of £10 with the Cyprus Treasury' to cover 'their possible expenses of repatriation'. However, Palmer knew that 'as all the applicants' were 'extremely poor', even that 'small deposit' could have been 'just as effective an obstacle as a larger one'.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, some accounts hold that Turkish Cypriots continued to immigrate to Anatolia without depositing this guarantee.<sup>67</sup>

For Palmer, however, the imposition of a fee did not go far enough to halt the emigration. During his notorious autocratic rule, the so-called Palmerocracy,<sup>68</sup> he imposed harsh laws to control the public sphere and censor the local press. He wanted to discourage potential emigrants by informing them about the hardship that they would likely face in Anatolia. Thus, he requested the Colonial Office to provide him with 'authentic information' to 'warn these possibly misguided people of the fate that awaits them'.<sup>69</sup> James Morgan, at the British Embassy, wrote that it was 'impracticable, if not impossible, to make a specific investigation' into the particular conditions facing the Moslem Cypriot emigrants.<sup>70</sup> However, he provided some general remarks holding that since 1923 the 'settlement of Muslim immigrants has much improved'.

In May 1935, the erudite Dawe understood the 'political motive underlying the Governor's solicitude for these people'.<sup>71</sup> 'Turkish Cypriots', he held, had 'always been a valuable element in the population from our point of view', since they had 'hitherto supported British rule' and had 'furnished admirable material for the Police Force and other Government services'. Dawe warned the Colonial Office that it was the Turkish consul's endeavour 'to win over these people to Kemalism and to get them to leave Cyprus'. He therefore asked to understand Palmer's action as 'be[ing] inspired by wider political considerations and not merely those of the personal interests of the applicants for passports'. For his part, Palmer warned Cunliffe-Lister about the increasing influence of Kemalism in Cyprus: in 1934, there was a "further application for

an entire village to migrate to Asia Minor.<sup>72</sup> A month later, whilst discussing the potential transfer of the Turkish Consulate from Larnaca to Nicosia, Palmer also cautioned that if the consul were to move to the Cypriot capital, 'his opportunities for inducing persons to emigrate to Turkey would be far greater'.<sup>73</sup>

In the 1930s, the deteriorating economic situation made living conditions difficult for the vast amount of the Cypriot population. Although Cyprus was relieved of the 'Tribute' [debt charge] in 1927, Cypriots still resented what they held were heavy tax burdens – the Moslem community disproportionately affected by the harsh economic conditions. In many cases by 1937, with the situation so deteriorated that soup kitchens had to be set up for food relief,<sup>74</sup> the colonial administration became very concerned about 'a feeling of discontent in the Moslem community'.<sup>75</sup> That dissatisfaction 'manifested in outspoken attacks in the Press on the educational policy adopted by Government in so far as it affected the Moslem Lycée and among the poorer and less educated classes, in frequent attempts on the part of young men to emigrate to Turkey without passport facilities'.<sup>76</sup> For the British administration, 'emigration was the logical outcome of the Press campaign':

young men were tempted to try their fortunes and joining together in small groups purchased sailing boats in which they made the journey across the narrow strait which divides Cyprus from the south coast of Asia Minor. Altogether 259 men left the Island in this fashion. Of this number, all except 21 returned. Some were not permitted to land by the Turkish authorities, while others landed and, after discovering that work was not obtainable, either paid their passage back to Cyprus by steamer or applied to the British consular authority for repatriation at public expense. This conclusive demonstration of the futility of the Moslem attitude and its inapplicability to the changed conditions and exclusiveness of present day international relations, quickly allayed the unrest.<sup>77</sup>

These efforts were characterised by Palmer as abortive attempts of a number of unemployed adolescents to evade the emigration restrictions by a hazardous crossing of the Mediterranean in open boats in search of an El Dorado in Anatolia".<sup>78</sup>

In response to this alarming situation, London attempted to provide special assistance to the Moslem community. For instance, the governor 'on the occasion of the Bayram festival visited the Delegates of Evkaf [the Pious Foundation in Cyprus] at the Evkaf Offices, and made a short speech encouraging co-operation with the Government, and reprobating dissention among the Moslems'.<sup>79</sup> Whilst not commented on in the Moslem Cypriot press, 'no further reports have been received of young Moslems leaving the Island for Asia Minor'. This probably derived from the changing stance of the Turkish consul.<sup>80</sup>

Cypriot emigration to Turkey was not the only flow that concerned the British. One more route had active use by an increasing amount of Cypriots: that to Britain.<sup>81</sup> The grounds for concern were different from those for



relocation to Anatolia. The arrival of Cypriot immigrants to Britain was unwelcome mainly because of their poor background. For instance, the growing numbers of Cypriots in London urged Colonel Hamilton 'to express the concern of his Society [The Charity Organisation Society] at the problem of the Cypriot Colony in London, and their steadily increasing numbers'.<sup>82</sup> Anxiety existed about Cypriot 'lack of character and lawlessness, and his Society greatly feared that the fact that some of the Cypriots were able to receive public assistance would lead to a greater influx than ever of their fellow countrymen'. The British administration in Cyprus could not forbid it but only raise some barriers. Reports from the London Metropolitan Police regarding the poor and humble life of Cypriots in the capital of the Empire, along with racist British perceptions, saw British officials in Cyprus seek to restrain and discourage that wave of immigration.<sup>83</sup> In 1936, Palmer requested that the Home Office give him an account of all Cypriots arriving in Britain in that year.<sup>84</sup>

As shown by the contextualisation of the British stance regarding the emigration of Moslem Cypriots to Anatolia during the interwar period, the continuing existence of a sizeable minority community for perpetuating British rule over the island was of paramount importance. The geostrategic significance of Cyprus was rapidly evolving for the British Empire in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, and the swift developments that followed the redistribution of power in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern theatres gave the island added value for British Imperial defence. Whilst the administration in Cyprus had followed divisive policies since in the late nineteenth century, it is arguably the interwar period where the divide-and-rule policy was fully developed. Yet to do so, London needed two sizeable communities inhabiting the island.

With the signing of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, British authorities agreed to allow the island's Moslem population to immigrate to the newly founded Turkish Republic. After a major migrant wave displaced almost one-fifth of that vital minority, the British government in Cyprus became alarmed about the possibility of losing an essential asset for exercising its *divide-et-impera* policies. That many Moslem Cypriots who had opted to leave for Turkey regretted their decision due to dire conditions in Anatolia and soon wished to return to Cyprus was a gift to the British. To take advantage of this opportunity, the Colonial and Foreign offices, along with the Cyprus administration, put forward a legal pretext to allow immigrants to follow Lausanne dictates, whilst also establishing obstacles for Moslem Cypriots to discourage them from leaving.

Although largely overlooked by the bulk of the historiography on Cyprus, understanding the interwar period is crucial to grasp more fully the years of conflict and violence that took place on the island since the 1950s. As Cyprus emerged greater in Britain's geostrategic interests and calculations by the First



World War, British rulers understood the need for an Imperial strategy necessary to establish control and dominance over the island. This strategy had in its core the *divide et imperia* policies that required the existence of two sizeable ethnic communities. Thus, whilst the overwhelming majority of the Cypriot population already nationally awakened for over a century and prompted by the successes of various national independence movements kept pressuring for national self-determination, the existence of a sizeable ethnic minority was important. For the following decades, British rule on Cyprus would repeatedly deny the national aspirations of the Greek Cypriot majority on the pretext of safeguarding the rights of the Turkish Cypriot minority. Nevertheless, to grasp fully the historical developments on Cyprus, they need contextualisation within the evolving power dynamics of the Eastern Mediterranean.

## Notes

- 1 Except for the region of Alexandretta – Iskenderun; the region was originally part of Syria, but Turkey annexed it in 1939. See Hazal Papuççular, “The Sanjak of Alexandretta (Hatay) in Turkish Foreign Policy: A Case of “Accidental Diaspora” and Kin-State Politics,” in *A Transnational Account of Turkish Foreign Policy*, ed. Hazal Papuççular and Deniz Kuru (Cham, 2020), 121–40.
- 2 Murat Metin Hakki, *The Cyprus Issue. A Documentary History, 1878–2007* (London, 2007), 6.
- 3 Briton Cooper Busch, *Mudros to Lausanne: Britain's Frontier in West Asia, 1918–1923* (Albany, NY, 1976), 357.
- 4 For an excellent analysis of the political considerations of the Allied governments for admitting the Soviet delegation to the Lausanne conference, see Bülent Gökay, *A Clash of Empires: Turkey between Russian Bolshevism and British Imperialism, 1918–1923* (London, 1997), Chapter 6.
- 5 Erik Goldstein, “The British Official Mind and the Lausanne Conference, 1922–23,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 14, no. 2 (2003): 203.
- 6 Cmd. 1814: *Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern Affairs 1922–1923: records of proceedings and draft terms of peace* (London, 1923).
- 7 In the 1950s, Britain invited Turkey to take part in talks on the future of Cyprus, a move violating Lausanne treaty clauses. A question still exists how and why the Greek side accepted that misapplication of Article 16 of the treaty. It was most probably one of the significant turning points in the history of the Cyprus issue. See M. M. Hakki, ed., *The Cyprus Issue. A Documentary History, 1878–2007* (London, 2007), 7.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 War Office Intelligence summary, ‘Turkey: a history of the Nationalistic Movement, 1918–1922’, Volume II, 1923, WO [War Office Records, The National Archives, Kew] 157/1310.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Turkey’s stance on Cypriot immigrants might have been influenced also by the pervasive rumour that Italy was planning to colonise Southern Anatolia with Italian emigrates. Cf. E. Kuran, “Turkish-Greek Relations in Connection with the Cyprus Question, 1923–

- 1939,” in *Cyprus International Symposium on Her Past and Present*, ed. Ismail Hakki Mirici (Famagusta, 1994); and George S. Georghallides, “Turkish and British Reactions to the Emigration of the Cypriot Turk to Anatolia, 1924–1927,” *Balkan Studies* 18, no. 1 (1977): 43–52.
- 14 Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 3rd ed. (London, 2005), 144.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 138.
- 16 Since the early 1920s, the *Misak-ı Milli* was ‘the canon of the Turkish foreign policy’, its provisions shaping the Turkish agenda on the question of minorities. See Onur Yiildirim, *Diplomacy and Displacement: Reconsidering the Turco-Greek Exchange of Populations, 1922–1934* (NY, 2006), 33.
- 17 Ilia Xypolia, “Racist Aspects of Modern Turkish Nationalism,” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18, no. 2 (2016): 111–24.
- 18 Kemal Kirişçi, “Disaggregating Turkish Citizenship and Immigration Practices,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 3 (2000): 1–22.
- 19 Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who Is a Turk?* (London, 2005), 82.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 This paragraph is based on Hoare to Chamberlain, March 23, 1927, FO [Foreign Office Records, The National Archives, Kew] 424/266.
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 Suha Bolukbasi, *The Superpowers and the Third World: Turkish-American Relations and Cyprus* (Lanham, MD, 1988), 22.
- 24 This and the next sentence based on Costas P. Kyrris, *Kypros, Tourkia, kai Hellēnismos: thesmoi, domes, scheseis, provlēmata, m’epilogo gia tis anatolikes spoudes ston Hellēniko chōr* (Nicosia, 1980), 105.
- 25 Niyazi Kızılyürek, *Κύπρος: το αδιέξοδο των εθνικισμών* (Athens, 1999).
- 26 Zafer Cakmak, “Kıbrıs’tan Anadolu’ya Türk Göçü (1878–1938),” *Tükiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi* 36 (2008): 210.
- 27 ‘Return to Turkey of Cypriots opting for Turkish nationality’, CO 67/221/11 (1927).
- 28 This and the next sentence from ‘Cypriots opting for Turkish Nationality’, 1927, CO [Colonial Office Records, The National Archives, Kew] 67/221/11.
- 29 Ilia Xypolia, “From Mare Nostrum to Insula Nostra: British Colonial Cyprus and the Italian Imperial Threat,” *Round Table* 105, no. 3 (2016): 287–96.
- 30 George F. Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, Four Volumes (Cambridge, 1940–1952).
- 31 For a concise macro-historical account of Great Power rivalry in the eastern Mediterranean, see Marios L. Evriviades, *Power Competition in the Eastern Mediterranean: A Historical Perspective and Future Prospects* (Athens, 1996). For British pre-eminence in the Mediterranean Sea, see Robert Holland, *Blue-Water Empire. The British in the Mediterranean since 1800* (London, 2012).
- 32 George S. Georghallides, *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus 1918–1926* (Nicosia, 1979), 14.
- 33 Ilia Xypolia, *British Imperialism and Turkish Nationalism in Cyprus, 1923–1939* (London, 2017).
- 34 Idem., “Divide et Impera: Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of British Imperialism,” *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory* 44, no. 3 (2016): 221–31.
- 35 James A. J. McHenry, *The Uneasy Partnership on Cyprus, 1919–1939: The Political and Diplomatic Interaction Between Great Britain, Turkey, and the Turkish Cypriot Community* (NY, 1987).
- 36 Georghallides, “Turkish and British Reactions,” 49.
- 37 Colonial Office “Annual Report 1926,” CO 67/220/2.

- 38 *Soz* [No.974], 28 July 1936, CSA [The State Archives, Nicosia, Cyprus], SA1 517/1926/2.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 Emgili Fahriye, “Kıbrıs’tan Türkiye Yapılan Göçlerin Kıbrıs Türk Basınına Yansımaları (1923–1938),” *Karadeniz Araştırmaları* 39 (2013): 111–36.
- 41 ‘Cypriot Optants for Turkish Nationality. Extract from Cyprus Gazette’, 2 September 1927, CO 67/258/15.
- 42 ‘Report from the British Delegate on the Commission for the Assessment of Damage suffered in Turkey’, 19 March 1926, CO 67/216/12.
- 43 Amery [colonial secretary] to Stevenson [governor, Cyprus], 29 May 1926, CO 67/217/7.
- 44 This paragraph based on Storrs to Amery, 22 November 1928, CO 67/226/19.
- 45 Legislative Council minutes, CO 69/37.
- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 Under-Secretary of State [Foreign Office] to Under-Secretary of State [Colonial Office], 1 October 1926, CO 67/217/12.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 ‘No 94. OPTIONS UNDER ARTICLE 21 OF THE TREATY OF LAUSANNE. It is hereby notified for the general information that the Secretary of State for the Colonies has intimated that persons, who opted for Turkish nationality under Article 21 of the Treaty of Lausanne but failed to leave Cyprus within twelve months of having so opted in accordance with the provisions of the same Article, are not considered by His Majesty’s Government to have acquired Turkish nationality. All such persons may therefore, if they so desire and being otherwise eligible, apply for a certificate of British nationality under the Cyprus (Annexation) Amendment Orders in Council, 1914–1929’: ‘Extract from the Cyprus Gazette’, 24 January 1930, CO 67/262/2.
- 50 Dawe to Cowell, 21 May 1929, CO 67/227/11.
- 51 This and the rest of the paragraph based on ‘Petition of Cypriot Optants for Turkish Nationality’, 28 October 1929, CO 67/227/11.
- 52 Internal CO correspondence, 5 October 1931; Muhittine [Turkish Consul] to Cunliffe-Lister [colonial secretary], 2 November 1934, CO 67/240/7.
- 53 Rooke [acting commissioner] to Cunliffe-Lister, urgent, 26 October 1934, CO 67/258/15.
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 Muhittine to Wright [acting colonial secretary], 2 November 1934, CO 67/258/15.
- 56 ‘Cypriot optants for Turkish Nationality’, CO 67/258/15.
- 57 *Ibid.*
- 58 Rooke to Cunliffe-Lister, urgent, 26 October 1934, CO 67/258/15.
- 59 *Soz* [No.693], 27 December 1933, CSA SA1 517/1926/2.
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 Internal CO correspondence, 9 June 1936, CO 67/265/14.
- 62 Richmond Palmer, the governor of Cyprus, wrote: ‘In the interval which has subsequently elapsed whilst the national status of optants for Turkish nationality under the provisions of Article 21 of the Treaty of Lausanne has been under discussion in London, I have been able fully to consider the local implications and possible reactions of a large-scale emigration to Turkey; and my conclusion is that it is desirable so far as proportion of the Muslim element in its racial composition’: Palmer to Thomas [colonial secretary] 10 January 1936, CO 67/265/14 (1936).
- 63 *Ibid.*
- 64 Palmer wrote: ‘In addition wider political considerations make it desirable to do nothing which would weaken the part which the Turk plays in the racial composition of the Island and I am anxious that every effort should be made to retain within its shores the whole of the present industrious, loyal and hardworking, albeit poor, Moslem community’: *Ibid.*

- 65 Allen to Colonial Office under -secretary, 23 October 1935, CO 67/260/19.
- 66 Palmer to Cunliffe-Lister, 17 April 1935, CO 67/262/5.
- 67 See Zafer Cakmak, “Kıbrıs’tan Anadolu’ya Türk Göçü (1878–1938),” *Tükiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi* 36 (2008): 218; and James A. J. McHenry, *The Uneasy Partnership on Cyprus, 1919–1939: The Political and Diplomatic Interaction Between Great Britain, Turkey, and the Turkish Cypriot Community* (NY, 1987).
- 68 Alexis Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict* (London, 2014).
- 69 Palmer to Cunliffe-Lister, 17 April 1935, CO 67/262/5.
- 70 Morgan to Hoare [foreign secretary], 14 September 1935, CO 67/262/5.
- 71 Except where noted, this paragraph based on Dawe to Allen, 17 May 1935, CO 67/262/5.
- 72 Palmer to Cunliffe-Lister, 10 April 1935, CO 67/262/2.
- 73 Palmer to Cunliffe-Lister, 3 May 1935, *Ibid.*
- 74 For instance, for the establishment of a soup kitchen in Limassol, see *Embros* (15 February 1937).
- 75 ‘Secret Report on the situation in Cyprus July–October 1937. The Political Situation in Cyprus from the 1st July to 31st October 1937’, FO 141/643/6.
- 76 *Ibid.*
- 77 *Ibid.*
- 78 Palmer to MacDonald [colonial secretary] 24 June 1938, CO 353/1594/18.
- 79 ‘The Political situation in Cyprus from the 1st November to the 31st December 1937’, CO 67/274/5.
- 80 See the 1937 Report prepared by the Turkish Consul regarding the situation of the Turkish Cypriots, BCA [The Republican Archives, Ankara] 030.0.010.000.000.124.887.3.
- 81 ‘Control of Cypriot immigration to the United Kingdom’, 1935, CO 67/260/7.
- 82 Internal CO correspondence, 1 May 1936, CO 67/265/5.
- 83 *Ibid.*
- 84 Alfie [under-secretary, Aliens Department, Home Office] to Mayle [under-secretary, Colonial Office], 11 July 1936, CO 67/260/7.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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