

A Short Life of Torment and Sacrifice: The Letters of Moshe Hoch from the African Detention, 1944–1948

Daniela Ozacky Stern

To cite this article: Daniela Ozacky Stern (02 Jul 2025): A Short Life of Torment and Sacrifice: The Letters of Moshe Hoch from the African Detention, 1944–1948, *Jewish Culture and History*, DOI: [10.1080/1462169X.2025.2526977](https://doi.org/10.1080/1462169X.2025.2526977)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462169X.2025.2526977>



Published online: 02 Jul 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



A Short Life of Torment and Sacrifice: The Letters of Moshe Hoch from the African Detention, 1944–1948

Daniela Ozacky Stern

Holocaust Studies Program, Western Galilee College, Akko, Israel

ABSTRACT

This article examines the personal correspondence of Moshe Hoch, a Jewish underground member detained by British authorities in Africa (1944–1948), through the analytical lens of ego documents. Through critical analysis of letters written to his family during exile, this study offers unique insights into how personal narratives function under political detention. Hoch's letters reveal individual strategies of resilience, identity maintenance, and meaning-making while serving as both personal testimony and historical documentation. This collection demonstrates how personal correspondence complements official historical narratives, offering valuable insights into the lived experience of political detention during the final years of the British Mandate.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 11 November 2024
Accepted 21 June 2025

KEYWORDS

British Mandate Palestine;
Jewish underground
movements; letters; Africa;
British detention camps

Introduction

Personal correspondence serves as a critical category of ego documents that allows historians to access individual experiences often overlooked in broader historical narratives.¹ This article examines the letters of Moshe Hoch, a young Jewish underground member detained by British authorities in Africa, as ego documents that illuminate the personal dimensions of political imprisonment. While numerous studies have examined the British detention system and Jewish resistance movements, the subjective experiences of individual detainees remain underexplored in the historiography.² Hoch's substantial collection of letters, written to his family over five years in detention camps across Eritrea, Sudan, and Kenya (1944–1948), provides a rare opportunity to analyze how one participant in the Jewish independence struggle documented, interpreted, and communicated his experiences while separated from his homeland during this pivotal historical period.

Methodological approach to letters as ego documents

This study applies methodological approaches developed in the analysis of ego documents to examine Hoch's letters not merely as historical sources but as texts shaped by specific personal, cultural, and institutional constraints. Following Dekker's

definition of ego documents as texts in which an author writes about their own actions, thoughts, and feelings, I approach these letters as records that simultaneously document external events and reveal processes of self-fashioning and identity maintenance.³ This approach recognizes that personal correspondence from detention operates under multiple constraints: official censorship limiting what could be explicitly stated; self-censorship motivated by concern for family members' emotional wellbeing; and the letter writer's own psychological need to construct a coherent narrative of experience.

Three methodological considerations guided this analysis. First, the examination focused on patterns of disclosure and concealment across the correspondence, noting what aspects of detention experience Hoch emphasized, minimized, or omitted entirely. Second, the analysis addressed his linguistic and stylistic choices, particularly his use of descriptive language to create narrative distance from distressing experiences. Third, the research considered how the letters functioned as 'performances' addressed to specific readers (his parents, siblings) with whom he maintained different relationships and therefore constructed different self-presentations.⁴

This approach avoids treating the letters as unmediated windows into historical reality, instead recognizing them as complex texts in which objective documentation, subjective experience, strategic communication, and identity construction are interwoven. While acknowledging these interpretive challenges, this study contends that such ego documents provide invaluable insights precisely because they reveal how individuals experienced, interpreted, and communicated historical events as they unfolded.

Born in August 1923 in Lvov, Poland (today Lviv, Ukraine), eleven-year-old Moshe Hoch emigrated to Mandatory Palestine with his parents and two siblings in March 1934. The family settled in Haifa, where the fourth son, Asher, was born. Moshe joined the right-wing Betar movement at a young age and in 1938 was mobilized to the Irgun Zvai Leumi (Etzel) underground,⁵ which split two years later. He chose to join the new group Lohamei Herut Israel (Lehi), led by Abraham 'Yair' Stern.⁶ Hoch took part in actions such as spreading leaflets and putting posters on walls calling for the end of the British Mandate. His underground nickname was Rebbeleh.⁷

On 17 September 1943, he was involved in moving some organization equipment from one hiding place to another in Haifa. The British police apprehended him following a complaint from the neighbors, who suspected theft. Hoch was charged with 'attempted murder, receiving of stolen property, and housebreaking'.⁸ He was imprisoned in Acre jail, brought to trial at the district court of Haifa a few days later, and was acquitted by the judge. However, as he stepped out of the court, he was arrested by the British secret police CID (Criminal Investigation Department) and sent to Latrun Detention Camp for administrative detention under the Emergency Regulations.⁹ His lawyer's efforts to release him failed. 'I am to inform you that Moshe Hoch must remain in detention', was the short British authorities' answer to his appeal.¹⁰

Thus started the long five-year journey that took Hoch through the camps in Eritrea, Sudan, Eritrea again, and Kenya until he was finally liberated and arrived in Israel on a British boat on 12 July 1948, with his fellow prisoners.¹¹ Hoch did not wait long and joined the Israeli army (IDF, Israel Defense Forces) to take part in the War of Independence that was already going on. On December 23, just five months after he had united with his family and resumed his life as a free person, Moshe Hoch fell in battle. He was 25 years old.

Throughout those years of the African detention, Moshe Hoch wrote dozens of letters to his family,¹² telling them in detail his whereabouts and describing in beautiful Hebrew, at times poetic and always emotional, the sights of Africa, the conditions in the various camps, the relationships with the British commanders and guards, the daily activities of his fellow prisoners and their constant struggle for liberation, his concerns about the situation in Eretz Israel, and his hopes for the future. His letters are mostly hopeful, optimistic, and comforting, with no sign of despair or depression. He constantly consoled his parents and siblings and avoided worrying them as much as he could. This collection of ego-documents opens a vast panorama of a little-known saga of the exile to Africa of more than 450 young Jewish members of the right-wing undergrounds who struggled against British rule over Eretz Israel in the critical years between the Second World War and Israel's declaration of independence.¹³

The significance of this research lies in its unique contribution to understanding both the personal experience of political exile and the broader historical narrative of the Jewish struggle for independence. Hoch's extensive correspondence offers an intimate, contemporaneous account of the African exile that illuminates the exile's daily realities and psychological impact. His letters provide valuable insights into how young Jewish activists maintained their ideological commitment and personal resilience despite prolonged detention, while also documenting the colonial administration of British detention camps in Africa during this transformative period.

This collection of letters transcends its role as mere historical documentation. Through Hoch's eloquent and detailed observations, the reader gains access not only to the physical conditions of exile but also to the emotional and intellectual life of a young idealist caught in the currents of history. His correspondence, spanning five years of detention and ending with his tragic death shortly after Israel's independence, offers a unique lens through which to examine the complex interplay between individual experience and national struggle, between personal resilience and collective resistance, and between the immediate reality of exile and the broader fight for Jewish sovereignty.

Struggle for liberation

Hoch and his family's struggle for justice and liberation began when he was detained in Latrun on 7 October 1943. They hired a lawyer who corresponded with the British authorities to get a new trial for Hoch to prove his innocence. The few letters that remain from Latrun show the high spirit of Hoch, who was certain that the days of his detention were short and that he would soon be released. 'If my detention is not long, this is an excellent vacation camp', he wrote cheerfully; further, he asked for books and stationery so he could keep up his studies.¹⁴ A month later, he shared his thoughts during the Chanukah holiday. He praised his father for his 'incomprehensible spirit' that pushed him to leave Europe and immigrate to Eretz Israel. 'Who knows what would have happened to our family had we stayed.' In the spirit of the holiday, he added: 'We were lucky to come to Eretz Israel and continue to fight like the Maccabi. We should be happy and proud.'¹⁵

But months passed, and no good news arrived. His letters from 1944 are more straightforward and informative, dealing with some personal needs, his parents' scarce visits, and the whereabouts of his brother Saul, who had volunteered in the Jewish Brigade and been sent to Europe. In October 1944, he was glad to hear that Saul had

come back for the holidays.¹⁶ Two weeks later, the Hoch family in Haifa received a short letter, this time not from their son Moshe but from his lawyer: 'I received a message from the Jerusalem Police that your son has been sent abroad.'¹⁷

Thus, the second long chapter starts with Moshe Hoch's imprisonment in Africa and his exile with 250 colleagues from Eretz Israel to camps in various countries in Africa.

Letters from the first days of exile

The details of Operation Snowball, which involved the British exile of 459 Jewish underground members to detention camps in Africa from 1944 to 1948, and the political deliberations that led to this decision, have been researched in historiography primarily through British archival sources.¹⁸ This significant episode began dramatically on 19 October 1944, when Latrun detention camp was surrounded by heavy British guard, and 251 prisoners – members of Etzel and Lehi underground organizations – were taken from their beds, body searched, handcuffed in pairs, and transported to a military airport. Without trial or formal charges, these detainees were forcibly loaded onto 13 Dakota transport aircraft and flown to detention camps across Africa. Over the following years, additional transports brought the total number of exiles to over 430, none of whom ever faced trial. The exile lasted four years, until 12 July 1948, when the last detainees were finally released and returned to the newly established State of Israel. The British cabinet and Colonial Office authorized this action with the clear objective of distancing these political opponents from Palestine, weakening the underground organizations, and preventing potential escapes. Despite its historical importance as a major British counter-insurgency measure during the struggle for Jewish independence in Palestine, the story remains to be examined from the perspective of the detainees themselves, opening new avenues for understanding this chapter of pre-state Israeli history.¹⁹

Deporting leaders and activists of rebel groups from territories under their rule was a common practice of British colonial authorities. When the resistance of the two right-wing undergrounds in Mandatory Palestine grew and rumors about their intention to break into Latrun Detention Camp and free their counterparts spread, it was suggested to remove the inmates from the country.²⁰ The primary objectives of the British authorities in implementing Operation Snowball were twofold: to prevent any possibility of escape by the detained underground members and to sever their connections with both their organizations and families in Palestine. This strategic decision, aimed at weakening the Jewish underground resistance movement, was formally approved by the British cabinet and the Colonial Office, and the operation was scheduled to commence in October 1944.

The practice of detaining and deporting political activists was central to British colonial counterinsurgency across the empire, from Ireland to Kenya to Palestine.²¹ The present article specifically focuses on Hoch's letters as ego documents – personal writings that reveal both historical circumstances and processes of identity construction under detention. While acknowledging this broader context, this study primarily examines how one individual documented, interpreted, and communicated his experiences through correspondence, and how these letters functioned as tools for maintaining familial connections and personal resilience despite separation and censorship.

From the prisoners' perspective, the experience was radically different. Personal letters written contemporaneously with the events provide valuable 'bottom-up' insights into

their experiences. A particularly illuminating example is found in the correspondence of twenty-one-year-old Moshe Hoch, whose numerous letters to his family from Africa are distinguished by their eloquent language, literary style, and astute observations. Two weeks after the dramatic deportation, he provided his family with a detailed account of what he termed the ‘kidnapping’, describing the traumatic experience chronologically and offering a powerful counter narrative to the official British version of events. Some lines are erased by the censor, but the story unfolds as follows:

It was still dark; we were awakened by heavy steps, the shutters were closed from the outside, and the camp commander burst into the room, his face flushed, and he shouted at us to get up and dress. A few minutes passed, and he returned with a list in his hand and called names. Each one whose name was called had to report, no matter if he was dressed or not. We were chained and taken outside. There, we were surprised to see thousands of soldiers and policemen, among them the heads of the police and the CID.²²

All personal items in their pockets, including family photos, pens, and cigarettes, were confiscated. They were taken to an airport surrounded by armored trucks and thousands of soldiers. They were divided into groups and their names were registered. All this time, they did not get any hint about their destination. Only when they saw a group of airplanes coming from the horizon and landing next to them did they realize that they were being taken to a foreign country. ‘At that moment, a great turmoil prevailed. Many of us bent down and took a handful of Eretz Israel soil, and then, we sang “Hatikva” [the Jewish national anthem] with a strong voice.’ Before boarding the planes, another search took place, and the remaining personal belongings were thrown to the ground. The prisoners were chained in pairs and pushed into 14 planes. ‘At 9:30 a.m., we left the homeland.’²³

Despite the shock and uncertainty, Hoch stayed alert and observant throughout the journey so he could remember even the tiny details that unfolded. He later described the vast deserts seen from the plane window, the weather, the food eaten with chained hands, the small airport in the middle of nowhere, and the first night in a small African village, inside a dilapidated building that was once a local cinema called ‘Lawrence’.

This was their first encounter with what would become their life environment for the next four years. The following morning, they left this first station in Sudan and landed in Asmara, Eritrea. The name of this location was erased from Hoch’s letter to his family, but not the long description of its geography, demography, and climate.

This young man, forcibly transported to an unfamiliar continent, demonstrated remarkable initiative and courage in crafting an extensive epistolary chronicle through his regular correspondence with his family. His letters, written with meticulous attention to detail, transcended typical family communication to become an invaluable historical record. The systematic nature and comprehensive scope of his documentation – encompassing both significant events and daily life in exile – transformed his correspondence into a quasi-diary of his detention. From that point forward, he faithfully maintained this written record until his tragic death, which occurred shortly after his long-awaited liberation.

Daily life in the African camps

Days in Camp Sembel near Asmara, Eritrea, settled into a monotonous routine, with prisoners’ letters often beginning, ‘There is nothing new to tell you about, all days are similar. The big joy is the fact that another day has passed.’²⁴ Yet beneath this apparent

uniformity, their correspondence reveals a rich tapestry of exile life. Moshe Hoch's letters, in particular, provide a detailed chronicle of these seemingly 'uneventful' days, offering invaluable insights into the prisoners' daily experiences, coping mechanisms, and the subtle dynamics of life in detention.

'The food is better, but it did not come easily', he wrote on the 'seventy-first day of our exile'.²⁵ The prisoners protested the meager food they got, and when their demands were rejected, they started a partial hunger strike, consuming only bread and water. He asked his parents to join the protest from their end and appeal to the national institutions to intervene. A short while later, he reported on the improvement, which included not only better food but also English and Egyptian newspapers and a radio that new prisoners brought! 'It was a dramatic moment when we heard Hebrew words and songs for the first time.'²⁶ The subsequent struggle was for more clothes: 'There are people who have only one pair of trousers, and if it is torn, they have nothing to wear', and later about lifting the restriction on the number of letters allowed to be sent. Hoch reported in his letters on each small detail and achievement.²⁷

His sister, Rivka, who was imprisoned for a short while in the women's jail in Beth Lehem, requested in one of her letters that he give her an idea of what his daily schedule looked like. Hoch answered with a long, detailed, vivid, and humorous illustration of a typical day in the camp, starting with a wake-up call at 6:30 a.m. and lasting until lights-out at 10:15 p.m.²⁸ Meals and parades were always at fixed hours, but the time in between had to be filled.

Hoch and many of his fellow prisoners utilized the 'leisure' hours between breakfast and lunch for study and reading. Classes on various topics were organized by professionals among the detainees. There were classes on languages, the Bible, Jewish history, and more. The most popular was the Hebrew grammar class led by Uzzi Ornan, an expert in the field who put together a textbook for his students. All of them spoke Hebrew, of course, but many who had emigrated to the country as children, or those who did not graduate from high school due to their underground activities and imprisonment, did not master its syntax and grammatical rules, so they took the opportunity to improve their linguistic skills.²⁹

The British authorities granted inmates permission to pursue distance learning through correspondence with British educational institutions, providing an unexpected opportunity for intellectual development during their detention. Hoch, displaying both pragmatism and foresight, chose to study accounting and bookkeeping, recognizing these skills would be valuable for his future life after release. Despite the challenging circumstances of studying in detention – including limited access to materials, difficult physical conditions, and the psychological strain of imprisonment – he persevered in his studies. His dedication was rewarded in the spring of 1946 when he earned a certificate 'for proficiency with distinction' from the prestigious London Chamber of Commerce. His initial modest assessment, 'It was difficult, but I think I passed',³⁰ belied his significant achievement, as evidenced by the distinguished certification preserved in his personal file (Figure 1).³¹

The hours of study were often 'interrupted' by chores imposed on the prisoners by the roster, and they took turns in the 'house works', as Hoch described in his letter to his sister, detailing his daily schedule:

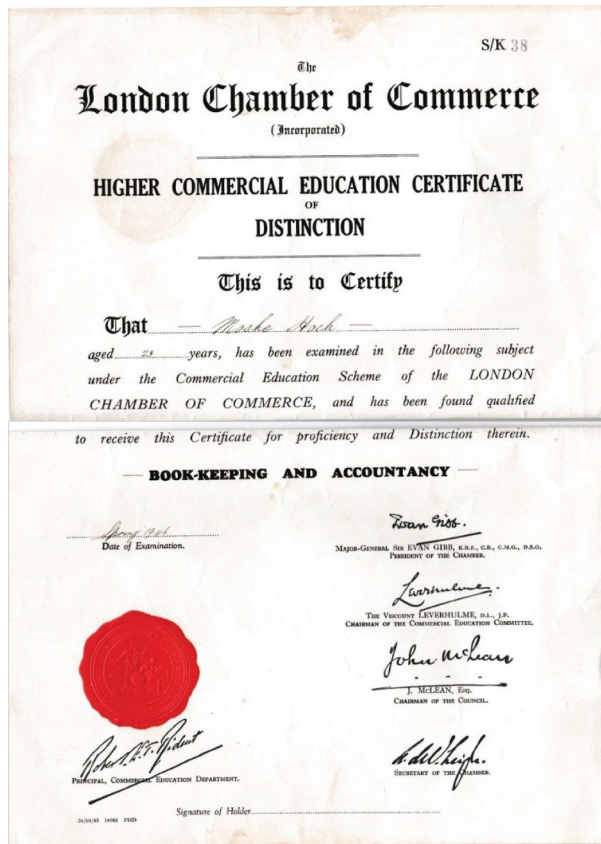


Figure 1. Certificate of Moshe Hoch for bookkeeping and accountancy, 1946.

Once in two weeks, I sweep and wash the rooms; once in three weeks, I clean the showers and restrooms; [I have] a 'small' turn in the kitchen once in two weeks, peeling potatoes and onions – a boring job, so we sing and tell funny stories to pass the time – [and a] 'big' duty – the hardest one, once a month – scrubbing the pots and pans and all kitchenware used for all the meals. . . . Since it is only once a month, we accept this work willingly.³²

In the mornings, before breakfast, he exercised; at 12:00 sharp, a whistle called for roll call; after lunch, they went back to their rooms; some took a nap, and others strolled in the yard, read, or continued their studies; at 5:00, a second whistle called for roll call, and then there was free time for playing games and grabbing a snack; after dinner, which is at 7:30–8:00, there was a free half hour, and at 9:00 they had to enter the rooms and stay till morning. There was an hour and 15 minutes for reading and talking until lights out at 10:15, when silence prevailed. 'This is an average day, more or less', concluded Hoch. 'But this is not the full picture because there are other repetitive events.'³³ Here, he added two more pages describing the Saturdays, which were completely different.

We gather in groups and start a conversation, reminiscence on our life at home. One would start saying: 'At this time in Tel Aviv, I used to . . . ' and the others would complete the sentence. Football is very popular on Saturdays. Recently, there was a match between our team and the British team, and we won 7:0! There are also matches between us, between

teams based on town of origin. They asked me to join the Haifa team, but training takes too much time, and I need to study for my exams, so I refused.³⁴

Hoch continued with stories of daily routine and concluded:

These are more or less the regular daily things I can write about, but other small and big events fill my life here and accumulate to become just memories. Writing about them would require filling dozens of pages, which I would never do. I hope that soon we will be able to sit together around the table at home and tell you everything.³⁵

This is an unusual hint in the vast body of letters Hoch wrote to his family, melancholy and secretive. One can only assume that he refrained from elaborating on the dark sides of life in detention, that he did not want to worry them, and as always, was careful of the British censor. Nevertheless, in later letters, he did write briefly about the escapes of his counterparts from the various camps and also about the violent event of January 1946 in Sembel, when the Sudanese guards shot at a group of newly arrived prisoners, killing two of them and wounding 12.³⁶

Observations of the African landscape

Hoch was very attentive to his surroundings, and despite the harsh reality, he had the capacity to admire the unfamiliar scenery unfolded to him in this foreign land. In January 1945, he mentioned the nice weather in Sembel near Asmara: 'Sometimes we walk inside the clouds, 2,000 meters above sea level. Evenings are cool and pleasant. There are not many places with such good weather.'³⁷ Just four days after he wrote this, they were moved to Sudan without advance notice or knowledge of where they were headed.

In his next letter, written after settling in the new place, he wrote at length about the three-day journey on tracks, trains, and a ship; again, he paid special attention to the scenery around him. Despite the uncertainty and unawareness of their destination, he concentrated on the sights and sounds around him:

A magnificent view had unfolded of low clouds looking like a sea, and the mountain peaks emerged out of them like islands in the water. The asphalt road is meticulously built, curving between the high steep mountains covered with trees and cacti. . . . On one side, there is a steep wall-like crag, and on the other side, a great depth. . . . There are two railroads - one electric - going to the port of Massawa through dozens of tunnels and bridges, and the regular one runs between the peaks, which is so beautiful to watch. One is amazed by the huge work of the Italians who invested in such efficient transport lines.³⁸

As a letter written by a prisoner taken to an unknown destination, chained to a friend, and hardly given food and drink, this piece of writing is astounding. There are detailed descriptions of the villages they passed by, such as one 'whose residents are Italian and black, they grow tobacco, and the land is good and fertile. . . . It is above my ability to describe the beauty of nature and construction'. In addition, Hoch described the animals: 'monkeys jumping between the rocks'; the port: 'its entrance is full of sunken ships left by the Italians upon their withdrawal'; and many more interesting observations.³⁹ Similarly, he reported on the stormy voyage on the sea, where many prisoners vomited and were not allowed to the deck. 'Only on the sixth day they gave them permission to go up to the deck; the weather was nice, and the storm abated. I felt well all through.'⁴⁰

Hoch's detailed description of the African landscape reveals more than merely keen observation. His ability to appreciate beauty despite being transported in chains demonstrates a conscious psychological strategy of focusing on external elements rather than dwelling on his uncertain fate. This approach appears consistently throughout his letters, suggesting both a personal coping mechanism and a deliberate narrative choice to shield his family from distress.⁴¹ The contrast between his eloquent descriptions of scenery and the brief, factual mentions of harsh treatment illustrates the complex self-censorship that shapes detention correspondence, where prisoners must balance truthful representation with both official censorship and concern for their recipients' emotional well-being.

Moshe Hoch's remarkable ability to observe and appreciate beauty even in the midst of his captivity offers a unique perspective on his experience of exile. His detailed descriptions transcend mere geographical documentation, revealing his intellectual curiosity despite the harsh circumstances of his detention. These letters, written under strict censorship and in conditions of uncertainty and physical hardship, demonstrate how some prisoners maintained their humanity and sense of wonder even as they were transported across unfamiliar territories (Figure 2). Hoch's keen eye for detail and his eloquent prose transform what could have been merely a record of forced relocation into a rich travelogue of colonial Africa.

Cartago, Sudan

When they anchored in Port Sudan, they were chained again and traveled through the desert for five hours, climbing up and down, until they reached their destination, a decrepit camp in the middle of nowhere.

It was built as a military camp, which does not fit our needs. Everything is broken. Doors, windows, and blinds were taken and replaced with grates, so everything is open to the strong winds. . . . They were kind to provide us with beds, but without mattresses. . . . The camp is huge, and we must run from one place to another accompanied by Sudanese soldiers pointing rifles and spears at us. This comedy amuses us and brings us to laughter.

He detailed at length more flaws of this new location but concluded with cheerful words:

Despite the bad conditions, we keep the good spirit and don't give a damn. I am sure that if we put pressure on the authorities, things will improve. . . . The length of this letter is a sign to you of my good mood. We expect better days to come soon, and we'll all be together at our home.⁴²

In May 1945, they heard about the end of the Second World War and the celebrations in British military camps. A new hope arose for the pardon of political prisoners. 'But we are not to benefit from it', he wrote sadly. 'The only changes here are the weather'.⁴³ July was a tough month. After their expectations for freedom had failed, the prisoners started to take small measures of protest. They decided not to take out their beds and mattresses as ordered. This was a regular procedure to ease the search in the rooms. The punishment was immediate – the beds were loaded on trucks, and the prisoners were forced to sleep on the bare floor. They were denied cigarettes and expected a boycott of letters, but this did not happen.⁴⁴

Political reasons, unknown to the prisoners, of course, caused their transfer from one place to another. British officials in the Egypt-Sudan condominium resented their stay in



Figure 2. Moshe Hoch in Gilgil, Kenya, 1948.

Sudan and pressed London to remove them, despite the big investment in security measures in Cartago and its isolation, which made escape almost impossible.⁴⁵ Legal complications were the last excuse for the transfer back to Eritrea on 10 October 1945. There, they were held for 17 months until their evacuation to their final location in Kenya in February 1947.⁴⁶

Sembel, Eritrea

Throughout their years in exile, the inmates kept themselves busy as much as possible. Cultural and sports activities were organized, holidays were celebrated, and most of them were engaged in learning. In September 1946, Hoch marked three years of incarceration. It was the High Holiday season, and he begged his family to celebrate with gaiety and not worry about him. 'I do not look back with despair, but rather look forward with hope', he tried to assure them.⁴⁷ This was his habit – concealing his emotions from his loved ones and encouraging them to believe that the day of his release was near. He also tried to stay involved in the family's whereabouts. 'You cannot imagine how excited I was when I heard that Asher started school. I wish I had been there with him. ... This is a new chapter in his life ... I expect much satisfaction from him.'⁴⁸ His care for his little brother is evident in every letter. From then on, he would add at the bottom of each letter to the family a line or two in printed Hebrew letters for Asher, encouraging him to study well to be a good boy at school and at home, and expressing his longing for him.

His correspondence with his sister, Rivka, who was four years younger than him, is particularly interesting. He took on the role of a sort of patron and advised her from afar. He was concerned about her studies and wrote to her that she could go out and enjoy company, but she should notify their parents; he even commented on her makeup! 'Your natural beauty is enough. You need not wear lipstick; it's against your lifestyle' (she was nineteen at the time). He inquired about her boyfriend and wished he had met him, and then he sort of apologized and hoped she was not angry with him for digging into her personal affairs.⁴⁹ A year later, she wrote to him about her coming engagement. That announcement was a surprise, and he could not hide his hurt. 'In retrospect, I would be glad because I have realized that you matured and your time has come ... but I am astonished that no one wrote about it before. ... Had I been home, maybe you would have got married and skipped the engagement, which in my opinion is not important.'⁵⁰ He asked to know everything about her fiancé. This letter is uncharacteristically confusing and angry. Towards the end, he requested that Rivka wait for the next round of releases in the camp in the hope that he would be among the lucky ones and would be able to attend her wedding. But at the same time, he implored her to ask their mother to write to him: 'And from you, I would ask – let her write freely and let her write anything she chooses.'⁵¹ It seems like he suspected that something was wrong, but 'it is hard to sort out such delicate matters through letters, and I want to know everything!'⁵²

It's worth noticing that Rivka was active in the struggle to free her brother and corresponded with British and Jewish authorities in the country, but that did not deter her from joining Lehi like her brother, where she served as a courier for the underground. Her nickname was Avishag. There is no hint in the letters that he knew about this. She most likely refrained from sharing it with him due to the British censorship and not to cause him additional worries.

All throughout the 14 months of their stay in Sembel camp in Eritrea, the inmates were not aware of the intensive discussions among various British authorities about the need to remove them due to the complicated political status of this country. Another reason was the numerous escapes of Jewish prisoners from the camp, particularly the largest escape from Sembel on the night of 29 June 1946. Fifty-three prisoners escaped through two tunnels. 'I did not sleep all night', wrote Hoch following this big escape. 'In the meantime, the new commander shows tolerance and consideration towards the people who stayed behind. We hope that no inconvenience will follow, as usual in such cases', he added, obviously for the eyes of the censor. Hoch used an indirect way to address his admiration for his brave colleagues: 'High British officers who checked the tunnels were amazed by the highly skilled work.'⁵³

On Sunday, 2 March 1947, the 260 detainees from Sembel were deported to a new detention camp in the middle of Africa, in Gilgil, Kenya. Here again, Moshe provides us with a colorful account of this journey by automobiles, a ship, a train, and walks.⁵⁴

After settling in the new camp, he wrote a wonderful letter that recorded the smallest details of that experience (Figure 3). Despite being chained in pairs, he yet again admired the beautiful African scenery. He noticed the Kenyan soldiers, who were spread along the road on the sandy hills, dressed in uniforms but barefoot. Only high officers wore shoes. After a four-hour drive, they reached the port of Massawa, which was 'heavily guarded', and were led inside the ship to hot, crowded cells. Only when the ship sailed were they allowed to climb to the deck – three at a time – to breathe some air. Later in the journey,

שני שליטה
לגאולתנו!

29.12.1946, אסמרה

אלום הארי היקריוס,
 קבלתי את המכתב מיום אלו עם
 מחבתך, כמו מחבקם אני לטוב לבבות לווית
 מתחילת ועדבנות, לבערני הטל לנחמי מואת נוח.
 אני מבקש מכם באי שלון של בקלה לא לראות
 שלום ללחצות אלפוטיות בי אינני לבד מה
 מסתרי מחלוקי מניצב למעלה אלה. כבי במכתב
 בקדם הבאתי כמה כאלה צד כמה אסור
 לתקופת שלום וביצה ללפילא אמ הוטל מוסמכת,
 כבוביל, הפקס יל ביבי אלב לתי דוקמאלת
 נוספת על יצירת מוסמכת וסמכות זני סוכות
 אחר את השניה. לפני כמה ימים הביוץ היתקד
 לבערונדי של אסמרה ובא אחי'3 אולצה לפעל
 עם שללם לרבץ אולט אלט עליו מלשמה
 אנכונים וללה אולט וללא נסיון אנכיה כפי
 לנבטח להם, ונאסף לזנה הוא נרצח לבדי
 עם צד כמה אקלים. ובכך אחי'3 הופיץ הבינוני
 ולללם לרבץ אולט ולעצד כמה אקלים האצלו
 אלוו ציי לפני המחנה. צכיו של הבינוני

Figure 3. Moshe Hoch's letter from Asmara, Eritrea, December 29, 1946.

they could go up day and night, but it was still crowded on deck. Many were seasick and nauseated and stayed in their rooms vomiting. He remained well all along, like the previous time: 'I feel as well as if I were a veteran sailor.'⁵⁵

Things improved when they left the Red Sea and entered the Indian Ocean. Still, they could hardly taste the food cooked for them by locals aboard, and they had to bathe in seawater. This journey lasted nine days, coinciding with the Jewish holiday of Purim, and they tried to celebrate it by singing and reading 'The Megillah of Esther' (the biblical scroll traditionally read during the festival of Purim). Finally, they arrived at Mombasa Port, 'a natural bay surrounded with trees, many boats, and warehouses.' They were led to a train 'adapted for us with grated windows and closed doors. All of us entered through one door only.' They traveled all night, so they could hardly see the scenery, but in the morning, he noticed 'coconut trees, mountains covered with woods, and very fertile soil.' They marched just 10 minutes from the train station to the well-guarded camp, and the first thing everyone wanted to do was 'take a shower of sweet water and sleep' after the hard

journey and the seawater showers on the boat. Hoch goes on to detail the sort of food they received in the new camp and the housing conditions and concludes this long, informative letter by saying: 'We hope this is the last wandering, it's time to end this nomadism.'⁵⁶

Gilgil, Kenya

Indeed, this proved to be their last location of the long exile, but it took 17 more months of internment and struggle until they were finally freed. Gilgil camp was located about 120 kilometers northwest of Nairobi in Kenya. As in their previous locations, the inmates were soon organized and kept themselves busy with studies, sports, cultural events, and celebrating holidays. In April 1947, they arranged the Seder for Passover; Hoch wrote, 'This is my fourth Seder without the family' and compared their situation in Africa to that of the Jews who were held in Egypt by Pharaoh, who prevented their exodus and freedom. 'We prepared a show that lasted three hours, and everyone enjoyed it.'⁵⁷ They did the same for the celebration of Shavuot (Pentecost), when 'one could imagine being in a real theater with the decoration and lighting.'⁵⁸

A week after Passover, they organized a 'sports day' with unusual guests in the audience, including children. There were 20 Jews from the local community in Nairobi accompanied by their rabbi, 'who were curious to meet Jews from Eretz Israel, and above all – terrorists!' Hoch was particularly touched by playing with the children. 'The youngest was four years old and reminded me of Asher.'⁵⁹ He relayed that the guests were excited and told the inmates about their lives in Kenya and how they had ended up there. One of them, who spoke fluent Hebrew, told them that he arrived in Kenya years ago with not a penny in his pocket, and today, he owned large farms and was doing well.⁶⁰

During the September 1947 High Holidays, Hoch wrote several letters expressing his feelings:

This is the fifth year I am imprisoned during the holidays, each time in a different place. But this year, there is hope. It might be the last time I am denied freedom, and the whole Jewish People will be set free.⁶¹

In November 1947, news of the United Nations' deliberations regarding the partition of Palestine and the potential establishment of a Jewish state reached the exiles, raising hopes for their imminent return. But Hoch and his counterparts remained suspicious. 'It could be a devious trick of the British', he wrote. 'There is no faith in the gentiles who rule the country. They may pretend to agree to get out and blow it up at the last minute. We are well aware of the English intentions.'⁶²

On November 29, they crowded around the radio to listen to the UN vote counting on the 'partition plan' of Mandatory Palestine, and the spirit was high. However, some of them, being right-wing idealists, opposed the land's division. 'But I don't see any wrong in establishing an independent Hebrew state in part of the land', wrote Hoch, 'that will enable us to fulfill our wishes and to depend on ourselves. . . . It would also solve the problem of Jewish immigration from the camps in Europe.'⁶³ In the letter that followed, he referred to the political situation in the homeland. He warned: 'We read about the joy in the country, but I think you do not foresee the hazards of future clashes with the Arabs.'⁶⁴



Figure 4. Moshe Hoch in the Gilgil camp, 1948.

Thus, one can see the deep involvement of the Jewish detainees in African camps in the events in Eretz Israel, despite the huge distance, the censorship, and the communication difficulties. Regardless of their personal situation and their disappointment in not taking an active part in the struggle for independence, their minds and hearts were there, and they worried about the country and its people, as well as their own families (Figure 4).

The long campaign for freedom through family letters and appeals

From the outset of Hoch's detention, his family engaged the services of Advocate Kaisermann from Haifa in an attempt to secure his release. The surviving correspondence in the Jabotinsky Institute Archive reveals the lawyer's persistent yet unsuccessful efforts to achieve this goal. Despite the heavy censorship of their letters, scattered references throughout Hoch's correspondence over the years indicate his family's tireless advocacy on his behalf, including multiple interventions with both British and Jewish officials in Palestine. Notably, Hoch's responses to these efforts reflected both his consideration for his family's financial situation – urging them not to expend excessive resources on legal proceedings – and his sustained optimism about the prospect of a collective release with his fellow detainees.

Three years into Hoch's detention, his mother, Miriam, made a poignant appeal to the British High Commissioner in Jerusalem, composing an emotionally charged letter that illuminates the personal toll of the exile on prisoners' families. In her desperate plea for her son's release, she assumed personal responsibility for his involvement in the underground, expressing remorse for what she termed her maternal blindness in failing to foresee 'this disaster coming'.⁶⁵ Her letter, reflecting both maternal anguish and strategic rhetoric, represents one of many attempts by families to secure their loved ones' freedom through direct appeals to British authorities.

She took the opportunity of the king's birthday to write her plea, hoping to be heard: 'He is only a child', she wrote about her son, 'barely twenty years old with already many rough and sad experiences to embitter his soul. . . . All young ones are impetuous, all make mistakes . . . he has been punished long enough, please let him come back to us.' Miriam

Hoch concluded by expressing her trust in the high commissioner to give her appeal ‘a kind and favorable consideration’.⁶⁶ But this, too, was to no avail; she did get a response a few days later, but it said briefly: ‘Your representations have been noted’, and she never heard from the British authorities again.

A special investigating committee headed by Colonel W. A. Curtis, assistant of the British Police commander in Mandatory Palestine, came to Sembel camp near Asmara in October 1946 with a list of potential releases. Like other prisoners, Moshe Hoch was summoned by them for a long interrogation, which ignited his hope. Still, despite his cooperation and explanations, Hoch was not among the lucky ones. Only 24 of the inmates were liberated and sent back home. Right after the interrogation, he wrote a long letter to his family quoting the questions and answers of the investigation. ‘I told them that the suspicions against me are so pale that the three years in detention are a sufficient punishment. I told them that if my parents were rich, I would have been long released.’⁶⁷ When the denial of his appeal arrived, he wrote: ‘My disappointment is not so big since there is a general feeling of disappointment here.’⁶⁸ This was the fifth year Hoch was imprisoned, yet he kept his hope.

His mother did not give up and wrote directly to the then-young Princess Elizabeth, explaining Moshe’s situation and appealing to her good heart. When the negative answer arrived, Moshe wrote to his family: ‘I believe the idea had come from Mother, and I wonder if she has not learned that things are not so simple and that we could have guessed the reply in advance.’ He urged them not to trust any rumors regarding his whereabouts.⁶⁹ He did continue to ask them ‘to encourage all elements connected to our case’, but with a clear priority to engage the Yishuv authorities ‘so we won’t need to wait for the “polite” decisions of the British.’⁷⁰

The year 1948 marked a critical juncture in Palestine, as Jewish youth were mobilized for the anticipated War of Independence. A telling illustration of the administrative complexities during this transitional period emerged when military authorities issued a draft notice for Moshe Hoch, dispatching it to his parents’ residence in Palestine while he remained in British detention in Africa. This bureaucratic oversight elicited a sharp response from his sister, Rivka, who was furious that the authorities did not know about his imprisonment. Hoch’s own reaction to this development, documented in his correspondence, reflects a broader perspective characteristic of his letters. Rather than dwelling on personal grievances, he contextualized the incident within the larger framework of national aspirations, expressing his continued hope for Jewish sovereignty: ‘My best years have passed behind wires, but despite it, I was never taken by defeatism, nor contemplated the question for whom and for what I had suffered. . . . I expect no one to thank me for my sacrifice’, he wrote to her.⁷¹ Undoubtedly, he was prepared to serve and not insulted by this error. This incident illuminates the significant disconnect between the emerging administrative bodies in Palestine and the status of Irgun and Lehi members detained in Africa. The apparent lack of coordination regarding detainees’ status suggests a broader institutional gap in monitoring and documenting political prisoners held abroad.

Between February and May 1948, the letters dealt with rumors of their coming liberation. Hoch wrote that the detainees were impatient and stopped their studies and regular activities in the camp. He asked his family not to rely on sporadic news and promised to update them when things were certain. On 9 May 1948, a week before Israel’s declaration

The final journey home and a brief taste of freedom

The camp commander, Colonel Harry Rice, invited representatives of the detainees and shook their hands, congratulating them and requesting that they not cause any 'troubles' until their final release. He agreed to their demand to be free inside the camp, as they regarded themselves as free citizens of the new state. They sent a telegram to the Kenyan government saying that it had no authority to hold them prisoners and announced that they intended to remove all locks and grates from the doors and windows. 'I went out to write this letter and looked at the change of guards – they were not carrying any weapons!' Hoch wrote, adding, 'We are eager to be in the country at this time when our homeland is at war against its surrounding neighbors. I wish for a complete victory.'⁷⁶ However, it took two more months for this wish to come true.

On 3 July 1948, Colonel Rice summoned the prisoners' representative, Meir Shamgar, and read aloud 'an urgent announcement'. It said that all detainees must be ready to leave in the next thirty-six hours with one hour's notice. It detailed the items they were allowed or forbidden to take with them – sixty pounds each.⁷⁷ Three days later, at noon, 'the camp gates were opened, and seventy "caged" cars entered, and we started our journey in convoy to Nairobi airport.'⁷⁸ The journey was long: they stopped for fuel, changed airplanes, spent the hot, suffocating nights in a sealed garage in Sudan – where they had started their ordeal four and a half years earlier – and finally reached Port Tubruk. All 262 prisoners boarded the notorious SS *Ocean Vigour*, which the British used to deport Jewish immigrants and Holocaust survivors to Cyprus detention camps after they tried to enter Mandatory Palestine in what was called an 'illegal immigration' between 1944 and 1948. Colonel Rice came aboard and gave his last farewell speech. On July 9, the ship sailed, accompanied by a British destroyer. They still were not sure if they were being taken to Cyprus or Israel. 'On Monday, 12 July 1948, at 8:00 a.m., we stood at attention on the deck when the ship anchored facing Tel Aviv beach and sang "Hatikva." We then went down to the dinghies, which took us ashore, directly into an Egyptian aerial bombardment, but to our free state – Israel.'⁷⁹

Thus, the saga of the exile to Africa ended, and each one of the former detainees went his way. Many of them became central players in Israeli politics, the judicial system, public service, and literature. Twenty-five-year-old Moshe Hoch chose otherwise. He chose to fulfill his dream and joined the Israel Defense Forces to fight for the freedom and independence of his homeland. A mere five months after his return, on 23 December 1948, he fell in battle against the Egyptian Army. It happened in the south, near Khan Yunis, a town in the Gaza Strip.

The duration of Hoch's reunion with his family, who had awaited his return throughout five years of exile, remains undocumented. His final recorded correspondence, a brief letter written from Tel Aviv merely a week before his untimely death, stands as the sole surviving testament to this brief period of freedom:

15 December 1948

Dear parents, Rivka, and Asher,

In fact, I have no special news to write to you about, since nothing has changed. I am staying in the same place and in the meantime do nothing. Last night I was in Tel Aviv and attended a show in Ha'bima Theater – 'Mirele Efros'.⁸⁰

Apart from that, I have nothing to add. Just asking – please do not worry about me in vain.
Yours, Moshe⁸¹

This is indeed a completely different letter from what he used to write from Africa. Limited by censorship, he could not elaborate on his whereabouts during service duty. He tells nothing about his circumstances, feelings, friends, or expectations. The next letters in his file are several letters of condolences from friends of his family who were shocked by the tragedy of his death.

Summary

This analysis of Moshe Hoch's detention correspondence demonstrates the distinctive value of letters as ego documents in illuminating aspects of historical experience often absent from official records or retrospective accounts. As Rebecca Kook observes, collections of personal correspondence function simultaneously as historical documents and monuments, 'telling multiple histories' while conveying 'sentiment that speaks directly to the recipient.'⁸² Hoch's letters exemplify this dual nature, providing contemporaneous documentation of detention conditions while revealing the psychological and emotional dimensions of political imprisonment.

Unlike memoir accounts written after liberation, these letters capture the uncertainty and immediacy of detention as it was experienced, unfiltered by knowledge of future outcomes.⁸³ They reveal how the constraints of censorship shaped self-expression, forcing detainees to develop coded language and selective disclosure strategies. Furthermore, they demonstrate how letter-writing itself functioned as a means of agency and resistance, allowing detainees to maintain continuity of identity and connection to family despite physical separation.

Although Hoch was not a prominent political figure or movement leader, his letters constitute a remarkable historical source that illuminates multiple narratives simultaneously. His correspondence provides insight into several significant historical threads: the struggle of the dissident underground movements (*porshim*) against British rule in Palestine, the complex dynamics between these organizations and the mainstream Zionist establishment, British colonial policies in both Palestine and Africa, the administration of detention camps as a method of political control, the micro-history of daily life and prisoner resilience in these camps, and the intimate story of how one ordinary family navigated these extraordinary circumstances.

Analysis of Hoch's correspondence reveals not only historical insights but also a remarkable individual voice. His writing demonstrates exceptional literary qualities that transcend the typical constraints of personal letters, displaying a sophisticated command of Hebrew and notable stylistic elegance. This linguistic prowess is particularly noteworthy given that Hebrew was likely not his primary domestic language, as the family, like many Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, presumably communicated in Yiddish. His correspondence thus serves as both historical documentation and a testament to the intellectual and cultural capabilities that some detainees maintained and developed despite their circumstances.

Hoch's devotion to his family emerges as a consistent theme throughout his correspondence. He consciously protected them from worry by refraining from detailing his

difficulties, maintaining an optimistic tone throughout his exile. His active involvement in his siblings' lives – encouraging young Asher's education with personalized messages in each letter, offering guidance to his sister Rivka, and maintaining a connection with his brother Saul despite communication difficulties – reveals how letter-writing preserved family bonds across geographical separation. Such details, evident through close reading of these ego documents, reveal the psychological strategies and interpersonal dynamics that sustained detainees through their prolonged separation.

This case study contributes to our understanding of ego documents by illustrating how personal correspondence functions under the specific constraints of political detention. It demonstrates that even heavily censored letters can reveal significant insights when analyzed not merely for their factual content but for their narrative strategies, omissions, and techniques of self-representation. In the context of Jewish detention during the British Mandate period, Hoch's letters provide a valuable counterpoint to official records, offering a 'history-from-below' perspective that complicates and enriches our understanding of this historical chapter.⁸⁴

Tragic fate ended this story at an early age. Moshe Hoch fulfilled his dream to see the establishment of a Jewish state and to join an independent Israeli army, but he did not enjoy it for long. Merely five months after his release from five long years of exile and detention in Africa, to which he was sentenced despite acquittal by the court, he fell in battle. However, his collection of letters endures as both historical documentation and personal testament. Preserved by his family, digitized by the Jabotinsky Institute Archive, and now analyzed as ego documents, these letters offer contemporary scholars invaluable insights into both a pivotal historical moment and the human experience of political detention. Through this analysis, we gain access to both the broader historical developments of the period and the intimate psychological dimensions of how individuals experienced, interpreted, and communicated these events while they unfolded.

Notes

1. Rudolf Dekker, "Jacques Presser's Heritage: Egodocuments in the Study of History," *Memoria y Civilización* 5 (2002): 13–37.
2. For studies on British detention policies, see Steven Wagner, *Statecraft by Stealth: Secret Intelligence and British Rule in Palestine* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019); Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (New York: Knopf, 2022). For Jewish underground movements, see Colin Shindler, *The Rise of the Israeli Right: From Odessa to Hebron* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
3. Dekker, "Jacques Presser's Heritage: Egodocuments in the Study of History," 31.
4. Liz Stanley, "The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences," *Auto/Biography* 12 (2004): 201–35; and David Barton and Nigel Hall, ed., *Letter Writing as a Social Practice* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2000).
5. The Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization) was an armed Jewish underground organization that operated in Mandatory Palestine between 1931 and 1948. Under the ideological guidance of Ze'ev Jabotinsky's Revisionist movement, it conducted armed resistance against both British rule and Arab forces, becoming one of the primary militant groups fighting for Jewish independence until its dissolution following the establishment of the State of Israel. On the Betar movement in Poland, see Daniel Kupfert Heller, *Jabotinsky's Children: Polish Jews and the Rise of Right-Wing Zionism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). Heller provides important context on how Betar, which had approximately fifty

- thousand Polish Jewish members by the late 1930s, served as an incubator for right-wing Zionist ideas and shaped the political consciousness of young Jews like Hoch before their immigration to Palestine.
6. Abraham 'Yair' Stern (1907–1942) was the founder and leader of Lehi (Lohamei Herut Israel – Fighters for the Freedom of Israel), a militant Jewish underground organization that split from the Irgun in 1940 due to Stern's uncompromising stance against British rule in Palestine and his belief that the fight against the British should continue even during World War II. Stern was shot dead by British police in Tel Aviv on February 12, 1942, while hiding in a safehouse.
 7. Moshe Hoch ('Rebbeleh'), Freedom Fighters of Israel Heritage Association (Lehi) website: <https://lehi.org.il/en/hoch-moshe/>
 8. Letter of attorney J. Kaisermann to British authorities in Jerusalem, July 25, 1944. Moshe Hoch's collection, in the Freedom Fighters of Israel Heritage Association (there is no archival symbolization).
 9. Latrun Detention Camp was a British-operated administrative detention facility located near Jerusalem during the Mandatory Palestine period. It served as a primary internment center for Jewish underground activists whom British authorities detained without trial under the Emergency Regulations.
 10. Assistant Inspector-General, CID, to Mr. J. Kaisermann, July 31, 1944. From Moshe Hoch's collection.
 11. Dov Milman, *The Prisoners of Zion in Africa: In Eritrea, Sudan, and Kenya* (Zikhron Ya'akov: Kotarot, 2005), 259.
 12. The collection of Moshe Hoch's letters was donated to the Lohamei Herut Israel (Freedom Fighters of Israel) Heritage Association in the 2010s by Irit Blau, daughter of Rivka Menuchin (née Hoch), Moshe's sister.
 13. For a detailed examination of the historical context and broader implications of the Jewish detainees' exile to Africa, see Daniela Ozacky Stern, "Out of Africa: Letters of Jewish Detainees in the British Internment Camps, 1944–1948," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 23, no. 2 (2024): 444–69.
 14. Hoch to his family from Latrun, October 21, 1943.
 15. Hoch from Latrun, December 30, 1943.
 16. Hoch from Latrun, October 9, 1944.
 17. Attorney Keizermann to Moshe's father, Sender Hoch, October 26, 1944.
 18. For example, Shulamit Eliash, *Irgun and Lehi Exile: In the Internment Camps in Africa, 1944–1948* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1996), chap. 1.
 19. Milman, *The Prisoners of Zion in Africa*; Moshe Bella, ed., *From Sembel to Gilgil: From the Book of Detention and Exile* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense Press, 1980); Shlomoh Okun, ed., *Exiles of Kenya: The Story of the Underground Fighters in Exile in Eritrea, Sudan and Kenya* (Tel Aviv: Association of the Exiles of Kenya, 1995).
 20. *Ibid.*, 14.
 21. For a broader historical context of British detention practices across the empire, see Benjamin John Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Imperial Endgame: Britain's Dirty Wars and the End of Empire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (New York: Knopf, 2022); David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005); and Erik Linstrum, *Age of Emergency: Living with Violence at the End of the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023). These works situate detention practices within the broader context of British colonial counter-insurgency strategies. While Jewish detainees in Africa faced different circumstances than those in other colonial contexts (such as the concentration camps during the Boer War or detention during the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya), these comparative studies illuminate how the British Empire deployed similar strategies of containment and control across diverse colonial settings.
 22. Hoch, from Sudan, November 1, 1944.
 23. *Ibid.*
 24. Hoch from Eritrea, July 21, 1946.

25. Hoch from Eritrea, December 12, 1944. Each letter was titled with the date, place, and number of days in prison.
26. Hoch from Eritrea, January 11, 1945.
27. Hoch from Eritrea, January 18, 1945.
28. Hoch from Eritrea, March 13, 1946.
29. Uzzi Ornan (1923–2022) was a leading linguist and professor at the Hebrew University. A copy of this textbook, *Grammar of Mouth and Ear: A Textbook for Hebrew Speakers*, Gilgil Kenya, 1947, can be found in Israel's National Library in Jerusalem.
30. Hoch from Eritrea, May 5, 1946.
31. A copy of this certificate can be found in his file.
32. See note 28 above.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. For example, in Hoch's letter from Eritrea, February 3, 1946. For more details on the violent event in the camp, see Ozacky Stern, "Out of Africa," 444–69; and Eliash, *Irgun and Lehi Exile*, 79–83.
37. Hoch from Eritrea, January 21, 1945.
38. Hoch from Sudan, January 30, 1945.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. On psychological coping mechanisms in captivity narratives, see Edna Lomsky-Feder, "Life Stories, War, and Veterans: On the Social Distribution of Memories," *Ethos* 32, no. 1 (2004): 82–109.
42. Ibid.
43. Hoch from Sudan, May 20, 1945.
44. Hoch from Sudan, July 5 and July 12, 1945.
45. Eliash, *Irgun and Lehi Exile*, 94–96. However, there were indeed escapes in March and September 1945, but the escapees were caught shortly after. Ibid., 272–3.
46. Ibid., 101.
47. Hoch from Eritrea, September 22, 1946.
48. Hoch from Eritrea, October 6, 1946.
49. Hoch from Eritrea, March 21, 1946.
50. Hoch from Kenya, August 31, 1947.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Hoch from Eritrea, June 30, 1946.
54. Hoch from Kenya, March 23, 1947. For further details of the British operation to move yet again the detainees, see Eliash, *Irgun and Lehi Exile*, 109–15.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Hoch from Kenya, April 4, 1947.
58. Hoch from Kenya, May 26, 1947.
59. Hoch from Kenya, April 12, 1947.
60. Ibid.
61. Hoch from Kenya, October 10, 1947.
62. Hoch from Kenya, November 9, 1947.
63. Hoch from Kenya, December 5, 1947.
64. Hoch from Kenya, December 11, 1947.
65. Miriam Hoch, letter to the high commissioner, June 7, 1946. From Moshe Hoch's collection.
66. Ibid.
67. Hoch from Eritrea, October 20, 1946.
68. Hoch from Eritrea, December 11, 1946.

69. Hoch from Kenya, January 26, 1948.
70. Ibid.
71. Hoch from Kenya, February 9, 1948.
72. Hoch from Kenya, May 9, 1948.
73. Hoch from Kenya, May 13, 1948.
74. Menachem Begin, who commanded the Irgun (Etzel) underground movement in its struggle against British rule in Palestine (1944–1948), later became Israel’s sixth prime minister (1977–1983).
75. Hoch from Kenya, May 17, 1948.
76. Ibid.
77. Milman, *The Prisoners of Zion in Africa*, 256–257.
78. Ibid., 258.
79. Ibid., 259.
80. An 1898 Yiddish play by Jacob Gordin.
81. Hoch from Tel Aviv, December 15, 1948.
82. Rebecca Kook, ed., *Hillel Kook-Samuel Merlin Correspondence 1965–1986* (Haifa: Herzl Institute for the Study of Zionism and the University of Haifa, 2022), 422–3.
83. On the value of contemporaneous accounts versus retrospective narratives, see Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991).
84. Priya Satia, “History from Below,” *Aeon*, December 18, 2020, <https://aeon.co/essays/what-shaped-e-p-thompson-historian-and-champion-of-working-people>

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the Jabotinsky Institute in Tel Aviv and especially archivist Miri Yahalom for providing me with assistance regarding the materials and photographs for this article.

Disclosure statement

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

Notes on contributor

Daniela Ozacky Stern is a scholar of Jewish Studies, the Holocaust and World War II. She is a lecturer in the Holocaust Studies Program at Western Galilee College, Israel. Ozacky Stern earned a PhD in Jewish History from the University of Haifa, studying the Jewish partisans in Lithuania and Belarus during the Holocaust. She earned a master’s degree from the School of History at Tel Aviv University, where her thesis dealt with Nazi propaganda led by Joseph Goebbels. Ozacky Stern conducted post-doctoral research at Yad Vashem and was a European Holocaust Research Infrastructure fellow at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and an archive fellow at the Fortunoff Archive at Yale University.