

No Life Without You

REFUGEE LOVE LETTERS FROM THE 1930s

EDITED BY
FRANKLIN
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Eleven: Zionism

Mope's break from the Orthodox Judaism practiced by his father did not quench his conviction that Zionism was the way forward for modern Jews or, at least, for himself. In its barest outline, I can trace Mope's fervent engagement with Zionism through to his early youth. For a fuller history, I have pieced together fragments from various sources that help to convey a consistent picture out of which his interpretation of Zionism has an appealing clarity. The geographical Palestine to which he alludes is what had become British Mandatory territory following World War I, and should not be confused with present-day aspirations for a Palestinian state.

MOPE

I believe that the function of Zionism is in the realization of the promise to create an official and legal homestead for the Jewish people in Palestine. What our generation of young Zionists is attempting is to respond to Palestine in a completely new, completely different, way from that espoused by our praying forefathers. Our concept is one that, until now, was only the stuff of stories and dreams. We try to revitalize the beauties of our religious forefathers consistent with modern demands of life today. We harmonize those dreams and make them real through plantings, irrigation and construction, a concept that was atrophied by the former "prayers only" approach.

Even as Mope entered his teens, his Zionist leanings are unmistakable. A printed table song produced for his Bar Mitzvah on 29 June 1912 ("Tafellied zur Barmizwah-Feier von Ernst Moritz Felsenstein") balances the counterclaims of two homelands, the one natal, the other inspirational. It combines tribute to the sanctuary of the Jewish home in Germany ("the homestead fostering our childhood dreams") with the ideals of Zion ("the ancient holy land... beckons us with ties so bold"). The Zionist melodies sung

at Mope's Bar Mitzvah are early indications of his growing ardor to prepare himself for the promise of a new life in Palestine.

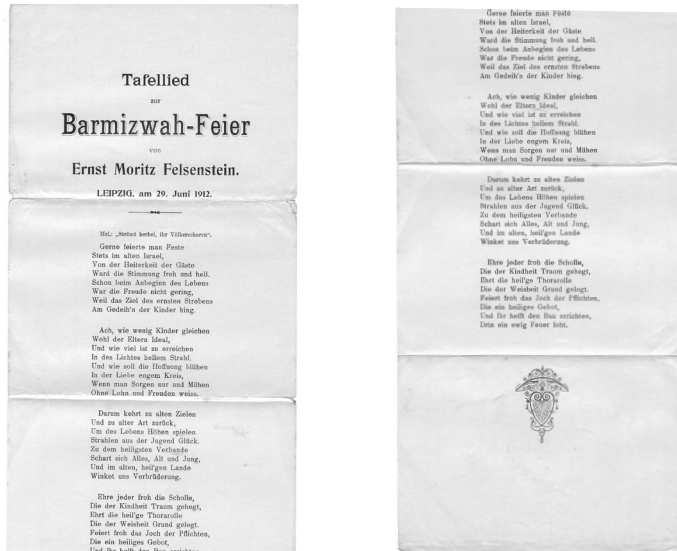


Fig. 54 (a) and (b) Bar Mitzvah Tafellied (Table Songs) for Moritz Felsenstein, Leipzig, 29 June 1912.

After 1933, hearkening to the Holy Land was transformed from aspiration into urgent necessity as German Jews sought refuge outside the clutches of the Nazi regime.

Where, following Mope's experience in the trenches, his unbending father had only succeeded in aggravating his religious disquiet, his mother appears to have been more than willing to engage with him over matters of faith. The closeness between mother and son is captured in a loosely abbreviated reconstruction of some verses that he penned to her on his own twenty fourth birthday.

Here, he nominates her as his best "critic" as he sets out his Zionist ideology. He once again distinguishes between "this cold northern land... the old Fatherland" (i.e., Germany) and the promise of a new home for the Jewish people in Palestine. Where he differs from his mother is in giving precedence to the realities of establishing a Jewish homeland over repetitive prayer in the synagogue.

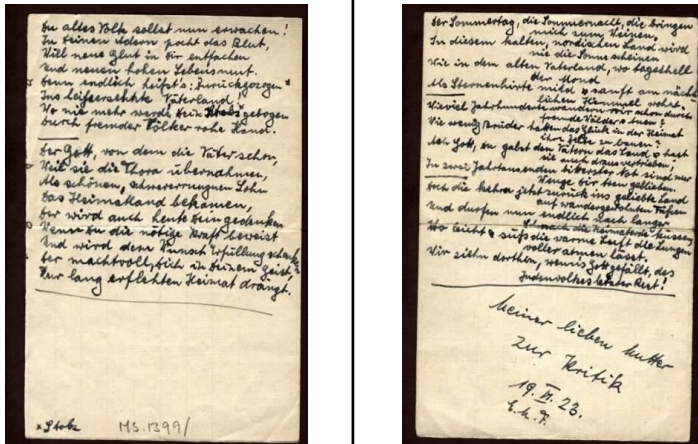


Fig. 55 Zionist verses dedicated to his mother, penned by EMF, on his birthday, 19 June 1923.

MOPE

How many centuries have we already wandered through foreign forests?

How few of our brothers have had the good fortune to rebuild their tents in the homeland?

But now with wandering feet we are returning to our beloved land

And finally now, after centuries of humiliation, we may kiss our native earth,

And raise there, if God so wills, a permanent resting place for the Jewish people.

All good people, you should now awake

The blood should throb in your veins.

A new ardor needs to be kindled in you

And with it the courage of a new kind of higher life.

In the sad, piteous Fatherland,

Where never more will we have to bow

To the raw hand of foreign people,
 They take the Torah as God's beautiful reward
 When they should also be in prayer for a Jewish homeland.
 If you need the proof of this
 Allow it to be your desire's fulfilment
 Be strong in your spirit
 To press for the restoration of our long lost homeland.

Mope was steeped in the Zionist movement through membership of Blau-Weiss (Blue-White), the first Zionist youth movement in Germany which was established in the same year as his Bar Mitzvah. Blau-Weiss began as a response to the refusal of German youth movements to enlist more than a token number of non-Christian members, and it promoted social and cultural activities that helped to give its youngsters a Jewish identity and sense of togetherness. In the years after the First World War, the gathering anti-Semitism in Germany and other European countries made Zionism a very attractive ideal for many young Jews of Mope's generation.

Within his own family, Mope was aware that among the early pioneers had been his mother's sister, Rifka, and her husband Wolf Bruenn, who had successfully sought to transform mosquito-infested swamps outside Hadera in the heart of Palestine, into orange groves through the selective introduction of eucalyptus trees and other natural forms of drainage. Another of his aunts, Esther, had married the writer Shmuel Josef Agnon (later a Nobel Laureate), and they too had made Palestine their home.

During his time as a graduate student, Mope received an irregular stipend for contributing articles to Zionist newspapers and magazines. I recollect a conversation with him in which he mentioned to me that most of these pieces came to be published under a pseudonym, though (if he ever divulged the name) I cannot recollect the moniker that he used. However, the recent digitization of the Leipziger Jüdische Zeitung has revealed a lone article, entitled "The Palestine Office in Leipzig", that he published under his own name on 24 March 1922. It was written in the context of the ongoing Kiev pogroms in which fifty thousand Jews had been massacred and half a million made homeless. I have adapted his words to give it a personal slant.

MOPE

By the beginning of April 1920, the Balfour Declaration had received official confirmation by the Zionist Commission, and, two years later, by the League of Nations. In Leipzig as well as in other German cities, people like me considered that as a signal for the mass emigration of Jews to Palestine, but in the year 1920 just one single pioneer emigrated there from our city.

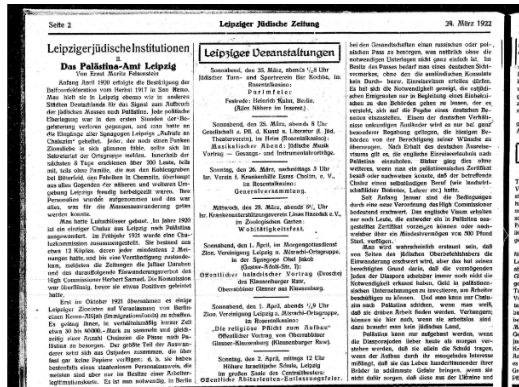


Fig. 56 Article by EMF that appeared in the *Leipziger Jüdische Zeitung*, 24 March 1922; accessible online at <https://digital.slub-dresden.de/werkansicht/dlf/122923/2>.

In the following year, I united together with a few other committed Leipzig based Zionists. We succeeded in raising funds of around thirty to forty thousand Reichmarks and used that to furnish passports to Palestine for a number of individuals. Most of the emigrants were Eastern European Jews who rarely carried with them any personal documentation. It was essential to obtain for them Russian and Polish passports from their respective embassies in Berlin, which, without any supporting documents, was of course far from simple. No less critical was that these Eastern European emigrants should be accompanied there by one of us since we were more likely to understand the mentality of the functionaries with whom they would have to deal. A foreigner who is unfamiliar with the protocols will succeed only with extraordinary talent to convince faceless bureaucrats of their right to emigrate. In addition, an applicant would need to be furnished both with a German emigration and an English immigration visa before traveling to Palestine.

Since the start of January of the present year the conditions of entry have become immensely more difficult due to a new law from the British High Commissioner, who declared that Jewish immigration would be approved only when it could be shown that it did not do harm to the economy. For now, only people who can produce a security of at least five hundred pounds sterling will obtain an English visa.

Wealthy Jews living in the diaspora still seem not to have grasped the necessity of supporting our venture by investing in Palestinian companies that can offer employment to these emigrés once they arrive. We can only send pioneers to Palestine when we know that they will find work over there. If they are unemployed, they might just as well starve over here. In such a hopeless situation, no one would need a land for the Jews!

Better *today* rather than leaving it to tomorrow, Palestine can only be built when diaspora Jews understand the urgency of our plea. They alone will carry the responsibility if the construction of a Jewish state fails due to their lack of concern. Should that prove to be the case, hundreds and thousands of Jewish lives will be cast into terrible danger. We diaspora Jews need to take care of our brothers by helping them to emigrate from Ukraine and other such pogrom hells in order that they may enjoy a safe and secure future for themselves in Palestine.

I should end by saying that in Palestine itself, a Jew will be able to set up and run a business more successfully than anywhere else in the world because the country still has much scope to be developed economically, and, with the arrival of new immigrants, it expects an ever-increasing commerce.

We make an urgent appeal to the Leipzig Jewish community at large: ***Help us with our difficult work if you can today! Likely tomorrow, it will already be too late!***

Mope's final remark is prescient. With the advent of Nazi rule in Germany, emigration to Palestine became far more complicated, particularly for those who hoped to take their material assets with them. Although his brother Adolf and his sister Alice, both still in their mid-thirties, had succeeded in bringing their families to Palestine, they had not taken into consideration the plight of their widowed mother. She would have to rely for her future on the transfer of her dwindling resources if she were to follow them. As the last of her children still living in Leipzig, Mope took it upon himself to help her in any way that he could.

When he formulated his plans for his mother and for himself to emigrate to Palestine, he realized that they would each need capital to sustain their new lives. To secure this, he turned to what he thought would be a viable scheme. Shortly after the Nazis grabbed power in 1933, an initial agreement had been reached with Zionist officials that would permit Jewish emigrants to transfer their assets to Palestine in the form of German export goods. The name of the company that was set up in Tel Aviv to administer this was Haavara, and money to be transferred had to be paid into the account of Paltreu ("Palästina Treuhandgesellschaft", the Palestine Trust Company).⁴ In turn, the capital was then used to purchase German goods, which were to be sold in Palestine by Haavara. It was a way of satisfying both the Nazis who were intent of ridding Germany of its Jews, and the Jewish Agency which was no less intent in encouraging immigration to Palestine. As a committed Zionist, Mope was attracted to the scheme.

To meet British mandatory regulations, each emigrant needed to be in possession of a basic surety of £1,000. However, strict German currency restrictions prohibited the exchange or exportation of Reichmarks without formal permission. To secure the necessary amount to cover both his mother and himself, Mope turned to family members outside Germany, writing to his brother-in-law in London, Fred Rau, to ask him to act as his financial guarantor, and to a Palestine-based cousin, Dr. Julius Rosenfeld, the brother of Karl Rosenfeld of Karlsruhe, to negotiate with Haavara in Tel Aviv. Working through Paltreu, and with the participation of his brother-in-law and his cousin, he believed he had found a legal method to transfer a significant portion of his mother's and his own funds out of Nazi Germany. The goods that he decided to use for this purpose were furs. Little did he suspect that he had caught himself in what was to turn out to be a labyrinthine web that threatened to enmesh him.

MOPE

I applied for a transfer to Palestine and received permission to send merchandise valued at fifty thousand Reichmarks there under the condition that a quarter of this amount would be paid in foreign currency. My brother-in-law Frederick Rau in London provided me with the needed amount in pounds Sterling (approximately £ 1,080),

⁴ An image of an application form created by the *Palästina Treuhand-Stelle* (Palestine Trust Company) can be viewed in the online resources for this book, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0334#resources>

because I did not have access to any money abroad. I did not want the merchandise, a quarter of which had been paid for by my brother-in-law to remain in Germany, but on the other hand, it could not be subjected to the heat of the summer months in Palestine, so I asked for permission to warehouse the raw furs in Antwerp until the autumn.

In setting all this up, I was called a dreamer, since my brother Adolf had already tried and found it too hard a nut to crack, but it looks like my preparation was worth the effort. I had to engage in a lot of correspondence in connection with these things, but, when I discussed it with my attorney, he expressed amazement at the result of my efforts concerning *Haavara* and assured me that, in his multiple experience, he had never seen such a well-developed plan.

To my absolute frustration, I cannot undertake anything more before receiving the confirmation or permission respectively through *Haavara* in Tel-Aviv that Julius Rosenfeld, acting on my behalf, will have to present to them in writing. In my impatience to receive an answer from *Haavara*, I called and talked to Berlin yesterday and there, they put me off by telling me that such enquiries always require quite a bit of time until completion and that the waiting period was completely normal. They only promised to ask Tel-Aviv once again by airmail to expedite the matter.

Everything moves forward far too gradually. It appears that there will be more delays, most of which I probably don't even know about yet. Anyone with Zionist aspirations, as I do, gets to suffer through this scheme. Before all of this is completed, I cannot make any firm plans for the future. The form has to be created first, before the bell is poured. In my momentary situation, it is difficult to form a clear picture of a future life in Palestine.