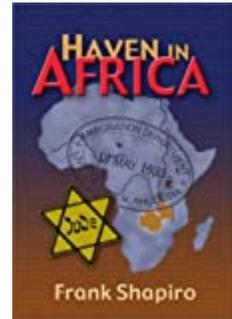


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Frank Shapiro.** *Haven in Africa.* Jerusalem and New York: Gefen, 2002. xii + 156 pp. \$14.95 (paper), ISBN 978-965-229-285-8.



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Was Northern Rhodesia a haven for European Jewry on the eve of World War II? What happened to the numerous plans for Jewish immigration to the British protectorate of Northern Rhodesia in the 1930s? And why were these documents sealed and kept classified until recently? In *Haven in Africa*, Shapiro attempts to answer these questions while leading the reader to wonder about all the missed opportunities that prevented a mass settlement of German Jewry in Africa. Shapiro explores the rise and fall of a vast number of plans to settle Jewish refugees in Africa while shedding light on Rhodesian and European politics, financial circumstances, local anti-Semitism, and missed opportunities by Jewish organizations. Shapiro also provides details on the Jewish community in Northern Rhodesia (today's Zambia in south-central Africa) and its settlement there as early as the end of the nineteenth century. In the process he brings to life a number of successful immigration stories.

*Haven in Africa* provides details that were not included in Shapiro's 1999 book *Zion in Africa: The Jews of Zambia*, which he co-authored with Hugh Macmillan. In addition to private letters, diaries, telegrams, journals, and press communiques, *Haven in Africa* includes documents from the files of the British Colonial and Foreign Office in London, as well as the Zambian National Archives in Lusaka (Zambia). Shapiro's research into

these formerly classified archival documents reveals secret negotiations that began shortly after Hitler came to power. For example, as early as March 2, 1934, a letter from Leonard F. Montefiore of the German Jewish Emigration Council in England to Sir John Maffey of the Colonial Office in Whitehall in London inquired about a possible opening for "Jewish and other refugees from Germany in the crown colonies" (p. 4). In the years to follow, locations under consideration included Tanganyika, Northern Rhodesia, Kenya, and even Angola, pending approval of the Portuguese government and financial backing by the American Joint-Distribution Committee.

The volume includes eleven chapters that follow in a chronological order, detailing little-known and often short-lived plans for settling German Jews in Northern Rhodesia. These chapters explore the obstacles to Jewish settlements while offering provocative observations. Although Shapiro avoids conspiracy theories, he certainly leads the reader to speculation. Contrary to the general belief by Holocaust scholars that by 1939 no country was willing to admit German Jews, this work proves that plans to absorb German Jewry in Northern Rhodesia did indeed exist but failed miserably.

One of the book's strengths is an appendix that provides a useful list of the different plans that are discussed in this volume, each of which is followed by a

brief summary of the plan. These include the Mwinilunga Plan, Lusaka Rail Track Plan, Northern Border Plan, Stephenson Plan, the 150 Families Plan, Paterson Farm Plan, George Prentice Plan, Mpika Plan, Highlands Plan, the 440 Families Plan, the 30 Families Plan, Chirupula Stephenson's Farm Plan, and Campbell's Industries Plan for 50,000 Families. A similar appendix listing the names that appear in the book, with short biographical notes, could have been quite useful but unfortunately is not provided.

The Mwinilunga Plan in 1938 to settle 500 families in Northern Rhodesia and its collapse is discussed in the first two chapters of the book. A few lucky individuals managed to escape Nazism, but they often arrived penniless and faced numerous obstacles, such as economic hardship, anti-Semitism, and objections by Logan, the Acting Governor of Northern Rhodesia, and especially by the Mine Workers' Union who did not welcome competition. Nevertheless, Shapiro stresses, as he does throughout the book, that in mid-1938, Northern Rhodesia "remained one of the few countries in the world which retained an open door policy to refugee immigration" (p. 10). Shapiro suggests that the initial, seemingly enthusiastic approach of MacDonald, the British Colonial Secretary, towards Jewish settlement in Northern Rhodesia was no more than a political maneuver before the upcoming Evian Conference, as the British had already imposed a harsh quota system on Jewish immigration to Palestine, which they ruled under a League of Nations Mandate. At the initiative of President Roosevelt, delegates from thirty-three countries were invited to meet in Evian-les-Bains on the shores of Lake Geneva in France to discuss rescue programs for Jewish refugees. The Evian conference failed and in *Haven in Africa*, Shapiro criticizes the British for their lack of support. Apparently "Britain intended to uphold only a minor role in the absorption of Jewish refugees in her colonies" (p. 15). Soon the Mwinilunga and Lusaka settlement plans were dropped and Shapiro wonders, "where were the humanitarian Elected Members ... [Major Sir Stewart Gore-Browne, Captain Campbell, and Sir Roy Welensky] who would later adopt a more positive stand?" (p. 19). He suggests that these officials were preoccupied with local elections in Northern Rhodesia. The author adds, "curiously, the Anglo-Jewish leadership, under people such as Anthony de Rothschild, Lord Bearsted, Lord Samuel and Sir Robert Waley Cohen, did not fight the fall of the Mwinilunga Plan" (p. 25). In the following chapter, Shapiro concludes "there was no serious intention on behalf of the British Government to settle masses of

refugees in Northern Rhodesia, or for that matter, anywhere else in the Empire" (p. 31), or at least not for a large number of German Jewish refugees.

While there were local objections, and the preoccupation with racism in Northern and Southern Rhodesia acted as a block to Jewish absorption, Shapiro nonetheless assures the reader that at least until September 1938 Jews from Germany, Austria, Lithuania, and Latvia who attempted to get into Northern Rhodesia were permitted entry. Nevertheless, there was no awareness among Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe that they could emigrate to Central Africa, and individuals who did usually arrived with the assistance of their family members who had already settled in Africa. In Northern and Southern Rhodesia, anti-Semitism was displayed openly in the local media and was used as a political tool. After all, accepting 500 families of Jewish refugees, instead of Anglo-Saxon white Christians, could potentially affect the political infrastructure. According to Shapiro, not everyone objected to Jewish settlement and he provides several examples. Among the Jews and non-Jews pro-settlement supporters were J. E. Stephenson "Chirupira," former Justice of the Peace, who recommended among other plans the establishment of a Rhodesia-Palestine Corporation to export produce overseas. Other supporters included the leaders of the Anglo-Jewish community who contributed their pro-settlement sentiments by assuring the British government that refugees would not become a burden on public funds.

A turning point in Germany was Kristallnacht in November 9, 1938, which was quickly followed by a wave of Jewish emigration. Some Jews converted to Christianity and emigrated to countries such as Ecuador and Brazil that granted visas to Catholics, while others, with the help of their relatives and friends in South Africa, were successful in entering Northern Rhodesia. Following Kristallnacht, MacDonald, the British Colonial Secretary, urged Governor Maybin to allow Jews to emigrate into Northern Rhodesia. Shapiro provides details of the plan, known as the 150 Families Plan, and names supporters and opponents in England and Northern Rhodesia, while providing examples of successful emigration stories of several Jewish families. Despite the British Foreign Office's policy of refugee settlement in the region, Governor Maybin was able to reduce the plan from 150 families to 150 individuals. Once again, Shapiro is surprised by the missed opportunity for a mass emigration to Northern Rhodesia, and notes that once again the Anglo-Jewish leadership of the Emigration (Planning) Committee failed to act when they had a chance.

It is worthy to note that a few plans for refugee settlement in Northern Rhodesia came from individuals. For example, Captain and Mrs. Peterson, who presented their Matonchi farm and two hundred head of cattle, and George Prentice of Chamchenga, Fort Jameson in Northern Rhodesia, who proposed a territory for settlement. Despite various objections, Shapiro maintains that “very few immigrants were stopped from entering the country” (p. 74). Shapiro also asks what remains unanswered and should be further explored, and why did the Jewish Central British Fund and Emigration (Planning) Committee continue to keep this option of settling in Northern Rhodesia as secret as possible, while the issue was being discussed publicly in the British Parliament and every immigrant who reached Northern Rhodesia obtained legal entry?

Shapiro’s book contains a number of fascinating tales. For example, the story of the Messerer family probably merits its own book. With the assistance of relatives, the Messerers fled Nazi Germany, the Buchenwald and Dachau concentration camps, and sailed on the German Watussie ship to Africa. Most unusual was the fact that the ship was flying the swastika, it had a Gestapo female

agent onboard, and yet its crew provided the Jewish passengers with Kosher food. In addition, when the ship stopped in Mozambique, Jewish men were permitted to pray in town for a passenger who had died on the ship. The Messerers settled and lived in Northern Rhodesia for thirty years before moving to Israel.

The book closes with a table entitled “A Time Capsule of Events, Jan. 1934-1940.” This table is another of the book’s strengths as it lists specific events that are related to Jewish immigration in the context of general world history. Specific events that are mentioned in Shapiro’s book are listed along with a chapter number, making this table a good tool for scholars. Some lines in bold text throughout the book highlight main points and could be useful to readers who are interested in a quick review.

*Haven in Africa* represents a stimulating contribution to the scholarship on European and African Jewry. This thought-provoking volume presents excellent documents and photographs, and is suitable for scholars of Jewish history, African Jewry, European history and World War II, politics, and Holocaust studies, and the general reader interested in the topic.

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