

“VWI invites the Institut für jüdische Geschichte Österreichs“

Wednesday, 10 December 2020, 3:00 pm

Please use this link to join the event (online only):

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87188649286?pwd=ZmFjT2VPL21QaUZoQ3lrNTI1Y0lnUT09>

Julie DAWSON

“As to my emotional anguish, there are days when I feel endlessly miserable...”:

***Hachsharot* in Early Post-War Romania and the Limits of Belonging**

This presentation examines the activities of Zionist youth organisations in Romania during the immediate post-war period using documents created by the *Securitate* (secret police) and the organisations themselves. I then take a microhistorical approach to probe the experience of the participating individual through a set of recently found survivor diaries. The situation of Jews in post-war Romania was unlike any other in Europe. Approximately half of the Jewish population had survived the war: numbering between 350,000 and 400,000, this group was fundamentally diverse, not only in their pre-war background, linguistic, and cultural affiliations, but also, and of great significance, their war-time fate. Uniting many, if not most, however, was the powerful desire to leave Romania. An outlet for the energies and aspirations of frustrated young people was provided

by numerous Zionist organisations active in every part of the country. These organisations, especially those of the *HeHalutz* movement, fomented for action, gearing their activities towards the practical and the immediate. *Hachshara* centres were established across the country and thousands of Jewish young people criss-crossed the land to live on communal collectives, training as farmers and factory workers, preparing for an uncertain *Aliyah* of dubious promise and dreaming of a new life. While working to reconstruct the impressive breadth of Zionist activity in the tumultuous post-war years, I also examine the limits of their propaganda and community-building work and their failure to address the psychological and physical needs of Holocaust survivors: despite apparent inclusion in a cohesive and sympathetic group, the author of the diary experiences alienation and marginalization within her own ranks.



13 - 17 April 1947 - כי"ז ניסן תש"ז

Commented by Benjamin GRILJ

Benjamin Grilj, Post-Doc at the Institute for Jewish History in Austria with a special focus on regional Holocaust-Studies, Migration-Studies, genealogic research, Digital Humanities, Eastern European History. Former lecturer at the University of Chernivci, research fellow at the Institute for Bukovina Studies and the Austrian Library Czernowitz. Editor of *Black Milk. Withheld letters from the death camps of Transnistria* (2013).

Julie Dawson, Fortunoff Fellow at the VWI, is a doctoral candidate at the University of Vienna's Institute for Contemporary History. She holds degrees from Columbia University and Northwestern University. Dawson worked for the Leo Baeck Institute from 2010 to 2019, directing their archival survey of Transylvania and Bukovina (jbat.lbi.org) from 2012 to 2019. From 2016 to 2019 she was researcher-in-residence in Mediaș (Romania) for the EU Horizon 2020 project *TRACES: Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts*. Her research interests include Bukovina, communist Romania, women's history, trauma and memory studies.

Illustration: Cover of 1947 activity report of the Gordonia and Busselia Zionist organisations in Romania. Original held by the National Library of Israel.