

“VWI invites VWI-alumna Edith Raim”
Wednesday, 20 February 2019, 3.00 pm
1010 Vienna, Rabensteig 3, 3rd Floor

Jonathan KAPLAN

AMBASSADORS OF MEMORY
THE STRUGGLE OF GUILT AND RESPONSIBILITY IN THE GDR



The founding of the German Democratic Republic marked a new chapter in German history and an opportunity for German communists to construct the “first state of workers and farmers on German soil”. One of the main self-defining characteristics of the GDR was the break with the National-Socialist past; it was the Federal Republic in the West and not the GDR that symbolized continuity with fascism. The ministry of foreign affairs of the GDR had a major role in conducting international propaganda aimed at denouncing the Federal Republic by revealing active Nazis and former war criminals in the West. The continuity between the Nazi and West German foreign ministries was already known in the early postwar period. By contrast, the GDR’s “Socialist Foreign Ministry” would not admit to having any representatives of the former regime in its new diplomatic cadre. The research I have conducted in the Stasi archive, however, reveals that ‘small Nazis’ found their place in the new socialist foreign ministry. Their biographies reveal the political and social tactics through which the GDR integrated former Nazis in the East German society. At the highest level of GDR diplomacy however, former Nazis were not playing a significant role. The role of German-Jews in political and cultural life in the GDR is impressive in comparison to their proportion in the general society. Some of the most important East-German politicians and SED-functionaries were of Jewish descent. Many of them took part in formulating the East German foreign policy and propaganda. A biographical presentation of diplomats of Jewish descent demonstrates the tensions between Jewish life in the GDR and the East German rejection of confronting the crimes of the third Reich and the Holocaust.

Commented by Edith Raim

Jonathan Kaplan is a PhD candidate in History at the Free University of Berlin. He holds a BA in Political Science and History and an MA in History from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His MA thesis was entitled ‘*The German Question in the East-German Historiography, 1945–1961. Culture, Territory and Enemies*. From 2009 to 2012, he was a fellow at the Richard Koebner Minerva Center for German History, and from 2015 to 2018 a Research-Fellow at the Ernst-Ludewig-Studienwerk.

Edith Raim studied history and German in Munich and Princeton and worked as a DAAD lecturer in the United Kingdom, at the Haus der Geschichte in Bonn, and at the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich. She is a lecturer of Contemporary History in Augsburg and has published on Nazi history and the post-war era. Most recent publication: *Nazi Crimes Against Jews and German Post-War Justice. The West German Judicial System During Allied Occupation (1945-1949)*, Berlin/Munich/Boston: de Gruyter 2017.

Please register at anmeldung@vwi.ac.at by Tuesday, 19 February 2019, 12.00 am and bring your ID.

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