

About the workshop:

The defeat of the Wehrmacht in May 1945 put an end to the Nazi policy of annihilation of the Jews of Europe. While we can barely speak about continuity in the pre- and post-war lives of any Holocaust survivors, German-speaking Jews remaining in Europe faced particular challenges.

First, German-speaking Jews outside Germany were often routinely perceived as Germans and therefore experienced the same humiliations as non-Jewish Germans, such as violence, social exclusion and legal obstacles in their attempts to regain citizenship.

Second, as the political and demographic centers of Jewish life shifted to the United States and Palestine following the war, German Jews in Germany - economically weak and politically marginal - struggled to be recognised as partners in international as well as local political negotiations.

Third, the historical legacy of German-speaking Jewry as an important modern force within European and world Jewry was in ruins in 1945. German-speaking Jews were confronted with harsh criticism of their national and linguistic choices; in turn, they felt compelled to redefine their identity and looked for ways to situate themselves in a new social and political reality.

The workshop aims to deal with these and other aspects of the experience of German-speaking Jews in the immediate post-war years. Papers will focus on regions with different legal, linguistic, political and religious contexts, covering occupied Germany, Lower Silesia (part of the new post-war Polish territories), the former Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, and those parts of Bukovina which were incorporated into Romania after the First World War. German-speaking Jews should not be seen solely as victims. Rather, the papers will explore the many creative and often dramatic ways in which Jews – often in cooperation with local or international agencies – actively faced the recent atrocities and engaged with discrimination against them in post-war Europe.