

Frozen Mud and Red Ribbons

Avital E. M. Baruch

**FROZEN MUD
AND
RED RIBBONS**

A Romanian Jewish Girl's Survival
Through the Holocaust in Transnistria
and its Rippling Effect
on the Second Generation

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“A testament, a pilgrimage, a journey of discovery and redemption, a beautifully crafted tapestry of stories of suffering, bravery, death and survival. Oral history does not come better than this beautifully written book, a daughter's labour of devotion to her Holocaust survivor mother and a gift of love to her children and her readers.”

Professor Yiannis Gabriel, *University of Bath*,
author of *“Myths, Stories and Organization”*

“Baruch recounts in fine details a family story which leads from the shtetl Mihaileni in north-eastern Romania in the 1930s to the horrors of the labor camps of Transnistria and from there to a new life in Israel. Based on oral history, this book offers very personal insights into the Holocaust perpetrated by Romania. It is sad and moving, but also carries a message of hope.”

Dr. Simon Geissbühler, *historian, political scientist and diplomat*

“*Frozen Mud and Red Ribbons* offers a true work of love in honour of her parents and all survivors, a work that deserves to be read, considered, and reread. Her masterful narrative moves across Romania to Cyprus and Israel, capturing the voice of generations that experienced the Holocaust and those who grew up in its shadow.”

Professor Maura Hametz, *Professor of History, Old Dominion University, Co-Editor of Jewish Intellectual Women in Central Europe, 1860-2000*

“The time is near when there will be no more survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust. It is therefore of the highest importance that the generations of children and grandchildren make every effort to collect and safeguard documents and testimonies—and that they reflect on the question what this memory work means for their own lives. With *Frozen Mud and Red Ribbons*, Avital E.M. Baruch has set an example for this painful and yet rewarding task. In addition, her book sheds light on one of the lesser known territories of destruction, despair, and hope in Europe.”

Professor Joachim Schlör, *Professor of Modern Jewish/non-Jewish Relations in History at the University of Southampton, Director of the Parkes Institute for the Study of Jewish/non-Jewish Relations*

“This is not just another book about the Holocaust or the history of the Jews in Romania, Bessarabia and Bukovina. It is a testimony written by a member of ‘The Second Generation’.

This book has a special meaning for me, being part of this generation. My family suffered a similar ordeal, losing some of its members. My aunt and my cousin were killed in a concentration camp in Transnistria and others survived the evacuation to Siberia. Reading it gives not only an insight to what happened during and after the war, but also a voice to those who could not speak before. It reveals the hidden past, filled with pain and sorrow, of an entire generation, as

they were reluctant, in many cases, to talk in public about what they went through. Nevertheless, it is also a story of hope and eventual happiness. Avital Baruch as the author does a marvellous job in being partly historian and partly a story teller, presenting that part of Jewish history with a clear vision and great personal dedication.

This book is a must for all those who study that period of time and are trying to understand what happened in Europe in those dark years of WWII. It brings another piece of the puzzle from that region in a perspective that was not covered that much in the past."

Ambassador Alexander Ben Zvi, PhD, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel

"This profound story has etched its impression greatly on my mind. Such memoirs from the Second World War must not be forgotten. The book is full with sensitive touches of the Second Generation, as reflected by a daughter, the narrator. Avital Baruch puts in the spotlight the heroes of incurable lost childhood, engaging us with their journey of survival and struggle for new life and hope."

Dr. Dorit Zilberman, author, literary scholar and critic,
Vice Chair of The Israeli Society of Authors

"Reading this book brought back old pains and feelings that will never be forgotten. Avital vibrantly describes those dark and difficult times, from being expelled from home through the agony in Transnistria. It is a great contribution to the memory of Jewish communities that perished. For a daughter to recount such horrors is not obvious. Avital merits great appreciation and gratitude for bringing these memories to light. I hope that the result of her endeavour will inspire others, so that Holocaust remembrance will be saved and passed on from generation to generation."

Iosef (Iulku) Klein, Chair of The Jewish Association of Kimpolung-Bukovina and the Surroundings, Retired Lieutenant Colonel

"Avital Baruch's flowing self-assured writing, takes the reader to dark worlds caused by hate and fear. This is not ancient history, it happened not long ago, in the generation of our parents. *Frozen Mud and Red Ribbons* is a chilling literary and biographical evidence that all human beings should remember."

Michel Haddad, author, retired senior Police officer, council member of The Israeli Society of Authors

"*Frozen Mud and Red Ribbons* by Avital Baruch paints a vivid account of a daughter searching for her roots and of a mother, a Holocaust survivor exiled from Romania to Ukraine. The book connects their history to the present and brings to light the issue of 'Second Generation of the Holocaust Syndrome'."

Suzanna Eibuszyc, author of *Memory is Our Home*

In memory of

Chaya, my beloved grandmother,

and of Tonie, Chaim, Gitté, and Esther,
who died without me knowing them

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FOREWORD

In Jewish tradition, individuals bear a heavy responsibility to remember, recount, and record experiences for future generations. In *Frozen Mud and Red Ribbons*, Avital Baruch does more than just fulfil this obligation in her book of the generational experience of the Holocaust and Holocaust memory. She interweaves oral history, memory, and documentary sources to create a compelling account of her family's journey from Romania to Israel, while at the same time exorcising her own demons and recounting her own journey from confusion to understanding growing up in a household and community of survivors.

The book is part memoir, part history of the experience of a Romanian Jewish family immersed in the traditions and rituals of Romanian Jewish communities, often overlooked in the Holocaust literature, and sharing the experiences of the polyglot Central European Jewish world. In line with many emerging Holocaust narratives, it offers a view of the Holocaust from the perspective of the survivors' children who, as Baruch demonstrates, might be counted as casualties as well, although of a different sort, haunted by the ghosts of the horrors of the past.

In her work that aims to bring 'cleanliness' or to clear up the loose ends of the past, Baruch captures a world of Holocaust memory from Mihaileni, Iasi, Botosani, Bucharest and Transnistria that includes the wanderings, deportations, deprivations, persecutions, and genocide of Romania's Jews. Her book captures the personal aspects and individual experiences of the Romanian Holocaust as Romania followed a path from independent state, to Axis ally, and back to independent state, along the trail of German Nazis and Russian Communists. In stunning detail, she relates the sufferings of the transience of life—in names, places, homes—and the hopes and disappointments associated with alternating periods of tragedy and triumph. Periods of hunger and deprivation are punctuated by stories of celebration and the taste of Romanian delicacies including mamaliga, kigalé and honey cake, which alternates with the bitterness of hunger.

The overlapping voices of family members including Baruch's mother, grandmother, father, and aunts offer a variety of perspectives on deportation, hiding, and flight, and on those who offered assistance,

inflicted pain, resisted the catastrophe, collaborated or acquiesced. The style of the book, written almost as a stream of consciousness, reflects on the richness and variety of Jewish life, and reveals the conflicts, both internal and external, of Jewish communities from ultra-religious Jews in Romania to radical Zionists in Israel.

Baruch succeeds in bringing a sense of order and cleanliness, in recounting moments of great kindness and of unthinkable cruelty and in tracing the footsteps of black muddy feet and the fluttering of red ribbons.

Maura Hametz
Norfolk, Virginia
July 2016