Ari Joskowicz

Toward an Economic History of Holocaust Memory

Two Cases from Post-War Austria

Abstract

Scholars working in the field of Holocaust Studies rarely centre questions of money in their studies of Holocaust memory and memorialisation. This reticence is understandable given how easily such approaches devolve into cynical and reductionist readings of complex and painful historical phenomena. Yet, it also leaves us without sufficient research tools, and information, about the role that economics has played in creating and sustaining public awareness of the Nazi genocide in the post-World War Two era. This article represents an initial attempt to explore how we might responsibly undertake an economic history of Holocaust memory, focusing on two case studies from post-war Austria. In my discussion of the large "Antifascist Exhibition 'Niemals vergessen!'" ("Never Forget") that opened in Vienna in 1946, I suggest that the price people are willing to pay for memory-related activities can help us gauge their affective investment. Turning to the case of Simon Wiesenthal's fundraising and philanthropic efforts throughout the 1960s, I then illuminate how the very act of fundraising can serve as a communal act of memorialisation.

For individuals, memory may come for free, but for institutions and societies it requires monetary investment in personnel and material. Scholarship in the wide field of Holocaust memory has largely ignored this fact, for understandable reasons: the notion that popular, artistic, political, or scholarly work on the mass murder of Europe's Jews might have financial aspects might easily be understood as feeding antisemitic tropes about Jews' interest in making money at all costs. And, indeed, the most notable works to deal with the subject take a markedly cynical view of Holocaust commemoration efforts. Yet, we need not allow the polemics about the supposedly sordid mechanics of a "Holocaust industry" (in the words of Norman Finkelstein) obscure the fact that monuments, exhibitions, document archives, testimony collections, education programmes, and research need resources to come to fruition.[1] To deny that need belies the experience of scholars who rely on grants, salaries, savings, or some combination thereof, to pursue their research. In the sprawling field that has explored the aesthetics, politics, and ethics of depictions of the Holocaust, economics is rarely addressed yet ever present.

Weaving monetary aspects into our analysis allows us to expand the fields of Holocaust and memory studies in terms that make visible the financial and knowledge infrastructures that most studies have thus far taken for granted. Exciting new work on Jewish philanthropy, such as that of Lila Corwin Berman, has dealt with issues of funding and Jewish life and politics.[2] Yet, the role of funding for memory

1 Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2003).

2 See Lila Corwin Berman, *The American Jewish Philanthropic Complex: The History of a Multibillion-Dollar Institution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), and Lila Corwin Berman, "How Americans

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work remains largely unexplored. This article invites us to consider the new vantages we gain by using an economic lens to rethink efforts to reckon with the Holocaust. It does so by exploring two case studies from Austrian post-Holocaust history. The first is the case of an exhibit on Nazi crimes that was produced in Vienna in 1946 and proved surprisingly successful; the second case involves the fundraising activities that underwrote Simon Wiesenthal's efforts as a "Nazi hunter" in Vienna in the 1960s. Both, I suggest, offer novel ways to use financial transactions as a way to ask new questions and answer some older ones.

The Economics of an Antifascist Exhibit

In the history of post-war attempts to come to terms with Nazi crimes, the 1946 Austrian "Antifascist Exhibition 'Never forget!'" (*Antifaschistische Ausstellung "Niemals vergessen!"*) stands out. Austria had been part of Greater Germany from 1938 to 1945, with strong popular support for Nazism and its policies. Politicians' attempts to re-establish an independent Austria after 1945 as a democratic and antifascist republic thus led to many paradoxes. They sought to denazify society while reintegrating as many Nazis as they could, first selectively and then, eventually, through a series of amnesty laws announced in 1948 and the 1950s, which reintegrated nearly all of the 600,000 Nazi party members fully into civic life. Seeking to distinguish their country from Germany and rejecting the notion that it might be perceived as a successor state of the Third Reich, Austrians' political elites came to depict the country as a victim of Nazism. This approach dovetailed with the evolving historical understanding of many Austrians, including those who had been enthusiastic supporters of Nazism but now felt like victims of a lost war. Focused on economic reconstruction, the Austrian authorities thus sought a restrained form of denazification and tended to avoid topics that might have suggested that the majority of Austrians were anything but a victim of Nazi force and manipulation.[3]

It is thus remarkable that Austria held one of the largest antifascist exhibitions anywhere in Europe a year after the war ended. Originally suggested by a Soviet officer, Miron Levitas, and planned and executed by the city of Vienna, the exhibition represented a rare multiparty endeavour to work through the recent history of the country. It attracted 260,000 visitors to the venerable *Künstlerhaus* exhibition building in the fourteen weeks between September and December 1946, making it the most successful exhibition in Austria's early Second Republic. Other political or historical exhibitions brought in fewer viewers, such as "*Wien baut auf*" (Vienna is Rebuilding) in 1947 (85,000 visitors) or *"Wien 1848"* (Vienna 1848) (67,000 visitors).[4] This success surprised even the exhibit's organisers, who at one point estimated that around 30,000 might show up.[5] When the first wave of curious visitors appeared to ebb after only a few weeks, the organisers had even considered a lottery that would

Give: The Financialization of American Jewish Philanthropy", *American Historical Review* 122, no. 5 (2017): 1459–1489.

3 For overviews of Austrian memory politics in English see, for example, Oliver Rathkolb, "The Shadow of the Past", *The Paradoxical Republic: Austria, 1945–2005*, trans. Otmar Binder (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 235–266, and Heidemarie Uhl, "From the Periphery to the Center of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in Vienna", *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 30, no. 3 (2016): 221–242.

4 Heidrun-Ulrike Wenzel, *Vergessen? Niemals!: Die antifaschistische Ausstellung im Wiener Künstlerhaus 1946* (Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2018), 42.

5 "Protokoll über die Sitzung des Politischen Beirates 5. Dez. 1946", Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchive (WStLA), M. Abt. 350 A19/12, folder IV.

have allowed one lucky entrant to have his or her bomb-damaged apartment restored.[6] In the end, a campaign to sell special postal stamps in combination with entry tickets, and mobilisation through the three main parties – the conservative Austrian People's Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the Communist Party – and through unions and schools, as well as private interest from citizens, proved sufficient to create sustained interest.

The exhibit's content was a striking mix of unifying and confrontational messaging. It included many elements that one might expect from an initiative to overcome the country's Nazi past: throughout, one found rooms dedicated to "Fascism is War", "Lies, Betrayal, Violence the Pillars of Fascism", "Resistance", and the reconstruction of Austria, each filled with image-heavy collages, educational texts, and artwork.[7] Aesthetically, it invoked 1920s agitprop while using the methods of picture statistics developed in Vienna by Otto Neurath in the 1930s.[8] A compromise between the three parties represented in parliament and produced for a population that had broadly supported the Nazi regime, the exhibit offered Austrians a way to engage with the past without confronting their own role in it. The images and texts highlighted the power of the Nazis to manipulate the population, suggesting that it was an excusable mistake to have been led astray.[9] In the words of the cultural historian Wolfgang Kos: "[w]hen it came to the Nazi question, one had learned to oscillate between radical rhetoric and the acceptance of state-serving white lies, and to live with taboos."[10]

While the central taboos about Austrian complicity remained intact at the Künstlerhaus, the exhibition also featured something that one could not see prominently anywhere else in Austria – and hardly anywhere else at all at the time, for that matter: a separate room on the persecution of Jews with references to ghettos, extermination camps (Treblinka), and camp survival. Although the section did not mention the involvement of Austrians in these crimes, the organising team was aware that it represented a risk for the country's public relations campaigns. When Jewish survivors in the United States inquired whether that part could be lent out, the relevant subcommittee agreed that this would "not be desirable for Austria and in its current situation vis-à-vis other countries".[11] Whatever its deficits, the room on the murder of Jews, suggested by Leo C. Friedländer, the head of the city of Vienna's office for cultural affairs, was set up to leave a strong impression on visitors.[12] The team working under the social democratic graphic designer and painter Victor Slama used a carefully orchestrated system of lights to guide the visitor's mood: the room on the

6 "Protokoll über die Sitzung vom 10. Oktober 1946", p. 3, WStLA, M. Abt. 350 A19/12, folder 1. They immediately discarded the idea to lottery away care packages with food as being below the dignity of the exhibition, but they did give one to the one-hundred-thousandth visitor. See "Protokoll über die Besprechung des politischen Auschusses am 17. Oktober 1946", p. 2, WStLA, M. Abt. 350 A19/12, folder 1.

7 For an overview of the rooms, see *Katalog zur Antifaschistischen Ausstellung "Niemals vergessen!": September–November 1946, Wien, Künstlerhaus* (Vienna: Kupfertiefdruck Globus II, 1946).

8 Wolfgang Kos, "Die Schau mit dem Hammer: Zur Planung, Ideologie und Gestaltung der antifaschistischen Ausstellung 'Niemals Vergessen'", in *Eigenheim Österreich zu Politik, Kultur und Alltag nach 1945*, 2nd ed. (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 1995), 7–58, here 16.

9 Ibid., 12–13.

10 Ibid., 12.

11 "Bericht über die Sitzung des politischen Ausschusses vom 21. November 1946 um 11 Uhr vorm. im Künstlerhaus", WStLA, M. Abt. 350 A19/12, folder AFA 1946 Ablage.

12 See "Sitzung des erweiterten Ausschusses am 19. VI [1945] im Künstlerhaus", M. Abt. 350 A19/12, folder 1. Friedländer preferred not to be mentioned among the organisers of the exhibition. He was the only one of the organisers who proposed a presentation on the fate of the Jews as part of a lecture series that accompanied the exhibition. See Propagandabesprechung 10. Sep. 1946, WStLA, M. Abt. 350 A19/12, folder 1, and Gedächnisprotokolle, Wien, 30 July 1945, WStLA, M. Abt. 350 A19/12, folder 1.

persecution of the Jews was the darkest space in the exhibit, which led to the twilight zone of a sacred memorial space (*Weiheraum*).[13]

What drove people to this exhibit and how they felt upon arrival can be gleaned from a variety of sources. For the small number of paying visitors who were themselves survivors of Nazism, the exhibit may have struck them as a place to aid their search for missing family members.[14] Several Jewish and at least one Romani survivor thought that they recognised their children in a photo of young victims from Auschwitz on display at the exhibit.[15] Local newspapers asked readers to come forward with any leads about their fate, but, in all cases, research on these visitors' relatives proved inconclusive. With some unwarranted optimism, the Austrian authorities wrote back to these Romani and Jewish visitors that there was no evidence that their relatives had perished during the war. These isolated cases give some indication of the personal reasons that survivors might have had for patronising this exhibit, making it an investment in their own attempts to reunite and repair their fractured lives after the war. Walking through its halls and believing that it was their own loved owns staring back at them also made it a deeply disturbing experience, a response also reported by the staff members in charge of setting the exhibition up.[16]

A larger number of visitors identified themselves as former Nazis. While organisers had originally hoped to demonstrate Austria's (seemingly contradictory) aims of overcoming its history and re-educating the public, the idea to invite Nazis themselves in a targeted campaign arose only after the exhibit had opened. Only once the initial number of visitors dropped off after the first few weeks did the organisers raise the idea of seeking out Nazis as a new potential audience.[17] In a direct mailing campaign based on the Nazi Party's membership lists, they sent printed letters to convince these registered party members to see the Antifascist Exhibition.[18] The organisers invited these individuals to initiate their own re-education, writing that the exhibit would give them "an opportunity to correct the unscrupulous and irresponsible propaganda of the past years and thus create the basis for a commitment to the democratic republic of Austria". Although there was no coercion involved, the fact that the exhibition had a separate booth where invited Nazis could get a stamp on the personalised invitation that had their name printed on it, so as to prove their attendance, suggested that everyone involved understood that showing up at the exhibit

13 Kos, "Die Schau", 21.

14 For brief impressions from the association of Jewish camp inmates, see Aktionskomitee der jüdischen KZ-ler, "Zur antifaschistischen Ausstellung im Künstlerhaus", *Der neue Weg*, 1 October 1946, 9–10, in Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (DÖW) 21349/018, Nachlass Anna und Heinrich Sussmann, Ausstellung Niemals vergessen. The fact that a Romani survivor had to go into a room dedicated to the persecution of Jews during the war was no aberration. For a broader history of the entangled history of Romani and Jewish experiences during the Holocaust, as well as their memorialisation, see Ari Joskowicz, *Rain of Ash: Roma, Jews, and the Holocaust* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023), and Ari Joskowicz, "Separate Suffering, Shared Archives: Jewish and Romani Histories of Nazi Persecution", *History and Memory* 28, no. 1 (2016): 110–140.

15 Newspapers and historians have missed the fact that one of the visitors who identified their relatives was a Romani victim. See "Protokoll aufgenommen am 7. Oktober 1946, Wien, 'Niemals vergessen', Antifaschistische Ausstellung" and Victor Slama to Therese Horwath, 25 March 1947, in WStLA, M. Abt. 350 A19/12, folder Fragebogen, subfolder Suchaktionen.

16 Kos, "Die Schau", 30.

17 "Protokoll über die Besprechung des politischen Auschusses am 17. Oktober 1946", p. 2, WStLA, M. Abt. 350 A19/12, folder 1.

18 Since lists were often based on crude data sets, it is no wonder that some enemies of Nazism ended up with such invitations as well, leading to outrage among the recipients. See WStLA M. Abt. 350 A/1914, AFA 1946, folder 8, "Gegner des Naziregimes", letters from Indrak Eugen, W. Kraus, and Maria Bachinger.

could serve Nazis' attempts to reintegrate into post-war Viennese society.[19] The kind of documentation these stamps provided might have served this particular group of visitors in future denazification proceedings or similar contexts. For a price, Nazis could begin to buy their way to becoming free from the stain of their recent past.[20]

The organisers also sought to collect information on the reactions of those Nazis who came to see the exhibit. They asked visitors with targeted invitations to fill out a detailed feedback form that asked them, among other things, to rate their favourite rooms and objects, their party affiliation, and whether they personally remembered the events depicted from the time before the war – a rather peculiar question, considering that only eight years had passed since that time. These forms also left space for remarks, which many visitors filled out at home with their personal typewriter before sending them back to the organisers.

The exhibition organisers collected these responses in folders with categories that included: "Nazis who fell for the propaganda", "Nazis who seek reconciliation", "Nazis who joined for economic reasons", "repentant Nazis", "indifferent Nazis", and "Nazis who make suggestions".[21] In the self-selected group of visitors willing to give feedback under their own names, those subsequently categorised as repentant Nazis formed the largest category. Much as they would be to anyone reading these folders today, the selection biases of such a sample were apparent to commentators at the time. The organisers collected massive amounts of information that was hard to interpret – so hard, in fact, that they categorised the responses but did not subject them to further systematic assessment.

This did not prevent different commentators from culling these forms for anecdotal evidence in order to make political points or celebrate the exhibit. For example, one newspaper editorial cited from a selection of violent responses offered by unrepenting Nazis to highlight the importance of such an exhibit.[22] While the extant forms can teach us something about both the responses of a select group of registered Nazis to the exhibit and those who sought to harness their responses toward political ends, they still tell us little about what drove most visitors – who were not stamp-seeking Nazis – to the exhibit.

The large number of newspaper reports on the event are similarly hard to interpret, since the re-established Austrian press was eager to promote the exhibition as part of its educational (or re-education) mission.[23] Socialist, conservative, and communist papers alike informed readers about opening times as well as associated talks and film screenings, in an effort to attract visitors. They also enthusiastically applauded the success of the exhibit as a sign of the country's transition from dictatorship to democracy. Despite a more complex reality on the ground, different papers addressed their readers as members of an unequivocal anti-Nazi collective that was eager to teach those who had been led astray. One cartoon in the communist *Österreichische Volks-*

19 The offer made to Nazis here was not lost on some journalists. See the critique in –uthe, "Begehrte Stempel", *Die Presse*, 5 December 1946. Others merely noted that the invited Nazis made sure to get their attendance confirmed without further comment. See "Frühere Nazi besuchen 'Niemals vergessen!'", *Österreichische Volksstimme*, 26 November 1946, and "Nur mehr zwei Wochen Antifaschistische Ausstellung", Wiener Kurier, 26 November 1946.

20 I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing this out.

21 WStLA M. Abt. 350 A/1914, AFA 1946.

22 "Nazikritik der antifaschistischen Ausstellung: Fragebogen, eine Fundgrube für Soziologen und Politiker", *Welt am Abend*, 26 November 1946, reprinted as "'Wenn wir wieder zur Macht kommen …'? Fragebogen, eine Fundgrube für Soziologen und Politiker", *Volkswille*, Klagenfurt, 1 December 1946.

23 My analysis of news reports is based on a larger folder of approximately 250 press clippings collected by the exhibition's organisers. WStLA M. Abt 350 A19/15, AFA 1946.

stimme clearly illustrates this self-positioning.[24] It depicts a man in a bowler hat and a suit standing with a child in front of a poster with an image of a skull that wears an SS service cap, and the inscription "Niemals vergessen!". The child asks: "Uncle, is this meant for us or for the Nazis?" The uncle responds: "For both, my child! For us: Remember what you suffered! For the Nazis: Think of what you caused!" Apparently, the "us" of the average Austrian depicted here is among the victims of fascism, not among the perpetrators. While the cartoon can help us understand what it meant to identify with the exhibit, it, too, offers few clues about the motives of those who went to see it.

What of the vast majority of visitors then? We know little about them, yet their role is crucial if we want to interpret what this exhibition meant. Was it a brief attempt to "face the unpalatable truth about recent events", as one historian has noted?[25] How invested were Austrians who were neither survivors nor registered Nazis in learning about how Nazi rule had unfolded in their country? What made the some 200,000 visitors who hoped neither to identify missing relatives nor to get their invitation stamped come to the halls of the Künstlerhaus in the fall of 1946?

Here the financial success of the exhibition offers some answers. The original budget of 280,000 schilling for the exhibit came from the city of Vienna, a part of which was set aside for construction activities, including 36,000 schilling to build a cinema that never came to be.[26] This was a small amount given the task. It took the team a full fifteen months to prepare the damaged building for the exhibit and procure all the materials needed in the war-damaged country. In this context, it is hardly surprising that the original projected budget did not suffice. In the end, the exhibit required 424,000 schilling to cover all costs.[27] Yet, in spite of the difficulties the organisers faced, the exhibit they staged ended up making a net profit of nearly 205,000 schilling. How did they manage this? The sales of tickets alone brought nearly 518,000 schilling. The postal authority was responsible for much of the ticket revenue – covering nearly 70 per cent of the exhibit's overall cost – in connection with the sale of special antifascist postage stamps at the exhibition. Another 154,499 full price tickets were sold at 1 schilling, and 3,690 half-price tickets for companies changed hands at the exhibition's box office. Including the sale of exhibition catalogues, "Niemals vergessen!" raised 560,000 schilling of revenue, paying over 63,000 schilling in taxes that returned to the state's coffers.[28] Only a small amount came from the approximately 60,000 invited Nazis who visited the exhibition.[29]

Exhibitions are rarely profitable without substantial subsidies: the Viennese antifascist exhibition of 1946 is among the exceptions. In a moment of hubris – and ridiculously poor accounting – planners at one point had estimated that they would be able to make a net profit of 2 million schilling, which they planned to allocate in large part to victims of fascism (1.2 million schilling), to trusts in support of an antifascist museum (300,000 schilling), and to a monument in an anti-air defence tower from the Nazi period (*Flackturm Stiftskaserne*) (400,000 schilling).[30] Still, even

24 "Haslinger und die 'AFA'", *Österreichische Volksstimme Wien*, 15 September 1946.

25 Judith Beniston, "'Hitler's First Victim'? – Memory and Representation in Post-War Austria: Introduction", *Austrian Studies* 11 (2003): 1–13, here 9.

26 Wenzel, 65.

27 Wenzel, 65.

28 For all numbers here, see "Abschlussbericht: Antifaschistische Ausstellung 'Niemals vergessen'", 2–4, Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes 22594.

29 There was a net-profit from inviting Nazis, however. The registered party members bought one-schilling tickets, like other full paying adult visitors, and caused extra costs for postage and overtime of 14,233 schilling. See "Abschlussbericht", 7.

30 "Besprechung mit Herrn Stadtrat Dr. Matejka und Herrn Direktor Friedländer am 3. 8. 1946 im Neuen Rathaus", WStLA M. Abt. 350 A/1914, AFA 1946, folder 1, AFA 1946 Ablage.

the more realistic profit margin that emerged in the organisers' final accounting was considerable, and signalled the wider population's willingness to pay full price adult tickets to see the exhibit. Although it is difficult to translate the one-schilling price tag into today's value, a straightforward consumer price index-adjusted price can give us some sense of orientation: it is approximately the equivalent of 4.50 euros in 2022.[31] Economists at the time estimated that a four-person family of a worker with two children would spend between 20 and 23 schilling on food per week.[32] A full-price ticket to the exhibit may not have been excessive, but the costs involved were by no means merely symbolic, especially for individuals just emerging from wartime conditions. Many of them were, as we have seen, still living in buildings that had sustained significant damage during Allied bombing campaigns.

The fact that a large number of people invested their money and time into such a visit may not conclusively resolve questions about people's motives for attending the exhibit or their reactions to it. Nor does it tell us what ordinary Austrians thought about the Nazi past or the persecution of Jews, Roma, and other victims. Yet, the financial story of the exhibit can help us rethink the Austrian population's receptiveness to such initiatives. Visitor statistics, paired with basic information about budgets and what people paid for tickets, can serve to complement the vast literature analysing the political, cultural, and aesthetic meaning of museums and exhibitions. Even in cases when feedback forms and newspaper editorials leave much space for interpretation, we can turn to event budgets and ticket and catalogue sales to ask questions about the public's relationship to public commemorative efforts. It is, of course, a truism that "money talks". In such cases, however, there is still more work to be done to listen to what it has to tell us.

Why do historians of Europe rarely ask questions about the funding of memory projects? Perhaps they expect to find little of interest given the similarities in the basic structure of post-war memorials and archives: financing for historical work in twentieth-century Europe – including the Cold War East and West – came mostly from states, no matter whether the initiative for exhibits, monuments, or research centres started within governmental structures or in civil society. Such patterns continue to this day, as new memory initiatives make funding by state agencies their first demand, and promoters of various historical causes deem state support the primary benchmark of recognition. There are good reasons for this, since most European countries had few funding sources available outside of the state or corporate bodies such as official political parties, unions, or chambers of commerce. Sovereign bodies on various levels – from municipalities to supranational entities like the European Union – usually were and remain the most important entities offering significant or sustained funding for projects. Only more recently have endowment-based philanthropies offered alternative paths for funding in Europe.

Organisations dealing with the documentation of the Jewish Holocaust are among the exceptions to this rule, however. While many began to receive support from state coffers by the 1980s, most such institutions both began and have survived largely due to the support that they have had from Jewish philanthropies, international organisations, and donors. We now turn to the case of one such institution in

31 This calculation is based on the inflation calculator of the Austrian National Bank, https://www.eurologisch.at/docroot/waehrungsrechner/#/.

32 "Wöchentlicher Mindest-Aufwand für die Lebenserhaltung auf Grund der Zuteilung für Arbeiterfamilien in Wien", *Monatsberichte des österreichischen Instituts für Wirtschaftsforschung* 20, no. 5 (1947): 80. They estimate expenses of 19.65 and 23.15 schilling for the periods of 14 October to 10 November and 11 November to 8 December 1946 respectively.

the 1960s, Simon Wiesenthal's Documentation Centre of the Association of Jewish Victims of the Nazi Regime, which also demonstrates how a different funding structure leads to different types of community building and emotional investment.

Simon Wiesenthal's Fundraising

Whether he liked it or not, Wiesenthal spent much of his post-war life directly or indirectly appealing to people's philanthropic generosity. A Holocaust survivor who in 1947 started his original post-war endeavour, the Jewish Historical Documentation Centre in Linz (1947–1954), without governmental support, Wiesenthal relied on the goodwill of others, mainly fellow Jewish survivors, to volunteer their labour or fund his pursuit of Nazi criminals. Wiesenthal reopened his documentation centre – previously active in Linz – in the Austrian capital in October 1961 with limited financial backing from the Jewish communities of Vienna and Linz.[33] Even for the short period when these contributions continued, he required additional funds to travel and pay his own salary while he pursued leads and corresponded with survivors, who began contacting him after he became famous for his role in capturing Adolf Eichmann. When the Viennese Jewish community closed down his operation in the summer of 1964 after a spat with its leadership, he reopened his centre as an independent institution a few blocks away. At this point his financial needs became even more pressing. Whether broadcasting his mission and successes in the bulletin he published or speaking to a journalist, Wiesenthal was always at least indirectly reaching out to potential donors. His strategies worked. After several sensational successes identifying prominent Nazi perpetrators, and articles covering his achievements in the international press, Wiesenthal was flooded with small donations. He then responded to each of them in turn, either personally or – in the case of English-language letters – with the help of volunteers such as Peter Michael Lingens.[34]

Wiesenthal's small-donation fundraising correspondence became so massive that by the 1960s he decided to collect these letters in separate folders. Marked "Dankschreiben" or thank-you letters, the folders contained ingoing missives from donors and copies of outgoing letters acknowledging their gifts, often with the amount of the donation marked in pencil. Wiesenthal's letter collection points to his wide net of individual supporters, mainly in the United States but also in Italy, France, and the Netherlands. Unlike the various national institutes dealing with the past that were formed in post-war European countries, Jewish institutions usually had an international dimension to their financing, and one that depended by necessity on continuous communication with the people they claimed to represent. These individuals in turn forged new ties of various kinds.

Even as they donated as individuals, many of those who participated in these efforts also began networking with each other. In the New York area, Herman Katz, the president of the garment importer Republic Novelty Corp., was among those who agreed to help Wiesenthal bundle and organise his donations. It is likely that his work also led to some of the largest donations Wiesenthal ever recorded, such as the one-thousand-dollar cheque that he received from the Indian-born and Hong Kong-

33 Tom Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal: The Life and Legends* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 159.

34 In the relatively rare instances when Wiesenthal failed to respond, donors were quick to complain: see Barry Dov Schwartz to Wiesenthal, 12 September 1966, Vienna Wiesenthal Institute Archive (VWI), Dankschreiben/Spenden 1965–1966. Rabbi Schwartz was a military chaplain who collected for Wiesenthal among his military congregation in Westover Air Force Base in Massachusetts.

based garment magnate B. K. Murjani, whom Katz had supported early on when Murjani entered the fashion manufacturing business.[35]

Wiesenthal came to rely on multiple dedicated volunteer promoters who collected small donations from different people, acting as bundlers. None of these individuals were professionals in the field, at a time when fundraising had already witnessed half a century of professional development.[36] The case of Jane (Julianna) Lerner from New York is typical in this regard. A long feature about Wiesenthal's work in the *New York Times Magazine* that appeared on 2 February 1964 had impressed her, as it had many other American Jews who contacted him during this period. A Jewish refugee from Austria like her husband Maximilian, Lerner sent a ten-dollar cheque to Wiesenthal and a letter, in German, underlining her commitment to the cause of post-war justice for the Jewish victims of Nazism.[37] In response, Wiesenthal thanked her for her donation while clarifying that his operation needed much more money. He asked Lerner for help: "[i]f you should have people among your friends who think like you and who might want to also donate, I would be very grateful."[38] Lerner got to work immediately: she wrote letters to periodicals demanding more coverage of Wiesenthal's work and sent letters to different synagogues asking congregants to "please search your conscience and write a check".[39] She also started enthusiastically collecting cheques and cash donations from her largely Jewish neighbours in the Bayside neighbourhood of the New York borough of Queens.[40] Things briefly got complicated when Lerner became reluctant to work with Wiesenthal because of rumours that his work – and his conflicts with the official Jewish community – were "political". Trying to extract herself from what seemed like an undesirable set of intrigues, she described herself as a "housewife". Over time, Lerner overcame her concerns about pursuing political causes: many years later, her daughter described her as an activist who opposed the Vietnam War, celebrated Earth Day in 1970, and had become very politically engaged.[41] Lerner's work for Wiesenthal was thus an early expression of her commitment to fighting for causes she believed in. In the 1990s and 2000s, she spoke regularly about the Holocaust in schools and co-founded the New Mexico Holocaust and Intolerance Museum in Albuquerque, New Mexico.[42] Lerner's fundraising for Wiesenthal was an early part of her path as an activist who cared deeply about creating public awareness about the horrors of the Holocaust.

Lerner's desire to avoid anything "political" during her early years of fundraising was driven by her sense that writing and collecting cheques was a kind of sacred activity, which she hoped would not be soiled by personal feuds or other forms of divisive-

35 Wiesenthal to Murjani Foundation Ltd. in Hong Kong, 22 December 1964, VWI, Dankschreiben 1964, L-Z; York Lo, "Murjani – the Ups and Downs of a HK Garment Dynasty", *The Industrial History of Hong Kong Group*, 4 November 2019, https://industrialhistoryhk.org/murjani-the-ups-and-downs-of-a-hk-garment-dynasty/. Businesspeople frequently offered to interest their commercial partners in donations. See, for example, Robert Newman to Wiesenthal, 8 February 1966, VWI, Dankschreiben/Spenden 1965–1966, who said he would seek to interest "some of the businesspeople that I come in contact with".

36 See Berman, *The American Jewish Philanthropic Complex*, and Berman, "How Americans Give", for the most comprehensive and incisive analysis of this development among American Jewish communities.

37 Jane Lerner [Mrs Maximilan Lerner] to Wiesenthal, 3 February 1964, VWI, Dankschreiben 1964, L-Z.

38 Wiesenthal to Lerner, 12 February 1964, VWI, Dankschreiben 1964, L-Z. My translation; the original, like the whole correspondence, is in German.

39 Attachment to letter of Lerner to Wiesenthal, 26 February 1964, VWI, Dankschreiben 1964, L-Z.

40 Jane Lerner to Wiesenthal, 15 March 1964, 17 March 1964, and 15 April 1964, VWI, Dankschreiben 1964, L-Z.

41 Personal correspondence of Shereen Lerner with the author, December 2022.

42 See "Founders Recognized: Name Change Imminent", *The Herald: New Mexico Holocaust Museum* (spring 2020). Lerner also gave an interview for the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, which does not address her post-war life, however. Julianna L. Holocaust testimony, 2 May 1987, Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, HVT 884.

ness. A facetious comment in one of her letters underlined this: writing in June 1964, she noted with some humour that she hoped to follow the example of Catholic pilgrims to the Shroud of Turin during a future visit to Vienna and to touch Wiesenthal's shroud.[43] This was not just a joke. Her daughter remembers until today how the family visited Wiesenthal's office in Vienna, with its impressive stacks of documents and binders, on a trip they took to Austria soon after Lerner penned her letter.[44]

In other instances, Wiesenthal had to more actively convince correspondents to collect money for him. Many of the letters he received were from individuals who hoped they could engage in detective work for him. One correspondent from New York described himself as "30 years old, not married, working in a family dress manufacturing business".[45] He hoped his college degree and knowledge of several foreign languages might be of use to Wiesenthal's hunt for Nazis. Wiesenthal instead redirected the man toward fundraising, something he had to make attractive to someone who had hoped to pursue more adventurous avenues.[46] Wiesenthal generally responded to letters of appreciation with a reminder that his work needed resources, and that these resources were urgently needed at that very moment – in 1964, for example, to campaign against the statute of limitations that would put even lethal Nazi crimes beyond the purview of West German prosecutors (the German parliament eventually punted on the issue, passing a law recalculating the twenty-year limit from 1949 instead of 1945).[47]

For Wiesenthal's donors, writing a cheque was not merely a form of support for an institution that honoured the memory of genocide victims by pursuing their murderers: it was memory work itself. This is nowhere clearer than among the many donors who mentioned their deceased family members and spouses in letters accompanying donations. Rarely did donors formally dedicate a donation to the memory of the loved ones they had lost – they generally did not write their cheque "in honour of" or "in the memory of" someone else – but they regularly noted their own loss as part of biographical explanations in accompanying letters.[48] These correspondents did not always name the dead, such as the man who wrote only of how touched he had been to read about Wiesenthal's work given his own experiences as "a Jew who lost his first wife in a concentration camp".[49] Others gave to Wiesenthal as part of their annual religious cycle, donating money around the Jewish New Year, for example. Some also followed the Jewish tradition of donating multiples of eighteen, which is represented by the Hebrew letters that read *chai*, or "life".[50] Jane Lerner was hardly alone in considering her collection of money as a way of expressing her care for the memory of the dead. Wiesenthal understood this, assuring her and other donors that they were doing sacred work.

Raising funds and raising awareness were entwined activities, and they were often communal. This is most apparent in the activities around community chests, which had stood at the cradle of popular fundraising in the twentieth-century United

43 Jane Lerner to Wiesenthal, 1 June 1964, VWI, Dankschreiben 1964, L-Z.
44 Author's correspondence with Shereen Lerner, November 2022.
45 Harvey Litt to Wiesenthal, 27 August 1964, VWI, Dankschreiben 1964, L-Z
46 Wiesenthal to Harvey Litt, 4 September 1964, VWI, Dankschreiben 1964, L-Z
47 Robert A. Monson, "The West German Statute of Limitations on Murder: A Political, Legal, and Historical Exposition", *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 30, no. 4 (1982): 605–625.
48 Among the letters of individuals who did donate in memory of someone, one donor noted that the person commemorated had been a regular contributor to Wiesenthal's cause. See Jessie R. Matzkin to Wiesenthal, 18 January 1966, VWI, Dankschreiben/Spenden 1965–1966.
49 Paul P. Lindenberg to Wiesenthal, 16 February 1964, VWI, Dankschreiben 1964, L-Z.
50 See, for example, Wiesenthal to Sylvia Zenia Wiener, 11 October 1966, VWI, Dankschreiben/Spenden 1965–1966, who sent 18 dollar for Rosh Hashanah that year.

States. [51] Thanks to one of Wiesenthal's supporters, Lena Klein from Fair Lawn, New Jersey, teachers who were part of the Teachers Community Chest of the City of New York decided to offer some of their donations to his Viennese institute.[52] These donations were communal in themselves: each teacher could decide where to send their money. Wiesenthal received both a single cheque representing all of their donations combined and a list of individuals who had decided to dedicate their donation to him through their local organisation.[53]

Conclusion

Both the Austrian Antifascist Exhibition of 1946 and Wiesenthal's post-war contacts with his circle of fundraisers offer a lens into the affective investments that individuals had in public attempts to reckon with dark pasts. My aim here is not to argue that we should privilege economics or, more narrowly, finance, in our studies of Holocaust memory. The makers of the 1946 exhibition, working with state support, were not primarily concerned with profit. The individuals who visited the exhibit no doubt had a plethora of different – and mostly hard to capture – reasons for buying their tickets. Wiesenthal was also certainly not pursuing Nazis to make money. In fact, he was regularly in dire need of financial resources and personally broke, like many of the pioneering individuals and institutions who dedicated their work to the Holocaust before the 1980s. Nor did Wiesenthal's supporters appear to have had any financial motives for their contributions. There are nonetheless reasons to weave money back into our story. Seeing finance as an integral part of life in our society – as resources that we use to preserve and direct to our own and our dependents' well-being, as tokens of appreciation and recognition, as necessary foundation blocks that make our labours of love possible – allows us to complement existing histories of memory commitments.

Different forms of financing create different affective investments. There are many reasons why it is difficult to speak of the motives of the visitors to the 1946 exhibition. One of them is that, as an individualised act of consumption, buying tickets does not easily lend itself to forming communities. State funding has a tendency to transform people who care about history into consumers, whose investments are temporary and limited. Nobody would wish Wiesenthal's financial difficulties on an institution dealing with the Holocaust, yet the result was something that is more typical of small-scale fundraising: the donors were more invested in the organisation, in the financial and emotional sense alike. Both the city of Vienna and the type of donors Wiesenthal attracted remain important in different contexts. Wiesenthal's own legacy remains split between the two, with a donor-funded centre named after him in Los Angeles and a research centre in Vienna that holds his name and papers, which is directly and indirectly funded largely by state taxes.

Of course, finance is also fundamentally a field of inequality. Resources determine whose voice we hear and in what way. Whether individuals control resources

51 See Olivier Zunz, *Philanthropy in America: A History*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

52 Mrs. Lena M. Klein to Wiesenthal, 6 October 1966, VWI, Dankschreiben/Spenden 1965–1966.

53 Jewish Teachers Community Chest of the City of New York, New York, 1966–67, VWI, Dankschreiben/Spenden 1965–1966, with three donors from 20 December 1965 and eight from 23 November 1966. Klein also wrote to *The New York Times* to draw attention to Wiesenthal's work. See Lena M. Klein, "Punishing War Criminals", *The New York Times*, 12 March 1964, 34.

because they are attached to state administrations, as was the case with the "Niemals vergessen!" exhibit, or due to their ability to motivate private individuals to support their work, as Wiesenthal did, the access to funds allows particular individuals and institutions to make decisions about whose voice will be amplified. Groups that have a history of economic marginalisation, as Roma and Sinti have had across Europe, for example, have historically had fewer opportunities to acquire funds from states or private citizens alike and thus have faced greater roadblocks in their bid to support their own memory work.[54] The structure of funding opportunities and access to them adds to our understanding of these dimensions too: they remind us that silenced pasts are frequently not so much censored as underfunded.

This inequality of resources also raises questions of the responsibility fundraisers have to groups whose history and suffering remains obscured. Wiesenthal, who struggled to make a living for most of his years as a "Nazi hunter" and who secured contributions from many small donors, understood this more than most. He used the funds from hundreds of largely Jewish donors to draw attention to the fate of people persecuted for reasons that might have not been on the mind of his own donors, including those imprisoned and killed as Roma and Sinti, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals. As in the case of the exhibition in Vienna, here we can ask the revealing question: does the public commitment to the lesser-known stories of victimhood express itself in a parallel commitment to dedicate resources to research, commemoration, and representation?

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54 See Joskowicz, *Rain of Ash*.

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Ari Joskowicz is Associate Professor of Jewish Studies and History at Vanderbilt University. He is the author of *Rain of Ash: Roma, Jews, and the Holocaust* (Princeton University Press, 2023) and *The Modernity of Others: Jewish Anti-Catholicism in Germany and France* (Stanford University Press, 2014), and editor of *Secularism in Question: Jews and Judaism in Modern Times* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). He has held fellowships from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Judaic Studies, the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies, and the American Council of Learned Societies, among others.
E-Mail: a.joskowicz@vanderbilt.edu

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