

Antifascist memory revisited: Hungarian historical exhibitions in Oświęcim and Paris, 1965

Memory Studies

2022, Vol. 15(5) 1087–1104

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DOI: 10.1177/17506980211066582

journals.sagepub.com/home/mss



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Abstract

The article challenges the widely shared thesis in memory studies that the antifascist memory of the Second World War suppressed the Holocaust. Instead of exploring exceptions to this rule by looking for single cases of antifascist memory that represent some aspects of the Holocaust, we argue that antifascist memory presented a distinct cultural regime for remembering the past. Our claim is that antifascist memory, understood as a particular historical phenomenon on a transnational scale, opened up specific ways to commemorate the Jewish genocide. Our article relies on two pillars: first, on recent memory studies scholarship that challenged “the myth of silence” in relation to the postwar decades; second, on recent studies revisiting antifascism itself, demonstrating its transnational and ideologically diverse nature. We argue that a contested but at least until the 1970s still commonly held pan-European antifascist legacy fostered not only intra-Eastern bloc but also cross-Cold War mnemonic cooperation. We present an empirical comparative study that discusses the 1965 Hungarian exhibition at the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau and the Hungarian section at the permanent exhibition at the Museum of the Memorial of the Unknown Jewish Martyr in Paris that opened in the same year. Based on archival documents in Budapest, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Paris, we prove that both exhibitions displayed a coherent, historically accurate, and comprehensive account of the genocide that articulated unambiguously the Jewish identity of those perished and persecuted. At the same time, they both operated under discursive conditions informed by antifascist legacies in Poland, Hungary, and France.

Keywords

1960s, Auschwitz, Cold War, cultural history, cultural memory, Holocaust, postwar Europe, Shoah Memorial, transnationalism

In the summer of 1979, members of the US President’s Commission on the Holocaust, created to make recommendation for what would become the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, undertook a “fact-finding mission” to memorial sites in Europe and Israel. Traveling to Poland and

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the Soviet Union, they were deeply troubled by what they saw as the “absence of any effort to memorialize Jewish victims” and by “what they believed was the effacement of Jewish victims from Auschwitz memorials.” Commission Chair Elie Wiesel would summarize their impression stating that Poles would “refer to victims in general,” whereas “we speak of Jews. They mention all the victims, of every nationality, of every religion, and they refer to them en masse. We object. (. . .) One always starts with the Jews” (Linenthal, 2001: 28–35).

At around the same time, a team at the Museum of Labor History in Budapest was working on a new exhibition for the Hungarian pavilion at the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau. The team regarded the antifascist outlook of the previous exhibition that had been on show since 1965 as outdated. They outlined a new concept that centered, almost exclusively, on Jewish suffering. The new exhibition, dedicated to the “memory of the murdered Hungarian Jews,” opened in late 1979—a few months after a disappointed President’s Commission left Oświęcim.

These two episodes testify to the emergence of a new memory regime and a sea-change in perception that discredited, in both East and West, the antifascist memory of previous decades. Especially after the collapse of socialist regimes, the latter became politically obsolete and morally disputable.

The emerging field of memory studies in the 1980s and 1990s reflected the norms of the new memory paradigm as it focused on the teleology of Holocaust memory—seen as an exclusively Western construct. Mainstream understanding contrasted Holocaust memory to postwar “silence” in Western societies and to antifascist memory in Eastern Europe. While postwar “silence” has been sufficiently questioned in recent memory studies scholarship, little has been done in that regard in relation to Eastern Europe. If the “Second World” is treated at all, it is seen customarily through the lens of Holocaust memory. In this context, any absence of patterns identified in Western memory culture is taken as a sign of “suppression” of the memory of the Holocaust.

Our article undertakes to uncover the memory culture swept away by the new regime of Holocaust memory. It challenges the anti-antifascist memory consensus in two ways. Instead of looking at “absence,” our article scrutinizes *how* the Jewish genocide was present in antifascist memory. At the same time, antifascist memory in this article is *not* presented as an Eastern but rather as a transnational phenomenon that, at least until its dissolution in the 1970s, transcended Cold War boundaries and provided a shared discursive framework for international collaboration.

In order to demonstrate our point, we present a double case study that discusses the 1965 Hungarian exhibition at the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau and the Hungarian section at the permanent exhibition at the Museum of the Memorial of the Unknown Jewish Martyr in Paris that opened in the same year. Archival documents prove that both exhibitions displayed a coherent, historically accurate, and comprehensive account of the genocide, one that articulated unambiguously the Jewish identity of those perished and persecuted. None of these exhibitions, however, adhered yet to the new norms of Holocaust memory as they would emerge in the decades to come. Instead, both operated under discursive conditions informed by antifascist legacies in Poland, Hungary, and France.

Refuting silence, rethinking antifascism

Our study rests on two pillars. First, on recent memory studies scholarship that challenged “the myth of silence” in relation to the postwar decades. Since the 2000s, an increasing research interest has focused on the early postwar years in order to explore the ways in which the Jewish tragedy was represented in various discourses (Cesarani and Sundquist, 2012; Cohen and Lawson, 2015; Fritz et al., 2016; Jockusch, 2012). This paradigm change manifested in the three countries studied here in slightly different ways. In France, the commonly shared view has been challenged

according to which the painful experience of Vichy France, in particular the collaboration in the extermination of the Jews, was suppressed by the grand national narrative of resistance (Nora, 1996) until the Vichy syndrome (Rouso, 1990) inflamed French historical culture in the 1970s. Recent research (Azouvi, 2012; Nord, 2020) has convincingly criticized this consensus (Perego, 2020). Embedded into the international trend, scholars interested in Poland and Hungary focused primarily on early postwar documentation efforts and cultural representations of the Jewish tragedy (Fritz, 2012; Jockusch, 2012: 84–120; Laczó, 2016: 155–223; Laczó and von Puttkamer, 2018). At the same time, more recent studies centered on de-Stalinized socialism in the 1950s and 1960s (Bezsenyi and Lénárt, 2017; Bohus, 2015; Bohus et al., 2022; Esbenshade, 2019; Stach, 2016; Zombory et al., 2020). Although they improve our knowledge about memory culture in the Eastern Bloc, they all share an a priori concept of Holocaust memory that they claim to be present *despite* antifascism. In contrast to that, we concur that “within the anti-fascist paradigm (. . .) Jewish memory was acknowledged” (Cesarani, 2012: 31) and aim to explore in what ways the Jewish genocide *was* represented in antifascist memory during the “long sixties.”

The mythic opposition between Holocaust memory and antifascism is due to a specific, orientalist interpretation of antifascism that originated in the Cold War and equated antifascism with communism and communism with the “East.” The anti-antifascist historiography that has become dominant since the 1990s (Traverso, 2016) perpetuated the picture of antifascism as a cynical Stalinist myth, a manipulative propaganda tool in the hands of communist regimes that prevented a genuine confrontation with the Nazi past and silenced Jewish suffering (see, most famously, Furet, 1995).

As its second pillar, our study draws on the impetus coming from scholars recently revisiting pre-1945 antifascism. Their studies demonstrate that antifascism appeared in the interwar period as a truly transnational political, cultural, and social movement that embraced—under the common denominator of opposing fascism—liberals, Catholics, social democrats, and communists alike (García et al., 2016). Far from being a product of Stalinism, antifascism emerged, in part, from the effort of liberal intellectuals to counter the rise of Nazism (Agocs, 2017). According to Seidman (2018), the “antifascist minimum” (cf. Copsey, 2010) rejected uncompromising anti-Communism and anti-capitalism alike; repudiated anti-Semitism; and refused pacifism as it saw state power as necessary to stop fascism. Thus, antifascism included both a revolutionary and a conservative (or counter-revolutionary) branch (Seidman 2018) that from 1941 onward formed an alliance to defeat the Axis war machine. While this research trend recognizes that the “‘antifascist paradigm’ [. . .] dominated European historiography and politics of memory in the decades following the Second World War” (García et al., 2016: 2), it reiterates notions of “postwar silence” refuted by recent memory studies scholarship.

Our article combines both research trends: it contributes to recent memory scholarship on the postwar period by putting the problem of antifascism on the table and, at the same time, expands the scope of new antifascism studies by rethinking the legacy it left behind in memory culture. Although the Cold War ended the antifascist alliance, our article argues that a shared antifascist legacy survived “as a remembered horizon” (Eley, 1996: 79) at least until the anti-totalitarian moment of the Left in the 1970s (Christofferson, 2004).

As historian Dan Stone has recently shown, an “antifascist consensus” reigned in postwar societies in both Eastern and Western Europe. While antifascism in Western Europe did not transform into state ideology the way it did in Eastern Europe, it “structured and shaped” what postwar societies in the West were to become: the lessons of fascism led Christian-Conservative elites to embrace class cooperation, the welfare state, and parliamentary democracy (Stone, 2014: 8–11). Certainly, antifascism was heavily instrumentalized in the Cold War and used, in socialist Eastern Europe, as a weapon against Western capitalism. And yet, it constituted a consensus shared *across* the Iron

Curtain without being limited to Leftist politics. Our article is a contribution to understanding what that consensus meant for memory culture specifically.

Our article is based on newly discovered or revisited primary sources in archives in Budapest, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Paris¹ as well as oral history interviews. First, we discuss the case of the Hungarian pavilion at Auschwitz, focusing on the representation of Jewish suffering. Second, we analyze the Hungarian contribution in Paris, putting the emphasis on the local French context and the bilateral cooperation itself. This double focus supports our claim as to the inclusive and cross-Cold War character of antifascist memory culture. In both cases, however, we are interested in understanding discursive frameworks rather than writing exhibition history in the strict sense.

The Hungarian path to Auschwitz

In 1945, Hungary had to face the devastating consequences of what was widely seen as a national catastrophe. Unlike Poland and France, Hungary had been an ally to Germany and the consequences of having been the “last satellite” of the collapsed Reich were moral as much as political. Although Germany occupied the country in March 1944, postwar Hungary had to account for pro-German politics before and collaboration during the occupation. In a country where an ever more expanding anti-Jewish legislation had been in place at least since 1938 and state administration had a key role in the deportation of some 430,000 Jewish Hungarians during the short months of spring and summer 1944, national responsibility was not to be explained away. Hungary’s sizable surviving Jewish community shaped postwar memory as well. Most of the perished died in Auschwitz which made the site central to discourses on the recent past.

In 1965, the 20th anniversary of Liberation offered an opportunity to demonstrate how state socialist Hungary remembered the country’s difficult legacy. Although recent consensus cemented the view that the exhibition stressed false heroism instead of national responsibility by replacing Jewish victims by Communist partisans (Fritz, 2012: 268–272; Rév, 2004; Szécsényi, 2018), the historical record does not support this consensus.

The exhibition came into being as part of an effort to turn the former concentration camp into a site of commemoration of international scope and significance. Emerging in the mid-1950s, this new concept for the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau reinforced Leftist antifascist memory in response to the emerging anti-totalitarian discourse in the West (for the latter, see Lagrou, 1999: 271). Elaborated under the directorship of Kazimierz Smoleń, the new concept originated in a cooperation of local professionals and authorities as well as the International Auschwitz Committee (IAK), a Vienna-based umbrella organization of survivors from all across Europe. The IAK participated in works related to preservation, pilgrimage, documentation, and design as well (Stengel, 2012: 168–170). While in 1955, a new permanent exhibition initiated a process of de-Stalinization and a “return to a commemorative mode” (Huener, 2003: 108–143), it was the IAK that revived the plan for installing national pavilions, an idea that had been formulated in the first plans for a museum in 1946 (see Stengel, 2012: 200–204; Zbrzeska, 1997: 98). Polish authorities approved the proposal in 1959 and the first exhibitions—the Czechoslovakian and the Hungarian—opened as soon as early 1960 and were followed by others in the coming years.

There is little we know about this first, make-shift, exhibition, as the script has not resurfaced yet. What is certain, however, is that already in 1961, Hungarian delegates negotiated at the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau about replacing it.² Two years later, the Hungarian Ministry of Culture commissioned the Museum of Contemporary History (later: Museum of Labor History) in Budapest to create a new exhibition. Script and design were produced at the Museum but the production process included reviewers from research institutions, museums, and the Ministry of Culture itself. Although the exhibition had to be authorized by the Ministry, correspondence



Figure 1. Exhibition details of the 1965 Hungarian exhibition with wall panels.
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demonstrates that the Museum remained a relatively autonomous and self-assertive actor.³ The script is credited to historian Tamás Csató, while museologist Emil Horn is listed as researcher.

In a 1965 article, Horn detailed the internal debates that helped the exhibition concept crystallize. From the beginning, there had been consensus among museum staff that the exhibition had to go beyond showing the Hungarian-related history of the concentration camp itself and present more broadly “the [Hungarian] path that led to Auschwitz.” Debates ensued over where to begin such a narrative. Some argued for starting the exhibition with 1939 or the German occupation in 1944 as the latter led to the mass deportation of Jewish Hungarians to Auschwitz. Finally, the script opened the exhibition narrative with counter-revolutionary violence that inaugurated the Horthy regime (1920–1944). This decision was grounded in the understanding that the regime presented a “fascist-type dictatorship” that led—“by necessity,” as some argued—to Auschwitz (Horn, 1965: 88). This narrative of national history had been established since the early postwar years (Zombory, 2017) and enabled exhibition-makers to trace the “Hungarian Auschwitz” to local causes. Exhibition-makers would insist on this broader narrative scope despite continuing criticism from museum director Kazimierz Smoleń—the latter expected national exhibitions to concentrate on the fate of their citizens in Auschwitz (Zbrzeska, 1997: 99).

For the Hungarian pavilion, exhibition-makers designed a “somber but elevating” environment to convey a deep sense of tragedy and a message of triumph as well. The presentation’s tone was simple and subdued in order to foreground historical argumentation and the authenticity of the documents on display (Horn, 1965: 89). Nonetheless, a series of sculptures, paintings, and prints by contemporary artists supplemented the historical display to transmit the pathos of suffering and survival (cf. Véri, 2022). The emerging concept of a Holocaust exhibition in the 1970s would end this juxtaposition of historical and aesthetic authenticity and transform the historical display itself into an aesthetic entity (see Figures 1 to 4).

A single act of “staging” the exhibition consisted of a series of reliefs placed on an elevated platform to introduce the exhibition by depicting its *dramatis personae*: “officers, demonstrators, soldiers, labor servicemen, deportees, partisans, etc.” Beside members of the political elite, these



Figure 2. Exhibition details of the 1965 Hungarian exhibition with art works.
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Figure 3. Exhibition details of the 1979 Hungarian exhibition with large-scale prints.
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personae populated the story to be told. Officers embodied counter-revolutionary terror, demonstrators referred to mass protests during the Great Depression and later antifascist actions, soldiers related to Hungarian forces on the Eastern Front and elsewhere, while labor servicemen were forced laborers (mostly Jewish and Leftist) deployed on the front as well. Gendarmes were



Figure 4. Exhibition details of the 1979 Hungarian exhibition with a stylized wailing wall, and names and portraits of the victims.

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spotlighted later for enacting deportation policies on the ground in 1944. These *personae* illustrate the historical scope of the exhibit. At the same time, they indicate a model different to the perpetrator–bystander–victim triangle that informed Holocaust representation. The reason for this difference is that antifascist memory presented a memory of *fascism* and not primarily of genocide—although it certainly considered genocide as central to fascism.

The exhibition consisted of 114 units distributed in display cases and wall panels alongside seven walls (A–G).⁴ Each unit contained written documents, photos, prints, posters, and historical objects, while large-scale photo prints and wall texts introduced major topics and turning points. Units 1–33 (A–B–C) covered the era from 1919 to 1938, units 34–110 (D–E–F) described the period from 1939 to 1945, while units 111–114 (G) were dedicated to the early postwar years. Sections A–F presented expressions of anti-Semitism in detail: anti-Jewish violence during the White Terror and the anti-Jewish education quotas of 1920 (B), anti-Jewish organizations (B), the First (1938) and then the Second (1939) and Third (1941) anti-Jewish Laws (B–C–D), forced labor service from 1941 to 1945 (D), the first deportation to Kamianets-Podilskyi and the ensuing massacre in 1941 (D), the Novi Sad mass killing in 1942 (D), and, finally, anti-Jewish policies and mass deportations subsequent to the German occupation in 1944 (D–E) as well as anti-Jewish terror in Budapest during the Arrow Cross regime (F). The final chapters in the catastrophe of Hungarian Jewry—the short period between German occupation and Liberation—were detailed in units 59–106. Nowhere in this narrative were any doubts left as to the Jewishness of those concerned. Rather than replacing the term “Jewish” by generalities such as “the victims of fascism,” “the persecuted,” or “the martyrs,” the exhibition applied the term explicitly at every turn of the narrative.

So why was the exhibition dedicated “to the memory of 400,000 Hungarian victims,” instead of referring to Jewish victims specifically? This ambiguity responded to the underlying dilemma as to how to render racial persecution explicit without reinforcing racial categories and, thereby,

discrimination. Rather than obfuscate their Jewishness, exhibition-makers sought to re-integrate the victims into the nation that had excluded them. Certainly, the dedication included non-Jewish victims as well, predominantly political prisoners.

The exhibition integrated the discussion of racial persecution and genocide into a historical account on the “fascist-type” regime. Class domination, political repression, expansionist nationalism, and anti-Semitism were portrayed as interrelated phenomena as they were all seen as inherent to the post-1919 regime. Consequently, protests against political, class, and racial oppression were treated as interrelated as well and presented as part of a more general Leftist-revolutionary struggle. For instance, the exhibition showcased the 1 September 1930 mass demonstration, a major event of organized opposition that brought some 150,000 people to the streets of Budapest, protesting “poverty, the reactionary regime, and increasing fascism,” as the caption explained (unit 17). At the same time, local opposition and resistance were seen in an internationalist context: for example, antifascists were shown joining the campaign for the release of the German Communist leader, Ernst Thälmann (unit 23). Still, such efforts were presented as expressions of a larger anti-fascist humanism, epitomized by public intellectuals such as Thomas Mann and Béla Bartók (unit 28). Ultimately, the exhibition defined antifascism in the “broadest sense,” as one reviewer recommended, and included non-Communist dissidents as well.⁵

Documents from the review process testify that topics such as resistance and Jewish suffering were—in the eyes of reviewers and Museum personnel alike—not opposed priorities but interrelated components in a shared conceptual scheme. For instance, asking for more information on labor unions and missing a more detailed account on the Kamianets-Podilskyi massacre of more than 20,000 Jews, as one reviewer did,⁶ were in no way contradictory requirements. Ultimately, celebrating opposition and resistance did not distract attention from the suffering inflicted on those persecuted, especially Jews. On the contrary, photos of Auschwitz and mass graves in Budapest showed their suffering in terrifying detail. The exhibition attributed a significant—although not unique—role to the Jewish genocide and created a non-hierarchical relation between victims of racial and political persecution.

Moral and political responsibility was formulated in national as much as class terms. Certainly, the exhibition stressed the political responsibility of the ruling elite but it presented Hungarian anti-Semitism as a combination of state propaganda, organized violence, racial legislation, and popular sentiments, elucidating how much anti-Semitism permeated non-dominant social strata as well. For instance, a photo juxtaposed to a copy of the 1939 anti-Jewish Law showed a sign at a mountain shelter saying “for Christian customers only” (unit 32). Since legislation did not introduce such restrictions before 1944, the two items were displayed side-by-side in order to demonstrate how bottom-up initiatives at times surpassed and foreshadowed state policies.

Furthermore, exhibition-makers sought a balance when it came to considering Hungarian and German agency as they provided a detailed account on how reclaiming former territories contributed to pro-German politics and anti-Jewish legislation. Discussing German agency did not result in whitewashing local responsibilities either. Deportations were depicted as a consequence of local efforts and as a climax of a quarter century of anti-Jewish agitation.

While the exhibition did not travel, the national, regional, and denominational press (both Jewish and Catholic) in Hungary reported on the preparation and the opening of the exhibition. The latter coincided with the anniversary of the liberation of the camps on 11 April, an international day of commemoration attended by a large Hungarian delegation. At least a selected part of the public could travel as well: IBUSZ, a state travel agency organized pilgrimages to the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau at least since 1960. Catalogs were also available: Kazimierz Smoleń’s (1966) guide to the Museum came out in Hungarian in several reprints between 1966 and 1986, while Emil Horn edited a small catalog to the Hungarian pavilion in 1969. The latter emphasized Jewish

suffering by graphic imagery and an expressive design that evoked the yellow badge visually (Horn, 1969).

Still, as a new concept of Holocaust memory formed in the 1970s, professionals who would become instrumental in its emergence felt dissatisfied about the way the 1965 exhibition represented the genocide. In a 1999 interview to the Shoah Foundation, Emil Horn talked about his upbringing in an assimilated Jewish family, his survival in Budapest, and his professional career after the war. In this interview, he distanced himself from the 1965 exhibition stating that it did not concentrate on the suffering of Jews. Instead, he embraced the more recent exhibition that he created at the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau in the late 1970s.⁷ Indeed, the new Auschwitz exhibition, unchanged up until the twenty-aughts, became a turning point in his career, leading, eventually, to his show *The Holocaust in Hungary* (1994), a first major Holocaust exhibition in post-Socialist Hungary. However, earlier exhibitions that he curated for the Sachsenhausen (1973), the Ravensbrück (1973), and the Mauthausen (1975) memorial demonstrate that he did not abandon the antifascist model before he started working on the new Hungarian pavilion at the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau in the late 1970s.⁸

In contrast to the 1965 exhibition, the third Hungarian pavilion that opened in 1979 in Oświęcim presented a Holocaust exhibition in the strict sense. The new proposal declared that the “majority of the photos and documents” displayed at the 1965 exhibition “were unrelated to the topic.”⁹ Instead, Horn based the new script on the Auschwitz album, a collection of almost 200 SS photographs that documented the arrival of Hungarian Jews in Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944. Copies of these photos were donated to the Museum of Contemporary History in 1961, and some of them were used in the 1965 exhibition as well. Now the photos preserved in the album were put center stage—a decision that determined the historical scope of the exhibition as well. Dedicated to the “memory of the murdered Hungarian Jews,” the new script opened with a map of Europe and charts on the destruction of Jewish communities according to countries.¹⁰ While a brief section discussed the “Hungarian path to Auschwitz,” the exhibition focused mainly on the events of 1944 and placed it into the general context of the Holocaust. Unlike the 1965 pavilion, the new exhibition traveled to Budapest where the Museum of Labor History presented it under the title *Memento 1944* in 1980 before it toured some dozen towns across the country.

Katalin Jalsovszky, museologist at the Museum’s photography collection and Horn’s co-producer of the 1979 exhibition, remembered in a recent interview how, in the eyes of those working on the new concept, the 1965 exhibition seemed hopelessly outdated aesthetically as well.¹¹ They adhered to a new style of exhibition making that centered on the experience of the visitor *vis-a-vis* the exhibition as an aesthetic object in itself and would inform Holocaust exhibitions until today. Exhibition-makers used large-scale photo prints, authentic objects, and a train car to “stage” the exhibition and create a more immersive environment to empathetically transmit the experience of the deportees. For instance, the script proposed that entrance and exit of the exhibition were to be separated by a large canvas lit in a way that it presented the entering visitors with the projected shadows of those leaving. Aesthetic experience was expected to turn visitors into “secondary witnesses” (LaCapra, 2001). Tellingly, exhibition designer Tibor Piros protested categorically the use of some of the sculptures that had been included in the 1965 exhibition on the ground that they would disturb the “exhibition’s aesthetic harmony.”¹²

Although aesthetic and conceptual aspects were interrelated, reviewers of the new exhibition were not so much worried about formal matters. Internal debates on the academic advisory board of the Museum of Labor History demonstrate that museologists and historians were troubled by the narrow narrative focus instead. There were few who did not express concern that the new concept would present anti-Semitism as merely an “import from Germany.” They demanded that the exhibition portray the anti-Jewish character of the counter-revolutionary regime in sufficient detail.

They missed a representation of antifascist struggles as well. Again, the two were not contradictory requirements. Members of the board scrutinized the new concept on the basis of the old.

Certainly, Emil Horn and his colleagues did not intend to push responsibility to the Third Reich. Both exhibitions, old and new, detailed the participation of local actors and state agencies in the deportations. Ultimately, the trajectory from the old to the new was possible—though not uncontested—because there had already been a codified and coherent account on Jewish suffering in the 1965 exhibition.

Hungarian Jews in the struggle against Hitlerism

While preparations were underway for the 1965 Auschwitz exhibition in Budapest, representatives of the Memorial of the Unknown Jewish Martyr in Paris contacted the Hungarian authorities. By the early 1960s, the Shoah Memorial, as it is called today, had already become an influential research institution, memorial, and museum both in France and worldwide (Heuman, 2015; Jockusch, 2012; Perego, 2014). Of all the international exhibitions related to the European Jewish tragedy that they had organized, *The Jews in the struggle against Hitlerism* (1965) would come to be the most significant in terms of both international—and fundamentally cross-Cold War—cooperation and its role as the museum's new permanent exhibition. The exhibition covered 16 countries, including Israel, as well as the activities of the World Jewish Congress. The documentary material of the sections, altogether more than 180 panels; 20 vitrines; and 2000 photos, documents and artifacts,¹³ was compiled by the contributing institutions in the respective countries. For historical reasons, the participation of the six countries from the Eastern bloc was essential since it was there where the majority of anti-Jewish Nazi atrocities occurred. They provided exhibit material otherwise unattainable for the Memorial and their national and Jewish representatives attended the opening ceremony (Heuman, 2015: 137–139).

Still, the participation of socialist Hungary was far from self-evident. Escalating Cold War tensions inside the World Jewish Congress about the situation of Jews in the USSR went against the collaboration with an anticommunist Jewish institution in Paris supported by the American-Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Claims Conference.¹⁴ Moreover, preparations for the exhibition began in the midst of international controversies triggered by the Israeli capture of Adolf Eichmann, with Hungary attacking Zionism and refusing to officially cooperate with Israeli justice. Although the Paris exhibition had clear Zionist overtones, the Hungarian authorities could not refuse cooperation on legitimate grounds. It was a shared antifascist legacy of the war that still enabled the Franco-Hungarian cooperation, providing legitimacy and cultural significance for participation to each side.

The Memorial's initiative was clearly antifascist in nature as it staged the history of the heroic international struggle of peoples/nations against the common Nazi enemy (“contre l’Hitlerisme,” “contre Hitler et nazisme”). The term “antifascism” was lacking from their discourse because of the Cold War context. From the French perspective, the terms fascism and antifascism were over-used, even abused by the communist regimes, as in the campaigns attacking the “re-fascistification” of the Federal Republic of Germany (Lemke, 1993; Weinke, 2002). Still, the historically located notion of antihitlerism/antinazism was general enough to embrace not only the struggle against the dictator of the Third Reich but all of his allies.

Thus, the Memorial's discourse was implicitly antifascist. It relied on the war's antifascist legacy when defining the struggle to be exhibited as internationalist (the enterprise of peoples against the common enemy), universalist (bearing moral significance to all humankind), integrative (including Jews and non-Jews alike), and antiracist. The exhibition title refers to the common antifascist struggle in which, among the other peoples, also the Jews took part. In his Preface to the

exhibition catalog, CDJC (Center for Documentation of the Shoah Memorial) founder and president Isaac Schneersohn (1965) warned that “nothing must remain omitted or forgotten from what the epic of Resistance was, which united the resistance of all men, all religious denominations and countries, who engaged in the struggle against the rule of the Beast” (p. 7; cf. Mark, 1965).

Certainly, the non-communist antifascism of the Memorial did not imply the silencing of Jewish suffering. On the contrary, among the three main objectives of the exhibition, Schneersohn mentioned first that it shows Jewish suffering under Nazi occupation. Staging the Jewish part in the common antifascist struggle, however, was meant to demonstrate their right to national rebirth (Mark, 1965: 14) and to counterbalance the image of the Jews as solely passive victims of Nazism. The latter, claimed Schneersohn (1965), implicated an ignorance of Jewish resistance (p. 6). Despite (or due to) its Zionist overtones, the exhibition constituted a conscious attempt to counter the victim-centered memory narrative enacted by the Jerusalem trial and especially its interpretation by Hannah Arendt (Azouvi, 2012: 296–301).

Schneersohn wanted to reconstitute the equal status of Jews among the nations as “the number of Jews enrolled in the army of the great anti-Nazi coalition was considerable” (Mark, 1965: 11). Thus, the exhibition emphasized not the difference between Jewish and non-Jewish suffering but their equal status in the common struggle.

As its second main objective, the exhibition was to show that the Jews struggled “against their butchers” in particularly difficult conditions (Schneersohn, 1965). The problem of unbalance between heroism and victimization was, as Schneersohn put it (1964–1965), that the unsettling pictures of Jewish martyrdom, by emphasizing suffering instead of resistance, foster only strong emotions in the visitors without inspiring respect in them.

Finally, as a third objective, the exhibition paid particular attention to the “Just,” the non-Jewish rescuers whose deeds it interpreted as a form of resistance (Schneersohn, 1965).

Hungarian authorities rightly perceived the French initiative as an international antifascist exhibition. Marius Moutet, honorary chairman of World Committee of the Memorial, contacted the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs on 14 March 1963 and the cultural attaché of the Ministry the next day. The package¹⁵ he sent contained a letter, a Note presenting the CDJC/Memorial, and an Aide-Mémoire with an exhibition plan that listed three points to serve as a guide for the collection of documents.¹⁶ Moutet presented the CDJC as an immense archive preserving the “history of German barbarism” and the Memorial as an institution commemorating the “terrible tragedy of Nazi persecution,” both fighting against forgetting “the terrible atrocities of Nazis and Fascists committed in whole of Europe under Hitlerian rule.”

Jewish resistance was integrated into the common antifascist struggle. The Aide-Mémoire’s first point outlined a narrative of Jewish resistance starting from 1933 with demonstrations and press announcements, followed by the boycott of Nazi Germany, then by individual and collective armed struggle in partisan movements and in the Allies’ armies, and finally by Jewish divisions and parachutists. “Thus fought the Jewish people against Nazism and contributed to the victory of the Allies.” The second point of the collection guide was about the focus on “non-Jews’ resistance to rescue and help the Jews,” “noble and just souls” as Moutet put it, while the third concerned the “resurrection of Jewish life” following the catastrophe. Proving that heroism and suffering was not at all in contradiction, the Note expressed that the exhibition would show the “total extermination of our 6 million brothers with all their suffering and heroism.”

Moutet’s call to participate in the exhibition and to intervene for the sake of collecting the necessary Hungarian documents was left unanswered by the Minister.¹⁷ This demonstrative indifference was in sharp contrast with the engagement of the respective Hungarian authorities, most importantly, the National Representation of Hungarian Israelites (Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képvisellete, MIOK), the united and party controlled representative body of the Jewish denominations in

Hungary. On 18 March 1963, MIOK Chairman Endre Sós argued for the Hungarian participation in the French initiative in his note to the State Office for Church Affairs (Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal, ÁEH), the authority for the control of religious life.¹⁸ Making reference to Schneersohn's letter "sent to me today," he emphasized that the exhibition plan already enjoyed worldwide attention and that Hungary had already participated in the creation of the 1961 exhibition *Life and Revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto and the Ghettos of the Eastern Countries*, and sent a delegation to the opening ceremony, headed by Sós himself.¹⁹ He reassured the head of ÁEH of the Soviet support of the Memorial's project. Sós pointed out, however, that "[r]egrettably it is not really easy to compile the Hungarian part of the material because the antifascist Jewish resistance was very insignificant in Hungary." He also informed the ÁEH that Paris had invited the MIOK to represent itself by a delegation at this "international exhibition of antifascist nature." Sós received permission to collect the material and eventually the MIOK made nine panels that, after political inspection, were sent to Paris on 10 July 1963.

The process was far less smooth with respect to the Hungarian delegation. The ÁEH demanded information from the Foreign Office about the willingness of other socialist countries to attend the opening ceremony and also asked for a report from the Hungarian embassy on the Memorial's project.²⁰ The report, relying on information given by the editor-in-chief of the communist Yiddish-French journal *Naie Presse*, proposed to be cautious with regard to the leaders of the Memorial, characterizing them as the right wing of French Jewry, who "more-or-less collaborated with the Germans" during the war.²¹ Since the embassy made this report only on 29 July, well after the nine panels had been sent to Paris, its recommendation was not taken into account. Eventually, the Hungarian delegation's participation at the opening ceremony went on the rocks not because of cautious party officials but the reluctance of Sós who, referring to his experience in 1961, proposed to not to send a delegation this time, as he wanted to avoid "insults from foreign Zionists."²²

On 2 April 1964, it was Schneersohn himself, a Zionist who had fled Bolshevik Russia in 1920, who asked for additional exhibition material from the Hungarian Partisan Alliance.²³ Although the MIOK, he asserted, had sent "a rather big material on the persecution of Jews in Hungary," "we got very little material on the Jews' participation in the national resistance movement" and "we don't have any material on the Hungarian resistance itself." He especially asked for photos of "the Hungarian people's struggle against Nazi oppression," on Liberation, on Jews' participation in the partisan movement, and other materials (e.g. posters, leaflets) "testifying to the stance against the racism of the German occupier." Eventually, the Hungarians sent nine photos of the partisan movement to Paris in late June 1964. Nonetheless, Schneersohn's letter is yet another indication of the antifascist nature of the French memory initiative: it intended to place Jewish resistance side by side to national movements and within the international anti-Hitler struggle.

The Hungarian section at the Paris exhibition was divided into six panels and a vitrine (Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine, 1965: 58–59). The narrative organizing the material started at the end of the 1930s. Panels 1 and 2, titled "Social and cultural resistance," contained documents of public protests of Jewish institutions, a document and photos of Jews enrolled to forced labor service at the Eastern front, a group of them who managed to join the Soviets, the aid provided for Polish refugees, calls for solidarity from the Hungarian Jewish community, and Zionist publications. Panels 3 and 4, "Oppression and Rescue," presented the German occupation, the persecution and the ghettos, the main Hungarian perpetrators, documents on the Pest ghetto, photos of intellectuals forced to wear the yellow star and carry out forced labor service, false papers, German documents²⁴ about different bottom-up rescue efforts, and individuals joining to the ranks of Yugoslav and Soviet partisans, as well as photos of non-Jewish persons executed for hiding Jews. Panel 5, "The Last Station," presented Hungarian deportations to Auschwitz, including seven photos representing the arrival of the wagons to the camp, which had probably come from the Auschwitz album. Finally, panel 6, "The International Pressure Puts an End to the

Deportation,” contained documents of diplomatic pressure on the Hungarian leadership, and the rescue efforts in Budapest of the embassies of neutral countries, with special focus on the activity of Raoul Wallenberg’s network.

This narrative tells the tragic fate of the Jews in Hungary from political, social, and economic stigmatization and exclusion to the deportations from the countryside, and the Arrow Cross terror in Budapest following the coup d’état in mid-October 1944. The photos preserved in the archive of the Memorial²⁵ depict Jewish suffering in horrific detail, including forced labor, the Kamianets-Podilskyi massacre, stigmatization by the yellow star, ghettoization, deportations to Auschwitz, the Budapest massacres in 1944–1945, and 1945 exhumations from mass graves. Jewish victimhood represented in the pictures was counterbalanced by historical documents testifying to resistance. The main protagonists of the narrative, apart from the (mostly Hungarian) perpetrators and (mostly Jewish) victims, were everyday people: Jews who refused to wear the yellow star, sabotaged the Nazi war industry, distributed antifascist propaganda, or joined the partisans and took arms to fight against the German and Hungarian Nazis, as well as non-Jews who hid the persecuted. As a sort of cathartic endpoint, a vitrine showed collective and armed Jewish resistance, otherwise probably lacking from the material. Titled “Parachutists from Eretz-Israel to the Aid of Hungarian Jews,” it presented, among others, actions of Hannah Szenes and other Palestinian parachutists, a report of Goebbels that until 9 July, 430,000 Jews had been deported from Hungary, and press clippings of protests against the deportations.

The opening of the Paris exhibition was a significant event both nationally and internationally, where not only the French government was officially represented but also diplomatic delegations and Jewish and non-Jewish organizations from participating countries. Schneersohn qualified the exhibition as a great success, stating that it “had a very great impact in the French and foreign press, both Jewish and non-Jewish, as well as on Radio and Television” (quoted in Perego, 2007: 129–130). The Hungarian press was not among those referred to by Schneersohn as only *Új Élet* reported on it, the Jewish weekly that had already covered the 1961 exhibition extensively. Unlike the Auschwitz pavilion, participation at the Paris exhibition was seen as a Jewish, rather than national, matter and reporting was relegated to the Jewish press.

The 1965 exhibition was one of the last major attempts to reconstitute the antifascist legacy of the Second World War which centered on the morality of resistance and attributed a distinctive but not unique significance to Jewish suffering. A new, Holocaust-centered regime of memory was born more or less at the same time (Nord, 2020), which by the 1980s had completely taken over the antifascist legacy. Claude Lanzmann’s 1985 film gave a name to the new memory regime that the Memorial of the Unknown Jewish Martyr, after half a century of functioning, adopted in 2005.

Conclusion

What we were looking for in the historical record is not Holocaust memory per se. We argued that antifascist memory presents a distinct cultural regime for remembering the past. Our claim is that antifascist memory, understood as a particular historical phenomenon on a transnational, in our case European, scale, opened up specific ways to commemorate the Jewish genocide. It enabled memory agencies, state and non-state, in both the East and the West, to collaborate. The antifascist legacy of the Second World War provided a common reference point despite the Cold War divisions. Yet both ideological sides distorted, in different ways, this legacy: in the West, antifascism was pictured and revealed as totalitarianism’s manipulative ideology (neglecting the reasons for its force of legitimacy); in the East, not only every form of oppression was stigmatized as fascism but also the Cold War enemies (neglecting thus the really existing relations between various historical forms of political violence). As a result of the Cold War struggles, antifascism has eventually been identified with communism.

In our case, it was antifascist memory that enabled Hungarian cooperation with both communist Poland and, simultaneously, anticommunist France. Neither was the Paris exhibition Western and anti-totalitarian, nor was the Auschwitz exhibition exclusively Eastern and communist. Both were, in different ways, antifascist. They both told stories of suffering and resistance without subsuming persecuted groups under the term “martyrs” or referring to them “en masse.”

Our analysis suggests that antifascist memory was characterized by four distinctive features. First, it was internationalist: it remembered antifascism as an alliance of nations (and peoples), not restricted to the political Left and the geopolitical East. Consequently, it regarded memory-making as an internationalist endeavor and included national organizations as well as their international umbrella organizations from across Europe. Jewish people, or even the Jewish people as a nation, were included into remembering antifascist alliance. Second, antifascism was inclusive in relation to all victim groups (cf. Lagrou, 1999: 285). Neither communist nor anticommunist actors were immune to overvaluing political persecution and thus downgrading Jewish suffering (a notable example is David Rousset’s “expert witness” movement, see Kuby, 2019: 93–108). Nonetheless, the imposition of a hierarchy between victim categories was, as we proved, not at all constitutive for the antifascist legacy. It was, rather, the outcome of the ideological and political struggles of the Cold War. Third, antifascist memory was universalist: fascism was represented as an ultimate atrocity against mankind. Thus, the “moral universal” (Alexander, 2002) of antifascism was based not on the uniqueness of the Jewish tragedy but on humanism: the extermination of one people concerns all others. This way, the Jewish genocide was represented as fascism’s exemplary atrocity against humanity. Finally, fourth, antifascist memory implied antiracism—while anti-Jewish atrocities were condemned as expressions of racism, racial categorizations (concerning peoples, perpetrators, or victims) were consistently refused.

It was against the backdrop of this “antifascist memory minimum” that Cold War struggles unfolded over the meanings of the Second World War. At the heart of the definition struggles was the notion of fascism that communists in East and West strove to appropriate while non-communists rather avoided it, talking about Nazism or Hitlerism instead. The collapse of the common antifascist framework of this cross-Cold War debate in the 1970s provided place for a Holocaust memory that had been in the making since the early 1960s. Although this shift was first institutionalized in the West, it also had an impact in Eastern Europe where political regimes continued to rely on antifascist memory. As the 1979 Hungarian pavilion at the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau testifies, the moral legitimacy of antifascism began eroding well before 1989.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following persons for their valuable help: Etelka Baji, Zsófia Frazon, Regina Fritz, Katalin Jalsovszky, Zuzanna Janusik, Katarzyna Kocik, Lior Lalieu-Smadja, Krisztina Lovas, Simon Perego, Rachel Perry, Wojciech Płosa, Zsuzsanna Toronyi.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Notes

1. Hungarian National Archives (MNL OL); Hungarian National Museum (MNM); Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives (MILEV), Center for Documentation of the Shoah Memorial (CDJC), and Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

2. See the delegation's report at MNL OL XXVIII-M-21.1/1961/4.
3. See the letter from Ede Gerelyes (Museum of Contemporary History, director) to the Museum Division at the Ministry of Culture dated 11 January 1965, see MNM AD-I-240-75.
4. "Az Ósziwecimi Állami Múzeumban megrendezett kiállítás forgatókönyve," MNM-AD-I-8611-2002.
5. See Oszkár Betlen, "Az Ósziwecimben létesítendő magyar kiállítás forgatókönyvéről," 14 July 1964, MNM-AD-I-3339-83.
6. See László Márkus: "Lektorai jelentés az auschwitzi kiállítás forgatókönyvéről," 27 July 1964, MNM-AD-I-3339-83.
7. Emil Horn: Interview 48988, Tape 4, 23:10-24:25, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1999.
8. See Emil Horn: "A sachsenhauseni volt koncentraciósi tábor magyar kiállításának forgatókönyve," MNM AD-I-1160-74; "A ravensbrücki volt koncentraciósi táborban felállításra kerülő magyar kiállítás forgatókönyve," MNM AD-I-7810-2002; "A mauthauseni volt koncentraciósi táborban felállítandó állandó magyar kiállítás tervezete," MNM AD-I-8440-2002.
9. "Az Oswiecimi Mártír-Emlékmúzeum magyar pavillonjában megrendezésre kerülő új állandó kiállítás tématerve," MNM AD-I-1649-80, p. 1.
10. "Az auschwitzi kiállítás forgatókönyve (Horn-féle utolsó) és kiállítási fotóterve," MNM AD-I-1630-80, p. 3.
11. Zoltán Kékesi's interview with Katalin Jalsovszky on 20 May 2020.
12. See "Emlékeztető a Magyar Munkásmozgalmi Múzeum Tudományos Tanácsának üléséről," 18 December 1978, MNM AD-I-1490-79, p. 5.
13. L'exposition "Les Juifs dans la lutte contre L'Hitlerisme" *Le monde juif* no.2, avril-juin 1964, 29.
14. The Claims Conference supported the preparation of the exhibition "La lutte du peuple juif contre Hitler et le Nazisme" with 50.000 francs on the condition that the creators work under the consultation of its program director. For comparison, the French state supported the project with 35.000 francs in total (Perego, 2007: 130).
15. See at MNL OL XIX-A-21-a-K-2-31/1963.
16. See in Lés préparatifs de l'exposition "La lutte des Juifs contre l'Hitlerisme," *Le monde juif* no. 1. janvier-mars 1964, 54-55. As a minor difference, this text contains an additional point (1/f) on moral and spiritual resistance.
17. Note of Endre Sós, 5 July 1963, MNL OL XIX-A-21-a-K-2-61a/1963.
18. Feljegyzés, MNL OL XIX-A-21-a-K-2-31/1963.
19. See Megérkezett Párizsba a fasiszta idők zsidó gettóiról szóló kiállítás magyar anyaga, *Új Élet* 1 October 1961. See also MNL OL XIX-A-21-a-K-2-14, a,b,c,d,e/1-61.
20. MNL OL XIX-A-21-a-K-2-31/1963.
21. MNL OL XIX-A-21-a-K-2-31b/1963.
22. Note of Endre Sós, 14 December, 1964, MNL OL XIX-A-21-a-K-2-150/1964.
23. See the entire correspondence at MNL OL XXVIII-M-21 1. állag, 1964. 1. é., 223-238.
24. Most of these originated from the archives of the Nuremberg trial, see the list of documents presented at the Hungarian section, Centre de Documentation de la Mémoire de la Shoah, Hongrie, CCCIII.
25. The provenance of the two collections of photographs preserved at the archive of the Shoah Memorial (73 photos at CCCII 1-CCCI 16-16; 54 photos at CCCIII 18-1-CCCI 21-30) is still unknown. However, it is possible that they contain exhibition materials, photos, and documents that the MIOK sent to the Memorial's museum exhibition as early as 1956. See MILEV VI. 34. doboz: MIOK-iratok a párizsi holokauszt-émlékművel kapcsolatban (1956).

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