

Ari Joskowicz, *Rain of Ash: Roma, Jews, and the Holocaust* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023), pp. 368.

Roma, Jews, and Archival Evidence on the Holocaust

by Anton Weiss-Wendt

Writing comparative history poses a number of challenges. The prospective author has to go through a large amount of primary and secondary sources looking for links between the elements chosen for comparison. The existing body of evidence should be large enough to justify a comparison. The linkage accentuated must not violate the logic of historical analysis. Finally, the purpose of a comparative study has to be clear. Ari Joskowicz tackles all those challenges with distinction in his new book, *Rain of Ash: Roma, Jews, and the Holocaust*. Beside its immediate focus on Jewish and Romani victims of the Nazis, the book raises a broader issue of institutional and financial foundations of historical research.

Scholarship on Holocaust memory is vast. The story is very different, however, when it comes to victim groups other than Jews. Even then, accounts of a specific victim group targeted by the Nazis—people with mental disabilities, Jehovah’s witnesses, homosexuals, Soviet prisoners of war, political opposition, and others—typically treat it in isolation. Beyond anecdotal evidence, no author has so far comprehensively compared and contrasted the experiences of two or more minority groups slated for destruction. That alone makes *Rain of Ash* a pioneering work.

Joskowicz’s family history underlines his academic interest in the subject of the Holocaust, though he does not say in the book what prompted him to pursue research on the Roma genocide (pp. ix–xi). In his reply to my question, Joskowicz wrote that his vague, early understanding of a shared victimhood of Jews and Roma at the hands of the Nazis was reinforced by the killing of four Roma in a right-wing bomb attack in 1995 in his native Austria. Teaching about the Holocaust at Vanderbilt University, where he serves as assistant professor of

history, made Joskowitz realize how unforgivably little he knew about the Nazi persecution of Roma.¹

Rain of Ash relates a history of an asymmetrical relationship between Jewish and Romani survivors in pursuit of justice. Although the book has the word *Holocaust* in its title, five out of six chapters deal with the post-1945 period. Joskowitz is intent on “breaking down the conventional barrier in scholarship between what happened during the Holocaust and how it has been represented ever since” (p. 11). Reasonable as may sound, this approach creates a misbalance of a different kind whereby the discussion on memory politics superimposes conclusions regarding academic research at large.

Joskowitz begins his discussion by surveying Jewish-Romani encounters—personal, communal, and administrative—during and immediately after the Holocaust. Earlier efforts to document the Nazi destruction of Roma (mainly in the Greater Germany) paralleled its emergence as a stand-alone subject in war crimes trials. Throughout the book, Joskowitz emphasizes the contribution of individual Jewish professionals and of what he is referring to as “Holocaust” or “Jewish” archives to raising the awareness of the persecution and mass murder of Roma under Nazis.

There is currently a scholarly consensus that, of all targeted groups, the Nazis committed genocide against Jews and Roma. This realization took long to sink in when it comes to Roma, however. The scope of the Jewish Holocaust became public knowledge already during the International Criminal Tribunal at Nuremberg in 1945-46, while the Nazi mass murder of Roma first came in sharp relief in the subsequent Einsatzgruppen Trial in 1946-47 that had received much less publicity. Romani survivors in postwar Europe, German Sinti in particular, were keen on emphasizing the similarities between the Nazi treatment of Jews and Roma—something that the International Refugee Organization had recognized early on. Beyond emotional relief, such a comparison bore on the chances of receiving financial compensation. West German courts consistently rejected Romani claims for compensation on the grounds that they had fallen victim to *racial* persecution only beginning in 1943. This type of argumentation had

¹ Communication from Ari Joskowitz, November 2, 2023.

persisted until 1965 when the German Federal Court of Justice reversed it by putting the burden of proof on the state rather than the Romani victims.

The interaction between Jewish and Romani prisoners—who sometimes found themselves locked up in the same Nazi camps, ghettos, and deportation trains—did not necessarily manifest in acts of mutual assistance and empathy. Rather, Jews and Roma had taken with them into the places of incarceration traditional stereotypes of the other group. Most of the encounters were transactional, informed by the impossible choices that the victims were facing. Jewish prisoners would typically refer to Romani to emphasize their own ordeal, and vice versa. In the poignantly titled subchapter, “Seeing, Hearing, Smelling Each Other,” Joskowitz narrates of Romani survivors recalling the nauseating smell of the incinerated Jewish corpses and Jewish survivors the bloodcurdling screams of Romani prisoners, both at Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. When talking about power dynamics between Jews and Roma in a vulnerable situation, Joskowitz contrasts the history of “loud” and “silent” persecution of the respective minority (pp. 6-7, and 10). As he does not pursue this discussion further in the book, I am not sure as to its usefulness.

When situating Joskowitz’s study in the body of existing academic literature, I would single out the following three discursive elements as perhaps most instructive: the ambivalence embedded in the initial attempts by concerned professionals, many of them Jewish, to make sense of a tragedy befallen the Roma (chapter 3); larger prominence of the subject of Nazi destruction of the Roma in the courtroom (chapter 4); and the politics of scholarship, especially in the 1990s (chapters 5-6).

To illustrate that first point, Joskowitz looks at three particular individuals: British linguist Dora Yates (1879-1974), American psychologist David P. Boder (1886-1961), and Belgian journalist Estelle Goldstein (1902-1991). As the secretary of the Gypsy Lore Society in England, Yates in 1943 began speaking of the shared history of persecution of Jews and Roma and three years later opened the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* to reports on the Nazi destruction—the first such accounts to appear. Boder in 1946 traveled to Europe to interview Jewish survivors. Among other things, he asked them what they knew about the fate of Roma, specifically at Auschwitz. Concurrently, Goldstein on behalf of the Belgian Government interviewed Jewish survivors in that particular country for the purpose of

compensation. About 13 percent of respondents volunteered information about their fellow Romani prisoners. In spite of their best intentions, writes Joskowitz, all three failed to grasp the full scale of destruction of the Roma people during the Second World War.

Of the three major war crimes trials that Joskowitz examines with reference to Roma, the Nuremberg is the best known. His analysis of the statement of Otto Ohlendorf, commander of Einsatzgruppe D who had argued that Roma were executed en masse on the same grounds as Jews, remains also the only direct reference in the book to the mass murder of Roma in the German-occupied Soviet territories. The relative prominence of the Roma genocide in the Adolf Eichmann trial in 1961 is a new information, however. Harrowing details about the “Gypsy family camp” at Auschwitz came from a Jewish physician who worked there, while not a single Romani took the witness stand. Despite that, Romani activists would subsequently refer to the Eichmann trial as the type of justice and/or forum they have been seeking, mainly due to the prominence accorded to victims’ narratives. In contrast, six Romani witnesses, alongside eighty-eight Jewish, testified in the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials. On the one hand, the 1963-1965 trials produced a significant body of evidence on the Nazi mass murder of Roma and thus made it a public knowledge in Germany. On the other hand, the few Romani witnesses who shared their experiences in the courtroom had been under police surveillance, which accentuated their continuous persecution.

Beside the main subject of his study, Joskowitz engages in an important, overlooked discussion on financial foundations of historical research. Jews have had a long tradition of self-organization, something that Roma are lacking. Specific to the United States is tax exemptions for charitable donations, which bolsters fundraising. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) emerges in his discussion as an example of an American public-private partnership whose agenda is determined in part by donors, in this particular case Jewish. Established in 1980 by Congress, the US Holocaust Memorial Council did not originally consider incorporating the Nazi persecution and mass murder of Roma into the story of the Holocaust to be told in a new purpose-built museum on the National Mall in Washington, DC. Negative publicity generated by Romani activists’ protests made the council to eventually offer a seat to a Romani representative. The fact of Romani representation on the USHMM council alone

could hardly alter the focus of the museum’s permanent exhibition or the principles of acquisition of archival collections, however.

During the first five decades since the end of the Second World War, archival evidence—specifically few in numbers survivor testimonies—on the Nazi destruction of the Roma has found its way or been deliberately incorporated in purpose-assembled document collections dealing with the history of the Jewish Holocaust. That makes him draw a logical nexus between the emergence of “Jewish/Holocaust archives” and the growth of knowledge about the Roma genocide. An original thesis, it has an inbuilt discursive flaw.

By means of a disclosure, I have reviewed Ari Joskowicz’s article that eventually appeared in 2016 in *History and Memory*.² While I recommended the article for publication, I found a number of problems with the author’s notion of *Jewish/Holocaust archives*. The published version of the article failed to address the thrust of my criticism; Joskowicz has reworked the journal article into the book manuscript, faithfully reproducing his earlier argument, parts of which I regard fallacious. *Quid pro quo*, some of the criticism below stems from my reader report, which the author had presumably received from the journal editorial board.

Joskowicz’s book falls in the established pattern of substituting the victimization of Roma in the Third Reich (i.e., Germany proper, Austria, and the Protectorate of Bohemia & Moravia) for that in the entire German-dominated Europe, and the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp for the thousands of sites of mass murder. The destruction of Roma in southeastern and eastern Europe, and by extension the interactions between Jewish and Romani victims in those territories, appear at the level of anecdotes within few sentences, maximum paragraphs (pp. 20, 23–24, 36, 41, and 112). This does not accurately reflect the geography of the genocide: as many Roma were murdered by the Nazis at Auschwitz in occupied Poland as by the Ustaša at Jasenovac camp in Croatia; nearly as many Russian-speaking Roma perished as German-speaking Roma.³

² Ari Joskowicz, “Separate Suffering, Shared Archives: Jewish and Romani Histories of Nazi Persecution,” *History and Memory* 28, no. 1 (2016): 110–140.

³ Anton Weiss-Wendt, “Roma,” in *The Cambridge History of the Holocaust*, vol. 3, *Victims, Bystanders, and Helpers, 1939–1945*, ed. Mark Roseman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), in print.

The sense that one gets when reading *Ash of Rain* is that the successful incorporation of Romani victimization in the history of the Holocaust still depends on an equilibrium between Jews and Roma. Joskowitz convincingly argues that historians, lawyers, and activists among Jewish Holocaust survivors had played an important role in drawing attention to the comparable faith of the Roma under the Nazis in the first postwar decades. By the late 1990s, however, the body of knowledge on the Roma genocide has reached a level that injected it into academic research beyond any ethnic markers. As a watershed event, I regard the publication in 1996 of a book by German historian Michael Zimmermann (1951–2007), *Rassenutopie und Genozid: Die nationalsozialistische "Lösung der Zigeunerfrage."* Based on research in sixty-five archives in seven different countries, Zimmermann's study remains unsurpassed until today. There hardly finds a Holocaust synthesis on the market today that would not incorporate the victimization of the Roma at the hands of the Nazis and their allies (how comprehensively any given book treats this subject is an entirely different matter). Joskowitz makes a good observation when arguing that, when it comes to addressing historical injustices, the "focus on one victim group does not always translate easily into advantages for others" (p. 135). Academic scholarship, obviously, does not approach history from the vantage point of advantages for any chosen subject of research.

As they emerge from the Joskowitz's discourse, factors that had motivated certain (Jewish) individuals, including historians, to study the Nazi destruction of the Roma are mainly emotional—"shared suffering," as he puts it. Correct as it may be, historical analysis is embedded in rational choice. Sometimes, historians find themselves in a situation when documents stare them in the face. Former USHMM historian, Martin C. Dean (b. 1962), once replied as follows to the question how he had come across the subject of his 2000 book that dealt with local collaboration in the Holocaust in Belorussia and Ukraine: "They found me rather than I found them." He then explained that, as part of his former job as a historian in the Scotland Yard War Crimes Unit, he was handling cases of alleged war criminals among ethnic Belorussians and Ukrainians.⁴

⁴ Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). Dean told this anecdote in a private conversation sometime in 2003.

It was no different in my case. When doing research for my doctoral dissertation on the Holocaust in Estonia in the late 1990s and early 2000s—the subject I chose because it had not been until then comprehensively treated in scholarship—relevant archival files I have ordered contained recurrent references to the mass murder of Roma. With no advanced knowledge of the Nazi policy toward Roma, I put the documentary evidence regarding the persecution of Roma in German-occupied Estonia in a separate pile. A compact material, it fit well the format of a journal article, which I published in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* in 2003, six years before my book on the Holocaust in Estonia came out.⁵ The files in question came from the Estonian Security Police Collection deposited in the Estonian National Archives in Tallinn. The same files are available as copies in USHMM in Washington, DC. I will be using this particular anecdote to discuss what I regard as a major problem with the discourse that Joskowitz advances in his book.

Joskowitz is inadvertently proposing a certain hierarchy when it comes to primary sources on the Holocaust. He is correct to pinpoint that Holocaust historians writing on the Roma genocide mainly approach it from the perpetrator's perspective (p. xi). This does not automatically mean, though, that perpetrator records are useless in rendering a victim's perspective.⁶ Equally true is that for each existing Romani survivor testimony there are over two hundred Jewish survivor testimonies. As I have argued elsewhere, however, the oral history gap can be, and has been, bridged by using other types of primary sources.⁷ Hence, the following claim by Joskowitz cannot be substantiated: "...there is a good reason that most scholars working on the Jewish Holocaust typically use administrative accounts only to supplement others [survivor testimonies]" (p. 100).

The original comparison between the Nazi treatment of Jews and Roma had been drawn not by the survivors, activists, and/or scholars, but by the perpetrators themselves. Joskowitz does say so at the beginning of the book (pp. 23, 46-47), yet this point gets lost in his discussion of "knowledge production." "Jews and Roma

⁵ Anton Weiss-Wendt, "Extermination of the Gypsies in Estonia during World War II," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003): 31-61; Weiss-Wendt, *Murder without Hatred: Estonians and the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

⁶ I am making this point in my recent article, "Who Were the Roma Victims of the Nazis: A Case Study of Estonia," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 54, no. 1 (2023): 27-54.

⁷ Anton Weiss-Wendt, introduction to *A People Destroyed: New Research on the Roma Genocide*, ed. Anton Weiss-Wendt (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2025), in print.

have become inextricably connected by proximate experiences, overlapping archival labor, and comparative perceptions of their fates,” writes Joskowitz (p. 10), in an attempt to rebuild after the genocide carried out by the Nazis, that is. “Shared Romani and Jewish archives” (p. 13) is thus a direct consequence of the murderous policy pursued by the Nazi regime. Concerned Jewish archivists, activist, and scholars did contribute to popularizing the victim linkage, yet only inadvertently (p. 14).

Joskowitz argues at the end of Chapter 1 that: “Yet, they [Jews and Roma] are forever associated with each other because their traces reach us through the same *archival* and knowledge *infrastructure* that survivors and liberators began building after the war [emphasis added]” (p. 48). Throughout the book, Joskowitz talks of archives metaphorically more than he does literally. He unduly segregates “Jewish/Holocaust” archives from “non-Jewish” archives essentializing the former in the process. Joskowitz unwittingly commits the fallacy of the false dichotomous question when inquiring, “What does it mean for members of one minority group to control a large part of the archives and, thus, the history, or another?” (p. 11). By approaching the study of the Nazi genocide of the Roma through the prism of “Jewish/Holocaust archives,” he predictably concludes that it has been secondary to that of the Nazi genocide of the Jews. By analogy, anyone finding his or her way into Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at the New York University that holds records of trade unions, Communist Party USA, anarchist groups, and other American radical left organizations may reasonably deduce that entities to the right of the political spectrum take significantly less, if any, space in this particularly depository.

In reference to available archival documentation, Joskowitz spends considerable time discussing survivor testimonies. Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Wiener Library in London, and the Center for Contemporary Jewish Documentation in Paris have pioneered the collection of written, and later audio, testimonies in the 1950s. In the United States, the Fortunoff Archives at Yale University and the Shoah Foundation at the University of South California picked up the torch in in the 1980s and the 1990s, respectively. Oral history is thus a novel type of evidence, considering that the history of archives stretches back ca. 5,000 years. Traditionally, state archives store administrative, legal, religious, military, financial, and other records. Archival collections are typically assembled according

to institutional principle, accounting for chronology and geography (e.g., Estonian Security Police, 1941–1944). Archivists at Tallinn subsequently organized and systematized the records of the Estonian Security Police that reflect on the decision-making, reporting and documentation system of that particular agency. Joskowitz mentions but does not accentuate that, survivor testimonies put aside, “Holocaust” archives are derivative by definition. Institutions like USHMM and Yad Vashem contain copies of documents mainly from central and branch state archives in Europe. For instance, in a footnote on page 276 Joskowitz refers to copies of documents on the destruction of Roma in German-occupied Eastern Europe that the Wiener Library had received from Yad Vashem. The latter institution, then, acquired those documents from some other archives. When USHMM archivists travelled in Estonia in the 1990s for the purpose of identifying and copying the records relevant to the history of the Holocaust, they replicated the earlier efforts of their Estonian counterparts in acquiring the entire collection. The records on the mass murder of Jews and Roma in Nazi-occupied Estonia, as carried out and documented by the Estonian Security Police on German orders, have no subjective quality that would reflect on an archival institution where they have been stored. Those records can be studied either in “Holocaust” archives at Washington or in “non-Jewish” archives at Tallinn, to the same effect. For that matter, of the sixty-five different archives whose documents Michael Zimmermann has used for his opus magnum, just one depository can be accurately described as “Jewish/Holocaust”—The Auschwitz State Museum.

Given the thrust of Joskowitz’s argument, I am missing an analysis of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem comparable to that of USHMM in Washington, DC. To my knowledge, Yad Vashem has been practicing what Joskowitz identifies as the USHMM’s earlier policy on building archival collections, namely copying specifically “records relating to Jewish losses” (p. 180). The USHMM in the meantime has effectively dropped that practice, as transpires from its archival holdings. Some of the collections from the former Soviet archives acquired at different times by USHMM and Yad Vashem are the same. However, the former typically copied the entire collections while the latter only those files in the respective collections that have to do with the persecution and mass murder of Jews. Correspondingly, Joskowitz utilizes eight different archival collections from

USHMM and three from Yad Vashem—one of them Righteous among the Nations, which lists a single Rom (p. 43).

That goes beyond specific victim groups. To give just one example, the USHMM holds extensive documentation on the Russian Orthodox Church in German-occupied Baltic States that originates from the Latvian Central State Historical Archives. While the attitude of the Catholic Church toward the Nazi persecution of the Jews has been a subject of both debate and research in Holocaust studies that of the Orthodox Church hardly. Yet, there are just a few, if any, references to the Jews in those particular records acquired by USHMM. In all likelihood, the USHMM archivists who had gone to Riga to survey the available records proceeded from the principle of maintaining integrity of relevant archival collections, copying just everything in the process. This is of great benefit to historians who would eventually come to study those records. Though, in this particular case, the USHMM may not be the most obvious address for a scholar writing history of the Russian Orthodox Church to look for relevant source material.

Both Yad Vashem and USHMM operate a fellowship program. The former only provides a list of fellowships awarded in the period 1993–2014, while the latter of all fellowships awarded since 1997. In the twenty years, none of the 122 visiting fellows at Yad Vashem did research on the Roma genocide.⁸ In contrast, twenty out of 673 fellowships awarded by USHMM up until now, six of them in the past three years, have had the destruction of Roma as the (main) subject.⁹ One of the twenty fellows was Ari Joskowicz, in 2014. Taking into account the number and/or percentage of Jews and Roma who lost their lives in the Holocaust, the fellowship breakdown at Washington, DC is rather representative. When it comes to dedicated fellowship programs that scholars working on any aspect of the persecution of Roma throughout history can apply for, there is currently just one: Romani Rose Fellowship-in-Residence for doctoral and postdoctoral students

⁸ Yad Vashem, list of research fellowships awarded in 1993-2014, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://www.yadvashem.org/research/fellowships/postdoctoral-fellowships/past-research-fellows.html>.

⁹ USHMM, list of research fellowships awarded in 1997-2023, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://www.ushmm.org/research/about-the-mandel-center/all-fellows-and-scholars>. Within the broader subject, deportation of Romanian Roma to Transnistria has attracted the largest number of fellows, seven.

administered by the Heidelberg University Research Center on Antigypsyism.¹⁰ If fellowship breakdown is any indication to go by, then the USHMM appears less affected by history politics than the other two institutions. Here, academic research emerges as the antithesis of history politics rather than its moderation, testing Joskowicz’s determination to view the Holocaust history and its ex post facto interpretation as one whole—as quoted earlier in these pages.

Joskowicz praises “Holocaust and genocide archives” as an alternative to traditional state archives (p. 13). This may be true when it comes to convenience of using selected records from multiple archives on any given subject. At the same time, the principle of selectivity poses a problem when it comes to contextualization, that is, the records and collections a “Holocaust” archives decided against copying. To illustrate, USHMM had copied from the Latvian Central State Historical Archives the records related to Russian Orthodox Church in German-occupied Baltic States but not Protestant or Catholic Church; responses to the Nazi mass murder of Jews and Roma might meanwhile have come from all three denominations.¹¹

What Joskowicz calls “recontextualized state documents” (p. 13) is not ideal for historical research. Recontextualization, as a foundational principle of the “Holocaust” archives—or just any secondary document depository for that matter—is what has unintentionally created a victim hierarchy in reference to institutions holding major collections of witness testimonies in the first place. Ironically, by balking at assembling oral history collections, traditional state archives have also avoided the pitfall of recontextualization.

Joskowicz’s discussion of the controversy surrounding the place of the Nazi destruction of Roma in the USHMM’s permanent exhibition and archival holdings begs a comparable analysis of Romani politics of memory, specifically in Germany.¹² Particularly revealing is USHMM’s internal correspondence, as used by Joskowicz in Chapter 6 of his book; it would be instructive analyzing similar type of document to map the politics of history behind the establishment of the

¹⁰ University of Heidelberg, call for applications, August 28, 2023, accessed June 12, 2024, <https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/en/newsroom/romani-rose-fellowships-advertised>.

¹¹ *Archival Guide to the Collections of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* (Washington, DC: USHMM, 2014), 266.

¹² I argue that, insofar as unified Germany is concerned, one can safely speak of Romani memory politics.

Documentation and Cultural Center of German Sinti and Roma at Heidelberg in 1997. Insofar as Joskowicz deals with the institutional history of central “Jewish/Holocaust archives”—sans Yad Vashem—it would make sense looking at the Heidelberg documentation center as a Romani equivalent. Not unlike in the case of Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, it does not take long to establish that the documentation center mainly collects records related to German Sinti and Roma, as opposed to other groups persecuted by the Nazis.

The other side of Sinti and Roma reclaiming their tragic past and molding it into a universal story of suffering has been an unfortunate tendency to exercise control over a historical narrative. Of the many examples, I have the space to mention just a few. Joskowicz documents the struggle to insert a Romani member on the US Holocaust Memorial Council. Linguist Ian Hancock (b. 1942), who served on the council between 1997 and 2002, appeared unyielding and confrontational in the regular meetings.¹³ Michael Zimmermann had been effectively ostracized by the Central Council of the German Sinti and Roma and attacked by activist historians in the wake of the publication of his 1996 book—largely on account his estimates of Romani deaths.¹⁴ Founder and longstanding leader of the Central Council of the German Sinti and Roma, Romani Rose (b. 1946), has threatened to withdraw his organization’s support from the memorial to the Sinti and Roma Murdered under National Socialism in the works in Berlin unless the accompanying text referred to 500,000 Romani deaths—a grossly exaggerated estimate unsupported by historical evidence.¹⁵ Several times during my career, I have experienced one scholar writing on the Roma genocide not wanting to associate himself or herself with another—the phenomenon virtually unknown when it comes to the study of the Jewish Holocaust.

Meanwhile, I observe gradual professionalization of history when it comes to the study of the Roma genocide. One positive sign here is an increasing number of

¹³ Communication from Michael Gelb, assistant editor of *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* between 1997 and 2022, August 8, 2023.

¹⁴ See, for example, Wolfgang Wippermann, “Auserwählte Opfer?” *Shoah and Porrajmos im Vergleich: Eine Kontroverse* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2005), 46-47, 114-115, and 118-120.

¹⁵ Communication from Karola Fings, editor in chief of the forthcoming *Encyclopedia of the Nazi Genocide of Sinti and Roma in Europe* and “Voices of the Victims” segment of the Rom Archive, September 2, 2021. On Romani death statistics, see Anton Weiss-Wendt, “The Number of Romani Deaths during the Nazi Era Revisited,” in *A People Destroyed*, ed. Weiss-Wendt.

scholars with academic degrees in Romani studies who identify themselves as Roma or Sinti. Meanwhile, the factor of emotional engagement, whether on an individual or institutional level, in the subject of research has become less. I can volunteer no better example than the institution where I work, Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies in Oslo. Opened in 2005, the center's permanent exhibition on the history of the Holocaust deals with multiple victim groups alongside Jews, including Roma. The annual commemoration of the Holocaust on January 27 organized by the center always features representatives of those groups (e.g., Roma, peoples with disabilities, homosexuals). At some point, we urged the Norwegian government to allocate funds for a comprehensive study of the persecution of Norwegian Roma before, during, and after the Holocaust. Findings presented in the research project subsequently carried out by the center motivated the government to issue an official apology to the Norwegian Roma and offer a restitution package. In 2021 we upgraded the permanent exhibition by including additional panels on the interwar persecution of Roma in Norway and Europe, and listing the names of 62 Norwegian Roma murdered by the Nazis alongside those of 743 Norwegian Jews in the Memorial Hall.

None of the elements of politics of memory eloquently discussed by Joskowitz in his book applies to Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies. The center is on the government's budget. None of the permanent members of staff identifies himself or herself as either Jewish or Roma/Sinti. No interest organization ever influenced the center to assume any particular perspective on history. We believe that an accurate representation of history must necessarily include the destruction of Roma during the Holocaust, the notion superimposed by decades of academic research. Still an exception rather than a rule, the center in Oslo is part of an emerging tendency toward professionalization of history, here with respect to the contextualization of the Roma genocide.

There is no any sort of victim hierarchy or memory politics at work in a Holocaust historian expanding his or her quest onto the mass murder of Roma, not unlike a student of modern history taking up the subject of the Holocaust. Archives, in their traditional form, function merely as knowledge banks. Some of them are more user-friendly than the other, yet at the end of the day it comes down to the professional historian—regardless of his or her ethnic background and family history—to scrupulously analyze the body of information they contain. Back in

the 1990s, as told by Joskowitz, USHMM used the claim of universality to the story of the Holocaust to marginalize Roma in its permanent exhibition. One thing that has irreversibly changed since then is that the destruction of the Roma people by the Nazis and their allies during the Second World War now regarded a part of the universal message that the Holocaust conveys. I want to think of it as the logic of history. Funding, identified by Joskowitz alongside political origins and moral mission as central to the USHMM (p. 177), was certainly a factor that determined the scope of acquisitions from the Estonian National Archives. Yet, I would regard as equally important a factor here professional qualifications of the USHMM archivists and historians.

In conclusion, *Ash of Rain* constitutes a major contribution to Holocaust studies by expanding on the victim's perspective. Simultaneously, it sets a high standard when it comes to writing comparative history. The structural problem with Joskowitz's argument, as identified in this review article, might have been avoided had the author drawn a clearer line between memory politics and academic research and taken time to reflect on general archival principles and practices beyond what he is referring to as "Jewish/Holocaust archives." Reading Joskowitz's book makes me want know more about Jewish-Romani encounters during the Holocaust, though I acknowledge the practical difficulties in collecting relevant evidence.

Anton Weiss-Wendt, Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities, Oslo

How to quote this article:

Anton Weiss-Wendt, discussion of *Rain of Ash: Roma, Jews, and the Holocaust*, by Ari Joskowitz, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 25, no. 1 (2024), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/14964