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Holocaust education and the Palestinian cause: young Palestinian people in Sweden, and their perceptions of Holocaust education

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ABSTRACT

The paper investigates the experiences, perceptions and responses of immigrants with a Palestinian background in relation to learning about the Holocaust and the Palestinian cause in Swedish schools and visiting Holocaust sites. Data were collected from 50 immigrant students using audio-recorded and open-structured interviews. The results indicate that most informants had learned about the Holocaust in various classes, through readings, discussions and assignments, but very little about the Palestinian cause in textbooks or in school activities. The majority of informants were never asked to take part in Holocaust site visits, but if they were to be asked, 84% were willing to make such visits. The majority of informants expressed sympathy with Holocaust victims, but they were not satisfied, as they felt there was too much focus on the Holocaust and too little on the Palestinian cause. This lived experience of imbalance between the two subjects resulted in reluctant attitudes towards Holocaust education among the Palestinian pupils, but this should not mainly be understood as a result of anti-Semitic sentiments among them. The results indicate that Holocaust education in Swedish schools among youngsters with a Palestinian background can hardly be treated separately from the question of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict.

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Introduction

There has been continued discussion within and outside academia concerning how antisemitism in general, and among Muslim students in particular, affects these students' attitudes towards and willingness to take part in Holocaust education (Short 2013). The basic assumption is that Muslim students have stronger antisemitic attitudes than do students in general, and that this is related to the Israeli occupation and politics concerning Palestine and Palestinians. As we will show in our survey of the field, thus far the research on this matter has mainly focused on

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the experiences of teachers who teach about the Holocaust in predominantly Muslim schools. In our study, we have chosen to take a different approach by interviewing young adult (Muslim and Christian) Palestinians who live in one major city in Sweden about their experiences of school in general, and learning about the Holocaust in particular. Our aim has been to avoid any prejudgements or assumptions about our informants. In other words, we were interested in learning about how young Palestinians in Sweden perceive and frame their experience of learning about the Holocaust and the Palestinian Cause. We mean by this the Palestinians' strivings in general for an independent state, and the experience of the *al-Nakbah* or the 1948 Palestinian exodus, and subsequent occupation of Palestinian territories. Clearly there is not one Palestinian cause in the sense that not all Palestinians have the same understanding of how a Palestinian state ought to be established, nor a unified understanding of the past. However, this study is not a study of Palestinian perceptions of the Palestinian cause, but of the relationship between how young Palestinians perceive Holocaust education and teaching about the fate of Palestine within the Swedish school system. We were careful not to treat these young people as a homogenous group, and we also tried to select informants to be as representative as possible of the diversity (age groups, religion and gender) of the Palestinian diaspora in Sweden.

Palestinians migrated to/arrived in Sweden and become refugees/citizens during a number of different time periods. They came from Palestine directly or from the diaspora in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria. It is estimated that about 6000 to 7000 Palestinians presently live in different parts of Sweden. They are mainly refugees and what are termed *related cases*. In addition, there is a small group of Palestinian guest students. The first major wave of Palestinian immigrants to Sweden came from Jordan during the early 1970s. Large groups arrived from Syria and from Lebanon in the early 1980s and after 2011. Palestinians have mainly settled in metropolitan areas and university cities in Sweden. The Palestinian community in Sweden is heterogeneous in terms of its demographics, socioeconomic status, and religious affiliation. There are single people and young families as well as a group of older people, who have often arrived as related cases. Many are well educated, though women and the elderly in particular have limited schooling. Palestinians who came to Sweden in the 1970s and 1980s integrated well and settled down in Swedish society and joined the labour market. Similar to other immigrant groups, however, Palestinians have suffered more than Swedes in general when unemployment has risen. Based on this knowledge of the Palestinian diaspora in Sweden, we sampled 50 informants for in-depth interviews. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: In what ways do young people of Palestinian descent perceive and talk about Holocaust education in Swedish schools?
- RQ2: How do young people of Palestinian descent talk about visiting Holocaust sites?

- RQ3: In what ways do young people of Palestinian descent perceive and talk about teaching about the Palestinian Cause in Swedish schools?

Past research

Holocaust education is a field that has been developing over the past 30 years, and should be understood as an educational effort to teach beyond the historical event as such and its related facts. Lindquist (2011) claims:

... studying the Shoah becomes a vehicle that allows students to engage in sophisticated conversations that stretch their understanding of the world and their ability to evaluate the many complex, multi-layered moral situations they will encounter as adults. (p. 28)

This moral imperative can be understood as one driving force behind the increased interest in studying the Holocaust in the Western world as well as in visiting Holocaust memorial sites, both museums and authentic sites. For example, the number of visitors to the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau has increased from about 500,000 in 2000 to more than 2,000,000 in 2017 (Fleengård 2018). This aim comprises a context for how the topic is approached within school curricula and in specific educational settings. In this connection, there has also been increased discussion about how this topic is perceived by immigrant students, which means in this case school students who have immigrated from non-European or non-Western world countries, or have at least one parent with this experience (first- and second-generation immigrants, as defined by the OECD, from these countries) (Gryglewski 2010; Kühberger 2017). The discussion concerns whether these students feel that the Holocaust as a warning to mankind is relevant to them, and whether there is a need to include other historical atrocities closer in time or more relevant to the students' background.

Another stream of discussion on the relationship between teaching about the Holocaust and immigrant students concerns direct hostility towards or reluctance among these students in relation to studying the Holocaust. Exploring this phenomenon, we have found three recurring themes in the research relevant to our study. The *first theme*, antisemitism among Muslim students, is by far the most predominant in the literature. However, we have also included two minor but nonetheless important and relevant themes. In the relevant literature, the issue of antisemitism among Muslim students and how it affects teaching about the Holocaust seems to be a hot topic. There are discussions about whether or not antisemitism is increasing among these students, and whether it is a particular form of antisemitism. In a study by Short (2008), 15 teachers were interviewed in schools with a predominantly Muslim student body. He learned that the teachers did indeed encounter harshly antisemitic statements among their students, but judging from the amount of time they

devoted to the topic compared to the national curricula and other schools, his overall conclusion was that the case for antisemitism among Muslim students and its negative impact on Holocaust education is largely unwarranted. This study was later followed up by Short (2013), where he analysed the outcomes from a larger body of research literature and found a more complex and somewhat contradictory picture. He concluded that this is because the Muslim population is not monolithic, even if the vast majority have been exposed to antisemitic stereotypes. According to Short, it is impossible to make general statements regarding whether and how antisemitism will be played out among Muslim students during Holocaust education. In any event, he offered the following advice: 'No matter how amenable some Muslim students might be to learning about the Holocaust, teachers ought to be prepared for a hostile reaction from others' (p. 130).

The role of the media consumed by this target group has also been discussed in relation to antisemitic sentiments among Muslim students. The idea is that antisemitism travels from the Middle East to Western European Muslim communities, influencing individuals' perceptions of the Holocaust, as Whine (2013) suggested:

That Muslims, and particularly Arab Muslims, are interested in the Holocaust is obvious; it is constantly referred to in their media. But the overwhelming consensus is that while it did take place the number of Jewish deaths is exaggerated by Israel and its Zionist supporters. Moreover there is consensus around the idea that Europe promotes Holocaust commemoration to divert attention from Middle East tension and Israel's perceived war against Palestinians. (p. 38).

Jikeli (2013) described the role of the media from abroad together with the attitudes of parents, siblings and relatives as a discourse from 'back home.' In an interview study among Muslim students, Jikeli found evidence for talk about Holocaust denial, approval and reluctance to engage with this teaching among the students. However, there was also clear proof of a willingness to learn. The knowledge his informants had about the Holocaust was based on what they had been taught in schools which, however, often conflicted with the discourse from 'back home.'

The *second theme* can be related to the first one, in the sense that it strives to investigate how Holocaust education can be deployed to deal with antisemitism among Muslim students. This research has been carried out within the broader tradition of investigating how Holocaust education can provide general lessons and warnings and have universal implications. This tradition seeks to find a basis for how, through teaching, the historical event can be translated into both the lived experiences of the students and current challenges in democratic society (Ekman 2015; Foster 2013; Salmons 2003). Rutland (2010) suggested that Holocaust education should be evaluated for its effectiveness in combating racist beliefs and anti-Jewish feelings among Muslim students. She concluded her study by stating:

The most effective form of anti-racism education occurs when an empathetic teacher integrates it into a broad curriculum area, using the Holocaust to illustrate the evils of racism and conveying the message that Muslims as well as Jews could have suffered under Nazi racial ideology. (p. 89)

The key issue here is to include the Muslim students' identity as Muslims into Holocaust education.

This conclusion brings us to the *third relevant theme* in the research on Holocaust education, which is its relationship to the multicultural society. One main issue within this field of study is how students with an immigrant background in general, and a non-European background in particular, are included in or excluded from teaching processes, i.e., if these students are understood as a particular category who are perceived as reluctant to engage with Holocaust education, or if the teacher might consider Holocaust education less relevant to them. A particularly interesting focus was presented by Hinderliter Ortloff (2015, 219):

Teachers viewed the Holocaust—an historical event—as an easier way to approach the difficult topics of diversity, multiculturalism, and tolerance. In and of itself, this would not necessarily be problematic, but when coupled with the teachers' belief that non-ethnic Germans cannot really be included in Holocaust education, we have a -perhaps unintended -marginalization.

There seems to be an unintended and unconscious contradiction in what teachers are communicating when they look for the universal implications of the Holocaust, i.e., a general warning to mankind on the one hand, and not viewing non-Europeans as part of this historical experience on the other.

In conclusion, most of the research in this area has been based on studies of teachers' experiences of teaching Muslim students about the Holocaust. The results from earlier research are mixed. However, overall there is an emphasis on the difficulties associated with teaching Muslim students about the Holocaust, and on the often-conflicting discourses and perceptions involved in these learning processes.

Research method and conceptual approaches

A qualitative research method was used in this study, where data were collected from a sample of 50 immigrants with a Palestinian background living in Sweden. All of them were students within the Swedish educational system. The interviews had an open structure, using open-ended questions and a narrative interview approach. The interviews covered a broad range of topics concerning the informants' integration into and relations with Swedish society. A particular section of the interviews focused on informants' educational experiences in relation to the Holocaust and the Palestinian Cause/situation, and on participating in visits to Holocaust sites. Some interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis, while others were group interviews. The sample was based on a strategic selection in order to have a proper

distribution of gender, age, Muslims and Christians, and between those born in Sweden, those who arrived as children and the newly arrived. Contact was made with the assistance of school staff and representatives from civil society organisations, and then via the snowball effect, where informants already recruited helped to recruit other informants. This sampling method helped us not only to identify a good number of informants, but also provided a good diversity in the group, and a good representation of the young Palestinian diaspora within Sweden. All interviews were conducted in Arabic by a native speaking research in the team. Arabic was also the native spoken language among all informants. To some extent this provided a safer environment for the informants. The recordings were transcribed and translated into English, then back-translated to check the validity of the translation. [Table 1](#) below described the sample's demographics.

After a thorough reading of the interview transcripts, the research team worked collaboratively using a discursive analysis strategy. After categorising and identifying a number of themes in the material, the research group worked analytically, influenced by discursive psychology methods. The purpose of the present study is to learn how young Palestinians in Sweden perceive and frame their experiences of learning about the Holocaust within relation to the Palestinian Cause. More specifically, the focus of our study is on how different narratives and discourses develop and take shape in the speech acts of the young people interviewed.

In the analysis of the empirical data, we focused on how Holocaust education and the Palestinian Cause can be traced, and how representations are constructed, established and sometimes even undermined in the students' narratives (Potter and Edwards 1999). In this context, we thus consider talk to be part of an ongoing social practice, as well as part of the *social construction of reality* (Potter 2003). Today, ongoing discussions in, for example, discursive psychology are leading to increased cross-fertilisation in the field of discourse analysis (Cresswell and Smith 2012). Influenced by discursive psychology, but also partly by poststructuralists such as Judith Butler, we aimed to study how the young interviewees are constructed as actors operating within a specific linguistic and rhetorical field of enabling constraints (Butler 1997).

If a performative provisionally succeeds (and I will suggest that "success" is always and only provisional), then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices.

Table 1. Distributions and percentages in the sample by gender, age, place of birth, and religion.

Gender		Age		Place of birth		Religion	
Male	Female	15–18	19–25	In Sweden	Outside Sweden	Islam	Christianity
19	31	21	29	15	35	45	5
38%	62%	42%	48%	30%	70%	90%	5%

It is not simply that the speech act takes place within a practice, but that the act is itself a ritualized practice (Butler 1997, 51).

In looking more closely at the empirical data and the chosen excerpts, we not only studied how the young people themselves perceive and understand Holocaust education and the Palestinian Cause, but also how talk and performative actions are embedded in sociocultural and historical perceptions of these issues within a certain diaspora and community. The statements draw on and are partly constituted by conventions and pre-cognitions concerning Holocaust education and other related topics. Through careful analysis of the material, we selected a number of key excerpts that were analysed more thoroughly. The main focus lies on the repetition of citations, making up a certain volume of similar forms of statements, and thus giving us access to the accumulated forces of attitudes and sentiments present in this particular group of students.

Results

The results presented here are aligned with the three main themes that were the intended focus of the interviews: 1) Holocaust education in general; 2) visiting Holocaust memorial sites, i.e. authentic sites and; finally 3) the issue of the Palestinian Cause. Within each theme, we will show the recurring ways of relating to each phenomenon and analyse the similarities and contradictions between the informants.

Holocaust education in Sweden

Teaching about the Holocaust is compulsory within the Swedish school system, and students are encouraged to take part in Holocaust Remembrance Day. It became clear that all our informants had had experiences of Holocaust education, and most of them recall it being taught mainly in the ninth grade, which is correct according to the curriculum. The informants were generally very interested in Holocaust education, but they thought there was too much focus on it, as it was repeated in many lessons.

Every year we learnt about the Holocaust and so many times in grades 7, 8, and 9 ...
(Female, 24 years old, born in Sweden)

We only learnt about the Holocaust in ninth grade ... but not much ... students read a book about Anne Frank's Diary as it was highly recommended ... very popular ... But I didn't read it. As I wasn't interested.

(Female, 20 years old, born in Sweden).

Without any questions being asked, the respondents quickly made connections with Israel and Zionism. This does not necessarily mean that they were reluctant to sympathise with Jewish suffering during the Holocaust. On the contrary, as in

the quote below, one informant was careful about making a distinction between the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, and Israelis and Zionists.

We studied the Holocaust too much especially in grade 9; we saw films on what Hitler did to Jews ... Jews are different than Israelis and Zionists ... yes we studied a lot, took exams and answered questions.

(Female, 18 years old, born in Sweden)

Others, however, talked about teaching about the Holocaust as something that recurred every year in secondary and upper secondary school. These students also tended to make connections with the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We talked about the Holocaust from the seventh to twelfth grades. It was the same thing every year. It seems awful to talk so much about it, because it is awful. They constantly talk about how we should not repeat history, and that is also why we asked the teachers about what was going on between the Palestinians and Israelis, the conflict, this history is also repeating itself. It is awful to talk about it, when you talk about it for six years. We started to question why our people [the Palestinians] die, our people die too. We are forgotten. Coming from the Middle East, you feel that you are an outsider at school. There is more focus on Europe and European culture (Female, 19 years old, born in Sweden).

Yes the topic affected us too, a lot, many got sad, upset and started cursing Hitler ... why he did that ... Haram ... they are human ... (Female, 19 years old, born in Sweden)

What we learnt from the informants was that they considered the Holocaust to be well covered in their education, but they were not particularly interested in this topic being taught in every grade, as is often the case. While they sympathise with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, they do not connect those victims with the people they refer to as Israelis. Obviously however, they do not disconnect their own identity from the teaching that they received about the Holocaust. On the one hand, they sympathised with the suffering of the Jewish victims and, on the other, they felt left out of the narrative being taught because of their identity and history as Palestinians. It appears that a *cognitive conflict* was generated and activated by teaching about the Holocaust in their Swedish schools. The topic of the Holocaust is almost always tightly connected to issues related to the Palestinian Cause and the students' own experiences of being fugitives and exiles. There is a cognitive dissonance, in the sense that two conflicting topics are present in the Holocaust education: one explicit – the Holocaust, and one more implicit – the Palestinian Cause.

Visiting Holocaust sites

Since the turn of the millennium, the number of study tours to Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has increased greatly, and the number of Swedes making this trip has increased from 10,000 per year in 2000 to more than 45,000 in 2017

(Fleengård 2018). This means that a significant number of Swedish students take part in these field trips. For this reason, questions about informants' willingness to take part in such activities were posed as well as questions concerning students' experiences. It was clear that all informants were aware of this activity, and they had no problem expressing their attitudes. In their answers, they commonly made connections with the Israel and Palestine conflict, but the conclusions they drew differed.

The results show that none of them had visited any of the Holocaust sites. Only two were asked to visit but did not go, while 42 were never asked to visit and six of them did not answer the question. Thirty-seven (88% of all informants) said they would be willing to make the visit if they were asked: 25 of them female and 12 male; 12 born in Sweden and 25 born outside Sweden. But eight stated that they would not be willing to visit even if asked, half of them male, and half born in Sweden. Those who would refuse to go if they were asked gave a variety of reasons. In some cases, they said that their families would not allow it, while others referred to friends. It was also common to refuse due to the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

Others said that they would go and stated a range of reasons:

I would like to go and see the Holocaust sites because this happened before the conflict started between Israel and Palestine. All those who were killed were families, just people and children. The only thing is that they were Jews. Our cause had not started at that time. Those who were killed were innocent (Female, 17 years old, born in Sweden).

In the quote above, it is clear that the informant has sympathy for the victims, and that she would like to deepen her knowledge by visiting Holocaust sites. However, this is apparently conditional on the victims being 'victims' according to her, and located in a time and place before the Israeli-Palestinian conflict began. A male informant took a different stand:

Why should I go there? As there are many cases in history like Hitler ... Why consider Hitler to be unique ... he is not ... He is a criminal like many others who passed through history. Like the Belgium king who killed about 20 million Africans. But nobody talks about that. Because he is royal, and a royal family can do this. Europeans are jealous of Hitler, but he was an ordinary person who got power. If I want to continue to follow the Jews cause ... graves [traveling to Holocaust memorial sites]. It will never end. Everyone has their own problems. But I will allow my daughter to visit. She will learn about it. (Male, 25 years old, born outside Sweden)

It was somewhat disturbing to the informants that Jewish suffering is focused on in their schooling, but this should not be understood as a desire to refrain from participating in the education or visiting the sites. At the same time, there are examples of informants who showed interest in the topic as such, without making any particular connections with contemporary conflicts. Even so, we noted that the

informant below still felt the need to declare that he believes the Holocaust did take place, a clarification made in a context where this is not always taken for granted.

I want to know [by visiting authentic sites] how things could have reached the point to cause them to burn Jews ... a natural human being is not born with so much hatred, to do such things. I want to understand what things caused them to reach such a stage ... I believe Hitler burned them.

(Male, 20 years old, born outside Sweden)

In some interviews, it became clear that there had been a problem of communication and understanding between the informant and their teachers. This seems to have resulted in the teachers being reluctant to include these students in any study trips to Holocaust memorial sites. It should also be noted that a stubborn attitude on the part of a teenager may develop into something different later on, as this quotation shows:

When I was in school, I did not make such visits because no one asked me to participate and if they did I would have refused to go ... I was extreme in my views when I was in school ... my thinking is different now. I did not know about this issue ... I feel now I was wrong, as I did not participate in these activities and visits ... if I did, I would have had much more information by now ... which is better ... I would encourage refugees to participatebut now I participate in such Holocaust activities through my job ... (Male, 25 years old, born in Sweden)

In relation to the study trips to Holocaust memorial sites, we learnt that the students closely connected the Holocaust and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but we also learnt that there was an interest in visiting these sites and a willingness to refrain from Holocaust denial. However, in order to justify visits to Holocaust sites, the students also tended to treat the teaching as focused on historical facts and the past, thus avoiding activating the cognitive dissonance between Holocaust education and the Palestinian Cause.

The Palestinian cause and Swedish schools

We realised that the Palestinian Cause, or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is not well covered in Swedish textbooks, nor is it in the curriculum or covered in educational research. Therefore, we would be on thin ice if we tried to draw any conclusions other than those that can be based on the information provided by the informants and other research or data. Still, the issue was clearly present in the interviews and can hardly be omitted from our analysis of the informants' experience of Holocaust education.

I studied all my life in Swedish schools. We did not study anything about the Palestinian Cause, or discuss it. Neither teachers nor students talked about Palestine and the Palestinian Cause, nor in all classes ... Nothing in the textbooks about it, as the Arab and Palestinian history is not important to Swedes and other Scandinavians and European countries. It is just this history [the Holocaust] that is important to them. But for sure they teach and talk about the Holocaust in schools and textbooks, 100%.

There are activities, programs, and lectures about the Holocaust. They go and visit Holocaust sites and concentration camps in Poland (Male, 25 years old, born in Sweden).

The informants also reflected on how they were affected as Palestinians by what they perceived to be a unilateral interest in the Holocaust. From their perspective, they felt that the topic, intentionally or not, helps to justify Israeli aggression towards Palestinians.

One might ask ... why did they do this. The teacher would say ... this has been going on for so long, so we got used to it ... in the Holocaust so many Jews were killed ... but they do not realize that there are many Palestinians who also got killed. This affects us when we get older, you start feeling that the Israelis have the right to take land that belongs to others ... it affects you ... I was frustrated and disappointed, because there was no mention of Palestine. (Female, 18 years old, born in Sweden)

In some instances, this train of thought is further developed into traditional antisemitic stereotypes, suggesting that a Jewish lobby is manipulating the Swedish educational system.

The Jewish lobby has influence in Sweden. They have the power and ability to influence the Swedish parliament and society as well and what they teach in schools. (Female, 20 years old, born outside Sweden)

In our view, however, this frustration is not driven by antisemitic sentiments on the part of the informants, but instead by the educational system's general reluctance to include the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in instruction. This is particularly evident when students are actively prevented from, or forced not to, talk about this topic, even when it is not brought up in conjunction with the Holocaust. The informants recognise that individual teachers can be supportive of them, but that the system as such is not.

But now and then we started talking about Islamic religion ... then Palestine. The teachers here stop pupils from talking about Palestine ... this has happened to me many times. But my teacher likes Palestine ... so he talked with me, and said he understands, but other teachers do not like to talk about this ... this depends on the teacher. When we started talking about Palestine, the teacher immediately stopped us and did not allow us to talk ... keep it for after class ... you only want to give your opinion ... this depends on the teachers' perspectives and opinions. (Female, 18 years old, born in Sweden)

In all schools I've been in ... nothing about Palestine ... There was no Palestine in the textbooks. (Female, 17 years old, born in Sweden)

Most maps I saw had Israel written on them, but I think I saw a map with Palestine written on it. (Male, 15 years old, born outside Sweden)

... teachers with Israel and would say Israel is a democratic state ... and when they give us assignments, they want us to take the Israeli perspective and say that Israel has the

right ... In secondary school they talked about Israel and said it has the right. The teacher (she) started baiting Palestinian students. (Male, 18 years old, born in Sweden)

There does not seem to be a relationship between place of birth, religion or gender and how the informants perceived teaching about the Holocaust and teaching about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Our findings do have something to say however about both the lack of integration in Swedish society in general, and about the role of the educational system in particular. Clearly, the students' perceptions of a lack of coverage of and teaching about the Palestinian Cause and 'their' side of the conflict are largely in line with the content of the Swedish school curriculum. This imbalance between how different tragedies and key historical conjunctures are treated in textbooks, teaching and study visits to certain sites provides a basis for understanding some of the cognitive conflicts activated around the questions focused on in the present study.

Conclusions and discussion

In the present study, we investigated how students with a Palestinian background (Muslims and Christians) take part in Holocaust education, and how they relate to and address this topic. In the literature, there has been a basic assumption that Muslim students have stronger antisemitic attitudes than students in general actually have. Our survey of the research shows that there is a lack of studies on these young people's own perceptions of and attitudes towards Holocaust education. The research consists mainly of studies of the experiences of teachers who teach about the Holocaust in predominantly Muslim schools.

The findings show that the informants consider the Holocaust to be almost too well covered in their education. They often stated that they were not particularly interested in this topic. Our findings also show that a *cognitive conflict* is activated by teaching about the Holocaust in Swedish schools. In most cases, the students connect questions about the Holocaust with the Palestinian Cause. Thus, according to the students' perceptions of the teaching, two conflicting topics are always co-present. This intermingling of the teaching about the Holocaust in Swedish schools and students' perceptions and feelings of being exiled, marginalised and treated differently creates a cognitive dissonance. This is also evident when we look at how the students approach the issue of visiting different Holocaust sites. The Palestinian students were interested in visiting these sites, but they also tried to find ways of justifying such visits. One way was to think about these visits as being focused on historical facts and past historical periods and events, thus disconnecting the visits from the more general issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The findings also indicate that in order to understand the results of our investigation, it is necessary to contextualise them in relation to the much larger question of Palestinian young people's feelings of marginalisation, exile and not being seriously listened to.

The present findings agree with the results and conclusions of previous studies, as reported in the literature review above (Whine 2013; Jikeli 2013; Ekmann 2015; Foster 2013; Salmons 2003; Rutland 2010). It is important to investigate how we can use teaching about the Holocaust to deal with antisemitism and not to defeat this purpose. At the same time, it is important to ensure that students do not feel alienated and excluded from the school system – something the present findings warn us about. There was a strong suspicion among the Palestinian students in this study about what was driving what they perceived to be too much teaching about the Holocaust, its goals and how it is being done, as in their eyes this teaching often takes Israeli perspectives. At the same time, not having the same concerns about the teaching about the Palestinian Cause could result in reinforcing this notion among students. Finally, the specific teaching that appears in the present study is mainly focused on European culture and interests. An overall conclusion from our study is that it would be better to encourage teachers to plan and teach about the Holocaust to students with a non-European background using a multi-perspective approach and including historical events and conflicts that are close to the students' own experiences. In addition, we would argue that the Holocaust is atypical in the sense that we have clearly defined perpetrators and victims, and the former acknowledge their historical guilt. Other historical atrocities are seldom so clearly defined, which calls for a study that enables the interpretation of highly conflicting historical narratives. Obviously, this is the case when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We do see a paradox in the use of Holocaust studies to sustain democratic values among Palestinian students, in particular when that narrative is atypical in its clear distinction between the victims and the villains. It will be difficult for Palestinians to translate the righteous victims of the Holocaust into their understanding and lived experience of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In conclusion, the Holocaust should be studied on its own historical premises, and it should be made clear that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be studied on a different occasion. And finally, it is relevant to compare the historical events, but inadvisable to equate them.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Sami Adwan was born in 1954. A Palestinian educator specialized in pedagogies, schoolbooks and research. Was Vice president for Academic Affairs at Hebron University and dean of school of education at Bethlehem University. Since the last 25 years, he has been engaged in the role of education in peacebuilding and in religious education toward tolerance, togetherness and understanding among all faiths.

Christer Mattsson is born 1971. Prior to his academic career, he was well recognized for his work on democratic education and preventing radicalization into violent extremism. Today he is the director of the Segerstedt institute at the University of Gothenburg. His research mainly focus on pedagogical work to prevent extremism and polarization.

Thomas Johansson is born 1959. His PhD thesis is on youth and media culture (1992). Johansson also has a background as a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist. Johansson was promoted to professor in social psychology in Skövde, in 2001. In 2010 he became a full professor of pedagogy at the faculty of education, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

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