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# Countering antisemitism through Holocaust education. A comparative perspective on Scotland and Austria

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## ABSTRACT

There is an emerging debate in the field as to whether or not Holocaust education is effective in combating antisemitism. This paper aims to provide explanations for the frequently observed ineffectiveness of Holocaust education in reducing antisemitism by examining two cases that are in many ways diametrically opposed: Scotland as a former part of the Allied Forces and Austria as a post-Nazi state. The case studies focus on overlapping, contrasting and conflicting understandings of Holocaust education and the role of antisemitism within it. The perspective is primarily sociological, inspired by Critical Theory. Evidence is based on research papers and basic documents from the field of Holocaust education (curricula, websites of key actors and educational materials). It is interpreted according to the principles of qualitative content analysis. Findings suggest that in both cases opportunities to address and reduce antisemitism are being missed: In the Scottish case, the teaching of the Holocaust tends to downplay the specific Jewish experience and largely fails to address antisemitism, or does so in a very simplistic way. In the Austrian case, antisemitism is talked about, but in the context of widespread secondary antisemitism it risks being explained and understood in ways that are themselves antisemitic.

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## Introduction

Calls for Holocaust education are a common response to the rise of antisemitism (Pearce et al., 2020, p. 151). However, the assumption that Holocaust education automatically immunises against antisemitism has not been supported by research (Pistone et al., 2021). There is an emerging debate in the field as to why Holocaust education often fails to combat antisemitism. This study contributes to this debate by examining two cases that are in many ways diametrically opposed: Scotland as a former part of the Allied Forces and Austria as a post-Nazi state. The case studies focus on overlapping, contrasting and conflicting understandings of Holocaust education and the role of antisemitism within it. By examining the role of the Jewish experience of the Holocaust and antisemitism in Holocaust education in different, in some respects diametrically

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opposed, national contexts, this paper seeks to contribute to the fields of Holocaust education research, antisemitism studies, and cross-national comparative studies. It does so by offering a range of explanations for the ineffectiveness of Holocaust education in reducing antisemitism.<sup>1</sup> The perspective adopted is primarily sociological, inspired by the Critical Theory (CT) of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, most notably Theodor W. Adorno. CT provides a sophisticated concept of antisemitism based on social theory and offers fundamental thoughts on education after Auschwitz and combating antisemitism. In this paper, antisemitism is defined as an ideology that manifests itself in attitudes and actions towards (perceived or actual) Jewish people, collectives and, in many cases, the State of Israel (IHRA, n.d.), but also as an overarching world view that sees Jews as the cause of all evil (Rensmann, 2020).<sup>2</sup> Holocaust education is seen as one possible, but not the automatic or only way to combat it.

The paper begins with an overview of the current state of research and the theoretical perspectives applied. This is followed by a discussion of the research questions, objectives and methodology. The focus is then on the cross-country comparison, the results of which are discussed in detail and concluded.

## Literature review

There is a lively debate about what, if any, lessons can be learned from the Holocaust.<sup>3</sup> While sceptics such as Peter Novik (1999) argue that due to the extreme nature of the situation it would be almost impossible to extract lessons for our daily lives, Nicolas Kinloch (2001, p. 9) identifies a broad agreement that Holocaust education can encourage students to examine their own attitudes towards minorities and help to make a repetition of the Holocaust less likely. Geoffrey Short (2003a, p. 285), for example, stresses that students would learn “to treat any manifestation of racism with concern”. Whether Holocaust education should also contribute to combating antisemitism, and whether it is successful in doing so, is a question on which there are differing views and surprisingly little academic research, although weighty voices such as the historian Yehuda Bauer (1996) have consistently emphasised the importance of the ideological motivation for the Holocaust, and therefore, one could argue, antisemitism must also be at the core of teaching.

In their major study of teaching and learning about the Holocaust (TLH) and its effectiveness in preventing antisemitism, Isabella Pistone et al. (2021, p. 8) criticise the “limited focus on antisemitism” in research on educational initiatives. They analysed 117 practice-based TLH studies, the majority of which were published in the last 20 years, mostly in the United States, followed by the United Kingdom and other Western countries. In 43% antisemitism was “either not presented at all or is not a part of the analysis” (Pistone et al., 2021, p. 33).

Despite this research gap, there are few studies on the impact of Holocaust education on antisemitism, some of which show that Holocaust education can have a positive effect on reducing antisemitism. Evaluating the impact of a programme designed to facilitate Polish students’ engagement with historical Jewish heritage in their places of residence, Anna Stefaniak and Michał Bilewicz (2016, p. 64) were able to demonstrate that students not only showed an increase in knowledge of Jewish history, but also “perceived Jews as more similar to themselves (greater inclusion of Jews in the self), and developed more positive attitudes towards them”. A Scottish study by Paula Cowan and Henry Maitles

(2007) also found positive effects. In terms of perceived understanding of antisemitism, only 3.5% of the students who had not studied the Holocaust in primary school could define it, compared to around 22% of the core sample.

On the other hand, several studies found small or no effects on attitudes towards Jews, or even negative effects. For example, Cowan and Maitles (2011, p. 175), in their study of the effects of a memorial visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau, were puzzled to find that knowledge about antisemitism was not the area of greatest growth among participating (Scottish) students. In the same study, two of their interviewees expressed concern that the Lessons from Auschwitz project in which they were involved focused too much on Jews. For Cowan and Maitles (2011, p. 174), this raised questions about students' knowledge of the historical context, e.g. whether they knew that the genocide of the Jews was different from the genocide of other groups. Andy Pearce et al. (2020, p. 156 f.) found similar conceptual misunderstandings in their study on England: Students' explanations of why Jews were specifically targeted for mass murder were often underdeveloped. Their explanations for why Jews in particular were persecuted were based on gross errors. For example, the proportion of the Jewish population in Germany in the 1930s was vastly overestimated, and the stereotype that Jews were particularly rich and profited in times of crisis was reproduced. Pearce et al. (2020, p. 158) conclude that due to the absence of key contextual historical information "students often sought not to understand the irrational world view of the perpetrator but rather to focus on the potential failing of the victims". In terms of knowledge of the term and definition of antisemitism, Stuart Foster et al. (2016, p. 105) found in their survey of over 7000 English secondary school students that 68% did not know what antisemitism was, even after receiving Holocaust education.

Regarding the lack of focus on antisemitism in the classroom Pistone et al. (2021, p. 8) suggest some reasons, such as antisemitism not being seen as a structural problem, or being seen as a form of racism or an expression of intolerance. Furthermore, antisemitism is often simply not included among the lessons to be learned from the Holocaust. According to Pistone et al. (2021, p. 33 f.) the fate of the Jews during the Holocaust is often used "as an educational resource to arouse empathy in relation to how other groups are suffering today, but rarely to counter or prevent antisemitism". This is supported by the results of a study by Karen Spector (2005, p. 253) on the framing of the Holocaust in English classes at two US high schools: In her research, she found 368 conclusions about content, human nature and action that students said they had drawn from studying the Holocaust. The dangers of antisemitism were not among them. Students learn about anti-racism rather than a critique of antisemitism, notes Spector (2005, p. 21). Scott Alan Metzger (2012, p. 405), in his research on Holocaust education through the medium of film, also found that students' perceptions of antisemitism no longer referred exclusively to Jews, and concluded that in applying the humanising lessons (viewing the Holocaust primarily as a warning to all humanity), students broadly generalised the Holocaust out of its specific historical context. Early on, Carole Ann Reed (1993, pp. 2 f.) pointed out that a specific understanding of anti-racism could sometimes lead to antisemitism not being recognised as a problem. In her study of the large-scale US Holocaust education initiative "Facing History and Ourselves", she mentions that it is the perception of Jews as Whites that makes them seem privileged today and renders antisemitism invisible. Accordingly, it can be assumed that the current image of Jews and understanding of antisemitism also has an impact on the historical interpretation and teaching of the Holocaust (e.g. applying

the Whiteness frame can lead to perceiving Jews as privileged and therefore not legitimate victims).<sup>4</sup> In this context, the “no problem thesis” postulated by Short (1991, p. 39) should be emphasised: Teachers avoid addressing antisemitism because they believe that antisemitism is not a current problem among their pupils or in general. Another explanation is offered by Spector (2005): At several points in her study, she notes that Christian convictions influence the teaching of the Holocaust and, in particular, the presentation of antisemitism. Some teachers were afraid of upsetting pupils and their parents and avoided discussing the Christian roots of antisemitism and the long history of antisemitism; other teachers had a lack of understanding of Christian hostility to Jews themselves. Maitles (2008, p. 348) makes a similar point with reference to Short (2003b, p. 124): Successful teaching of the Holocaust in a predominantly Christian society depends on students’ – and, one might add, teachers’ – perceptions of Jews and Judaism, and of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. To summarise: All of the above studies show that the socio-ideological climate – be it awareness of antisemitism in general or awareness of the Christian roots of antisemitism – in which Holocaust education takes place has a significant impact on its effectiveness in combating antisemitism.

In what follows, I propose to approach the question of the (in)effectiveness of Holocaust education in combating antisemitism through the lens of Critical Theory (CT) and, in particular, its concept of antisemitism.

### Theoretical perspective

In his writings, Adorno (2005a, p. 191) links education with the effort to form mature and more or less autonomous subjects in order to prevent a “relapse into barbarism”. With this in mind, he stresses that “[t]he premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again” (Adorno, 2005a, p. 191). In Adorno’s view, however, education cannot be understood in a social vacuum or as a panacea for social and economic inequalities. The potential of education must be seen as limited, and this should apply all the more to Holocaust education, which is very limited in time. Adorno’s interest in education stems from the following consideration: “Since the possibility of changing the objective – namely societal and political – conditions is extremely limited today, attempts to work against the repetition of Auschwitz are necessarily restricted to the subjective dimension” (Adorno, 2005a, p. 192). The “turn to the subject” Adorno (2005a, p. 193) proclaimed was an important premise for Holocaust education: He did not believe that appeals to eternal values would help much, because the very people who were prone to commit such atrocities would simply shrug their shoulders. Nor did he believe that explaining the positive qualities of persecuted minorities would be of much use. In the context of post-Nazi Germany, Adorno (2005a, p. 192 f.) came to the conclusion that the “roots must be sought in the persecutors, not in the victims”, which can still be seen as an important impulse for today’s Holocaust education.

This is very much in line with CT’s understanding of antisemitism, which Adorno (1951/2005b, p. 110) once called the “rumour about the Jews”. CT usually speaks of the image of the Jew, understood as a projection of the antisemite, which is why the antisemite is placed at the centre of the analysis rather than the Jew (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/2002, pp. 137–172). Furthermore, CT understands antisemitism as more than a negative perception or attitude towards Jews, and as distinct from social or religious prejudice.

Antisemitism is above all an anti-modern worldview that sees the existence of Jews as the cause of all problems – political, social, religious, moral or economic. Unlike other false generalisations or group discriminations known from forms of racism “antisemitism represents a form of myth or paranoia that serves as a container in which all of one’s fears, projections, problems, and unacknowledged desires can be placed” (Rensmann, 2020, p. 84). Drawing on CT, Lars Rensmann (2017, p. 407) defines modern antisemitism as a comprehensive world explanation, an ideology that explains the abstract, complex and transformative aspects of modern society and personifies blame for the shortcomings and failures of the modern world. Accordingly, antisemitism is a specific form of personification of (anonymous) social processes and structures, which can easily condense into a conspiracy myth (Rensmann, 2020, p. 84). It is this focus on society – and not just on the subject – that led Adorno (2005a, p. 203) to call for education to be transformed into sociology in the aftermath of Auschwitz. However, the focus on the antisemites and their concept of “the Jew” should not lead to a neglect of the “connection between concept and reality”, as the critical theorist David Seymour (2000, p. 298) points out. It was and is the Jews, in their flesh and blood, who suffered and continue to suffer from antisemitism, a fact that contrasts with the current trend to de-Judaise the Holocaust.

The term de-Judaisation is derived from Manfred Gerstenfeld (2009) and refers to the marginalisation of the Jewish experience in the Holocaust – and one could add the marginalisation of the impact of the Holocaust on Jewish generations after Auschwitz. Gerstenfeld (2009, p. 79) uses this term to subsume a variety of distortions of Holocaust memory: First, the expansion of the term Holocaust to various degrees to include people other than Jews who were part of a genocide or who were murdered or died in the Second World War; second, the erasure or minimisation of the Jewish character of the victims. He notes that this is often accompanied by taking the Holocaust out of its specific historical context and paying minimal attention to its uniqueness in order to promote a general message for humanity. Gerstenfeld associates de-Judaisation above all with the universalisation of Holocaust memory. As Seymour (2017, p. 20) states, the Holocaust gets “emptied of the particularist elements of its historical occurrence, including, of course, its specifically Jewish dimensions (among which is the presence of antisemitism)”. It is presented in abstract and universal terms, although personalised, in order to fulfil the symbolic role assigned to it. In Seymour’s eyes, this reflects Adorno and Horkheimer’s thesis of the domination of the universal over the particular, and leads to the emphasis on the particular – the Jewish experience – being perceived as an anachronism (Seymour, 2017, p. 28) – and, one might add, as an obstacle to contemporary human rights-oriented Holocaust education.

There is extensive evidence of de-Judaisation or minimisation of the specifically Jewish experience of the Holocaust in Holocaust education (e.g. Cowan, 2018; Grunwald-Spier, 2021). But de-Judaisation is not happening everywhere, and is not the only possible explanation for the ineffectiveness of Holocaust education in reducing antisemitism, as the following case studies will show.

### **Research question, aims and methodology**

The explanations offered by Pistone et al. (2021) and others for the failure to address antisemitism in Holocaust education remain rather general; specific contexts have not been

sufficiently considered. This contrasts with the understanding postulated by Ieva Gundare and Pieter Batelaan (2003, p. 151 f.):

Holocaust education is not, and should not be, the same everywhere. It is dependent on the context of the country in question and relates to the local history of anti-Semitism, local attitudes and the extent of collaboration or resistance during this period.

Other contextual factors include the existent educational culture, legislation and availability of materials (Gundare & Batelaan, 2003, p. 152). Following this postulated need to analyze Holocaust education within its regional context including local traditions and manifestations of antisemitism, this paper seeks to contribute to the debate on why Holocaust education often fails to combat antisemitism by conducting a cross-case analysis following the presentation of two separate, single-case studies (Yin, 2017, p. 54 ff.). The analysis focuses on the following question: What role does the specifically Jewish experience of the Holocaust and antisemitism play in Holocaust education in different, and in several respects diametrically opposed national contexts?

Cross-national research has the advantage that nation states have well-defined institutional and geographical boundaries. At the same time, there is a risk of treating nation states or national societies as quasi-natural starting points, when of course they are anything but natural. Moreover, nation-state sampling may underestimate the impact of globalisation and transnationalisation (Witte & Schmitz, 2021). Regarding the purpose of this research it is important to emphasise that nation states have sovereignty over education systems and that their specific histories have a significant influence on the historical narratives told in the classroom. At the same time, and certainly reflected in the case studies considered here, a strong effect of globalisation is evident, particularly in Holocaust remembrance and education (Levy & Sznajder, 2006).

The strategy for sampling was maximum contrast, assuming that “[t]he probability of fruitful comparisons is increased very greatly by choosing different and widely contrasting countries” (Glaser & Strauss, 2006, p. 59). Maximum sample variation makes it possible to explore the range of variation and difference in the field, even with few cases (Flick, 2010, p. 165), and allows us to explore the conceptually relevant heterogeneity of the research object (Dimbath et al., 2018). For this purpose, Scotland and Austria were selected as cases for a cross-country comparison. With Scotland, a country was chosen that was part of the allied forces that defeated National Socialism. The Holocaust did not have a direct impact on Scotland, although there are many links when one goes into detail. Austria, on the other hand, was part of the German Reich from 1938 and many Austrians took part in the industrial mass murder of Jews as perpetrators or bystanders or were indifferent to it.<sup>5</sup> On the side of the victims, more than 66,000 Austrian Jews were murdered in the course of the Holocaust, many more were deprived of their dignity, property and homeland (Bailer & Ungar, 2013, p. 73). But there is maximum contrast between Scotland and Austria not only in terms of their historical role in the Second World War. Austria is a federal state, but school curricula apply nationwide and to all types of schools. Discussion of the Holocaust and antisemitism is compulsory in the current curricula. Scotland, as one of the four countries that make up the United Kingdom, has full sovereignty over the education sector and therefore the curriculum, which still does not mention the Holocaust and antisemitism. This lack of direction in Scottish policy makes it difficult to draw general conclusions about the approaches adopted, but teaching practices in Austria

also vary widely, so the aim of this study is limited to the level of government policy and key actors. However, through synthesis with existing research literature, it is possible to identify some general trends in the approaches taken.

For the case studies, both research papers and basic documents from the field of Holocaust education were used as sources. Curricula, policy papers, websites of key actors and occasional educational materials derived from these websites form part of the analysis, as they exist for both cases. Other sources, such as textbooks, were not evaluated, but are covered in the literature on the Austrian case. In the Scottish literature, textbook analysis does not play a major role, but there is, for example, extensive reflection on the impact of citizenship education. As a result, there are different emphases in the case studies, which can also be seen as representative of the different approaches.

The corpus of material was compiled in January–February 2023. Sampling was based on the principle of theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 2006, p. 60 ff.). In order to ensure a theory-driven and methodologically controlled approach, sources were analysed following the steps of qualitative content analysis as described by Philipp Mayring (2022). The analysis was centred on deductively formed categories and followed the procedure of structuring according to content (Mayring, 2022, pp. 89–93). The aim of the data analysis was to uncover patterns, determine meanings and construct conclusions about each case (Kohlbacher, 2006). The overall aim was to analyse the case study data by constructing explanations about each case (Yin, 2017, p. 178 ff.) and relating these explanations to each other.

## **Comparative country case studies**

The present analyses focus on the framing of Holocaust education, the actors/positions discussed<sup>6</sup>, the definitions (e.g. of the Holocaust) and the specific treatment of antisemitism. The presentations of the two cases follow the same structure: First, the historical-political background will be briefly examined; second, the development of Holocaust education in schools will be discussed; and third, the current situation of Holocaust education will be examined. Fourth, the role of antisemitism in Holocaust education will be explored.

### ***The case of Scotland***

As part of the United Kingdom (UK), Scotland joined the Allied forces in the Second World War. The Holocaust had relatively little direct impact on Scotland and the Scots. Nevertheless, Cowan and Maitles (2011, p. 165) identify a number of points of contact – for example, Scotland became home to Jewish refugees (e.g. in the context of Kindertransports) and survivors, but also to a Nazi war criminal (Anton Gecas) – and argue that Holocaust education can contribute to a broader understanding of Scottish history and society. Nevertheless, the Holocaust was not part of Scotland’s historical narrative and its teaching was marginal prior to the establishment of a national Holocaust Memorial Day in 2001 (Cowan, 2013, p. 167). The development of Holocaust education in Scotland and its current state has been well documented in a number of publications by Paula Cowan and colleagues (Cowan, 2013; 2018; Cowan & Jones, 2021; Cowan & Maitles, 2007; 2010; 2011). Holocaust education has never been compulsory in Scottish schools,



and it still is not. Unlike in England, where teaching about the Holocaust has been included in the National Curriculum for History Key Stage 3 since 1991 – meaning that it has become compulsory to teach about the Holocaust when pupils are aged between 11 and 14 – Scotland has never introduced such a requirement (Cowan, 2018, p. 41). This has implications not only for teaching but also for teacher training. Cowan and Maitles (2011, p. 173) emphasise that continued professional development is strongly linked to curriculum requirements and that Scottish teachers therefore receive far fewer opportunities for training in Holocaust knowledge and related skills than, for example, English teachers. Irrespective of these differences, school-based Holocaust education has become more mainstream in all parts of the UK since the millennium (Cowan, 2018, p. 41).

Although the Holocaust is not mentioned in the curriculum, there are some ties both in the primary and secondary sector. As Cowan and Maitles (2010, p. 260) note, Holocaust education is regularly included in English and/or Drama through the study of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, in Religious and Moral Education through the study of Judaism, in History/Social Studies through the study of the Second World War and human rights, and occasionally in Art and Social Education. However, Cowan (2018, p. 42) highlights the main impact of citizenship education (CE), implemented in 2002 not as a separate subject but permeating the curriculum.<sup>7</sup> According to Cowan and Maitles (2011, p. 167) CE provides a “suitable context for attainment in many key areas such as human rights, the need for mutual respect, tolerance, and understanding of a diverse and multi-cultural, multi-ethnic Scotland” and, within this framework, also makes it possible to address the Holocaust and antisemitism.

Furthermore, a number of initiatives have had a significant impact on Holocaust education in Scotland. A national Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) was introduced in 2001, and the Lessons From Auschwitz (LFA) project was established six years later (Cowan & Maitles, 2011, p. 164, 167). HMD led to the development of a range of resources for primary and secondary schools, based mainly on the testimonies of Holocaust survivors who came to live in Scotland. The LFA project makes it possible for selected groups of students to visit the Auschwitz Memorial. The Scottish national Holocaust commemoration remembers “the Holocaust and the genocides that followed it” (Scottish Government, n.d.). The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT), a charity established and funded by the UK Government, helps to promote and support Holocaust Memorial Day and provides a range of educational resources. Another main player is the Holocaust Educational Trust (HET), registered charity in England and Wales and in Scotland, organising the LFA Programme (in Scotland since 2007) (HET, n.d.-a) and the Vision Schools Scotland Programme<sup>8</sup> (since 2017) (University of the West of Scotland, n.d.), but also offering specific educational resources for Scotland (HET, n.d.-b), teacher training and an outreach programme.

As can be seen here, Scotland relies heavily on incentives (e.g. being rewarded as a Vision School) rather than binding rules (curricular obligation). Individual students should act as multipliers (e.g. through the LFA project). The curriculum opens up possibilities but does not oblige to teach about the Holocaust. Cowan (2013, p. 176) notes, that curriculum flexibility might have “led to greater teacher enthusiasm and commitment to Holocaust education, as teachers choose to teach it, rather than being directed to doing so”. On the other hand, the teaching of the Holocaust is very much dependent on

individual school policies (Cowan & Maitles, 2010, p. 259) and there is a risk that Holocaust education is not well coordinated, “which can mean that the Holocaust is not put into its historical context, or that the modern-day lessons are not drawn as it is viewed primarily as a historical event” (Cowan & Maitles, 2010, p. 260). This brings us from the underlying conditions to the focus of Holocaust education in Scotland.

The educational resources provided by the HET (n.d.-b) for Scottish Nationals focus mainly on the victim’s perspective, but also offer insights into British responses to Nazism and the Holocaust, both heroic (e.g. individuals helping Jews) and more shameful (e.g. a football team giving the Nazi salute). The resources offered by the HMDT (n.d.-b) also focus on the life stories of survivors and those who were murdered, including films, images, virtual activities, etc. The HET’s and the HMDT’s focus on the stories of the victims, while the stories of the perpetrators are largely absent, has a number of implications: Personalisation permits insights into the individual consequences of antisemitism and Nazi ideology. This not only facilitates learning, but is also valuable in symbolically restoring a name, a face and a story to the victims who have been reduced to numbers by the Nazis (Totten, 2001). But without a comprehensive knowledge of the social context of the Nazi era, personalisation can have problematic effects. Individual life stories cannot be embedded, stereotypes can be reinforced, the specific context of persecution – antisemitism – can disappear from view, and de-Judaisation can therefore be encouraged. Subtyping<sup>9</sup> is another danger (Bileciewicz et al., 2017, p. 186). Furthermore, little can be learned about the individual and societal functions of antisemitism, past and present, from the stories of those affected, since antisemitism originates from the persecutors and the majority society, not the victims (Adorno, 2005a, p. 192 f.). Accordingly, there is a need for complementary teaching formats that are better suited to learning about antisemitism if this goal is also to be pursued.

The absence of the issue of perpetratorship gives the impression that a so-called positive approach is taken, offering identification with victims and heroes, leaving out darker aspects such as the lure of antisemitism and various forms of perpetratorship. The antisemitism that led to the Holocaust and grew into the delusion of exterminating the Jews is widely left out. The concept of discrimination dominates over a more specific focus on antisemitism. However, the HET website does provide some dedicated resources exploring the historic roots of antisemitism and Nazi antisemitic propaganda (HET, n.d.-c). What is lacking is a comprehensive definition of antisemitism in the teaching materials. Only a glossary is provided, reductively describing antisemitism as “hostility or prejudice against Jews” (HET, n.d.-d). What is made very clear is that the term Holocaust refers only to the Jewish experience, being the only persecuted group targeted for complete extermination. It is warned that using Holocaust “as a catch-all term for Nazi persecution can obscure the varying experiences of different victim groups” (HET, n.d.-e). The HMDT offers information on contemporary antisemitism and it declares itself promoting the IHRA Working Definition on Antisemitism (HMDT, n.d.-c). However, it provides little educational material on the history of antisemitism, its definition or contemporary forms. The “Antisemitism and Discrimination Lesson Plan” (HMDT, n.d.-d) defines antisemitism using the IHRA definition and addresses contemporary antisemitic incidents and perceptions of antisemitism; the rest of the unit refers to discrimination and anti-Muslim hatred. The differences between these terms and phenomena are not explained and antisemitism is subsumed as “a particular type of discrimination”. In their lack of specificity, the websites

risk joining the current trend of de-Judaisation in Holocaust memory (Gerstenfeld, 2009). Furthermore, the HMDT website provides resources on the Holocaust as one genocide among others. This alone would not necessarily mean that the Holocaust could not be taught in its specificity. But such a comparative treatment, which brings out the specificity of each phenomenon, would require a treatment of antisemitism as a distinctive ideology. Besides, there is a risk that schools “engage in Holocaust educational activities while marginalising both the Holocaust and the Jewish experience in the Holocaust” (Cowan, 2018, p. 43). Cowan also points out other aspects of de-Judaisation within Scottish Holocaust education. Against the background of a study on Scottish student teachers’ perceptions and the practice of primary teachers in Scotland she elaborates on teachers’ choice of a wider definition of the Holocaust. They choose a broader definition based on a lack of knowledge, but also as a preference due to their personal historical interpretation and some considered a wider definition as more neutral or fair towards other groups (Cowan, 2018, p. 47 f.). This misunderstood neutrality ignores historical facts and downplays the fate of Jews during the Holocaust, as Cowan (2018, p. 48) analyses:

This “downplaying” of the treatment of the Jews in the Holocaust may be due to a perception that all equality projects (in this case the projects are victims of human suffering) should be treated equally, that none should be considered more important than others. This would explain student teachers’ preference to focus on “racism” rather than “antisemitism” in their teaching and a resistance to presenting a hierarchy of victims of the Holocaust that places Jews at the top.

Cowan (2018, p. 52) also argues that the shift from using non-fiction to fictional resources in Scottish Holocaust education has, in many cases, marginalised the Jewish experience.

### ***The case of Austria***

Austria became part of Nazi Germany in March 1938, with the majority of Austrians enthusiastically supporting the annexation and Nazism. After Austria’s liberation, the Allies paid little attention to re-educating Austrians, due to the so-called “victim myth” (Beniston, 2003). The builders of Austrian post-war identity “relied on the positive images of imperial times, with an emphasis on heroic deeds, great personalities, and local traditions” (Utgaard, 2003, p. 2 f.). From the 1960s onwards National Socialism was mentioned in the curricula for Austrian schools, however, in practice, National Socialism in general and the Holocaust in specific were often not taught (Rajal, 2015, p. 59). The 1970s brought some changes, e.g. the Mauthausen Memorial Museum being opened. However, as Heribert Bastel et al. (2010, p. 63) point out, Holocaust education did not play an important role in Austria until the 1980s. The Holocaust was subsumed under World War II, which led to a “one-basket-of-suffering” theory (Utgaard, 2003, p. 123). History textbooks exaggerated the role of Austrians in the resistance, failed to mention the crimes committed by Austrians and emphasised the suffering of all (Mittnik, 2016, p. 144). When the victim myth began to crack as a result of the Waldheim affair<sup>10</sup>, this had a major impact on the education sector (Bastel et al., 2010, p. 63). Several initiatives and NGOs were founded and a number of museums were opened, all promoting Holocaust education in some way. As Bastel et al. (2010, p. 63) state, “an impressive package of directives and initiatives for teaching about the Holocaust has been

established, making up for lost time". At the end of the 1990s, *erinnern.at*, a state-sponsored platform, was set up to provide teachers with further training in the field of National Socialism and the Holocaust. In 2001, Austria joined the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (now IHRA).

Nowadays, Holocaust education takes place primarily in history classes or in projects based on history lessons. Religious education is also a relevant subject, as are ethics, German and sometimes art. Although there are initiatives in Austrian primary schools, Holocaust education is neither compulsory nor widespread in primary. Textbooks for primary may discuss National Socialism or Second World War, but "[o]ne feature that all the textbooks have in common is that none touches upon the concept of the Holocaust or even uses the word 'Jew' or 'Jews'", as Philipp Mittnik (2018, p. 103) shows. So, Holocaust education in Austria mainly concerns 13–14 year olds. The curriculum for the relevant 8th grade (RIS, n.d.) includes an examination of dictatorial systems, including National Socialism, and a separate module on the Holocaust, genocide and human rights. The experiences of victims, perpetrators and bystanders shall be analysed, as well as the policy of extermination and its historical and political significance for Austria to the present day. Another obligatory topic is the culture of remembrance. As students move on to higher education, the debate tends to deepen. In addition to regular classroom discussions, eyewitness testimony has long been a popular tool in Holocaust education. Today, these are mainly visits to memorial sites, especially Mauthausen/Gusen. However, the actual extent and quality of Holocaust education in schools varies from class to class and from instructor to instructor, and represents a major research gap.

In terms of content, a significant shift took place in the 1990s, when attempts were made to give the victims' stories more space in the classroom and thus to personalise remembrance. It is only since the 2000s, that the results of research into the Nazi perpetrators have been incorporated into school lessons to a greater extent. However, the focus is often still on "famous" perpetrators. Less famous or female perpetrators are dealt with comparatively rarely. As Lukas Meissel (2017, p. 407) highlighted in 2017, Holocaust Education still focused on victims and the personal stories of the persecuted. In his view, Holocaust education in Austria "has allowed for a discourse about the plight of the victims, but not about the responsibility of Austrian perpetrators and 'ordinary Austrians'" (Meissel, 2017, p. 406 f.). But it is precisely by examining the perpetrators that it is possible to reflect on antisemitism and the social conditions and thus the roots of the atrocities (Adorno, 2005a). In recent years, teaching materials have become available for this purpose: The main player in the field of Holocaust education, *erinnern.at*, offers both province-specific and general learning resources. For a long time, the focus of *erinnern.at* was on personalising remembrance by enabling people to engage with the stories of the victims. Resistance to the Nazi regime was an early issue too. As of 2016, however, one can also find a comprehensive teaching material dealing with questions of perpetratorship and bystandership, with the aim of understanding mass murder as a social act for which responsibility cannot be reduced to a few people (*erinnern.at*, n.d.-a). Furthermore, there are materials on various groups of victims of Nazi persecution and extermination policies, as well as specific materials for the preparation and follow-up of visits to memorial sites such as Mauthausen or Auschwitz; resources on antisemitism have only recently become accessible (*erinnern.at*, n.d.-b).

Since 2016, antisemitism is mentioned in the Austrian curricula. It is now considered one of the aims of history teaching that pupils learn to define and distinguish between forms of antisemitism and racism (RIS, n.d.). Since 2008, the study of Jewish life before and after the Holocaust has already been compulsory in Austrian schools, so addressing antisemitism was logical, but not mandatory. That same year, the managing director of *erinnern.at* (Dreier, 2008, as cited and translated in Bastel et al., 2010, p. 62) pointed out, that “[i]n most books, anti-Semitism is only mentioned, if it is mentioned at all, in the context of National Socialism [...], not as a wide intellectual and ideological movement that started long before [...]”. Things may have changed slightly since the 2010s due to curricular changes and several initiatives. In 2017, Austria adopted the working definition of antisemitism of the IHRA, which also applies to the education sector (*erinnern.at*, n.d.-c). In 2020, antisemitism prevention was declared a focus of the work of *erinnern.at*. On the learning material platform *erinnern.at* (n.d.-b), antisemitism was tagged 36 times during the survey period. After removing some duplicates and indirect references to antisemitism, there remain about ten entries that deal with antisemitism in depth. These include references to material on political antisemitism at the beginning of the twentieth century, contemporary Israel-related antisemitism, guilt defence, antisemitism in everyday life, etc. This should enable teachers to approach the issue of antisemitism on different levels. What is still lacking is a more sociological approach, which, for example, teaches the differentiation of different forms of antisemitism or relates antisemitism to social structures.<sup>11</sup>

In 2021 the state of Austria presented a national strategy against antisemitism. As part of this strategy, since 2022 there has also been an increase in professional development for teachers on antisemitism (Republik Österreich, 2022). Studies on the acceptance and impact of these offers on teachers and students are still lacking. The last study that examined students’ knowledge of the concept of antisemitism dates back to the school year 2017/2018.<sup>12</sup> An Austrian research team investigated the knowledge of students in Vienna about National Socialism, the Holocaust, the Second World War and the reappraisal of these topics. The responses were collected from students in the 9th grade (14–15 years old) who had been taught about these issues during the previous school year. It turned out that across all school types, about three quarters of the students could not give a basic definition of antisemitism. A form of working knowledge, a rough classification of the term, such as “having something against Jews”, would have been sufficient to score as correct (Mittnik et al., 2021, pp. 56–58). A more recent study focusing on antisemitic attitudes was published by the Austrian Parliament in April 2023 (IFES, 2023). Among others, the researchers concentrated on the under-25 group. A quarter of this group think that Jews wanted to take advantage of the Nazi era (IFES, 2023, p. 40). A fifth think that it’s no coincidence that the Jews have been persecuted so often in their history (“they are at least partly to blame”) (IFES, 2023, p. 39). A third equates Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians with Nazi Germany’s treatment of the Jews (IFES, 2023, p. 51). These are frightening figures, especially in the area of secondary antisemitism<sup>13</sup>, even among those who have only recently experienced Holocaust education. A closer look at the study reveals the following: More Holocaust education in schools goes hand in hand with more approval of positive statements about Jews (IFES, 2023, p. 22). But that does not necessarily mean that antisemitism is decreasing. For example, adolescents who report a discussion at school about contemporary

Jewish life are more likely than average to reject collective responsibility (45%;  $\emptyset$  36%) (IFES, 2023, p. 22 f.). It is interesting, therefore, why it is precisely school-based engagement with Jewish life that has counter-intuitive effects. One can suspect that education about Jewish life is not as well-founded and differentiated as it could be. Instead, it appears to be partly eulogising the Jews, isolating them as a group, which may encourage antisemitism (Adorno, 2005a, p. 101). An empirical study on this is still pending.

But why does Austrian Holocaust education miss the opportunities that the dedicated curriculum would offer? This may be due to a failed education of the educators, as Adorno (2005a, p. 100) would have put it. Until recently there were hardly any courses on antisemitism in teacher training (Kumar et al., 2022), and the in-service training that has been offered for a few years now is very poorly attended due to a lack of awareness of the problem by teachers.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the high level of secondary antisemitism shows that antisemitism cannot be reduced by talking more about the Holocaust, but that a different, deeper and more reflective engagement with the question of guilt is needed. However, it is precisely the question of guilt that has been completely excluded from Austrian Holocaust Education for a long time. As has been argued in the context of secondary antisemitism, e.g. by Roland Imhoff and Rainer Banse (2009), teaching the Holocaust in post-Nazi societies without focusing on mechanisms of guilt defence may even backfire by potentially blaming Jewish victims for aversive feelings of guilt and shame, which could (partly) explain the high levels of antisemitism among young people.

## Discussion and conclusion

The aim of the article was to identify overlapping, differing or even conflicting conceptions of Holocaust education in two national contexts that are in many ways opposed, to assess the role that antisemitism plays in each, and to identify explanations for the ineffectiveness of Holocaust education in reducing antisemitism.

A comparison of the two case studies reveals a number of differences at the organisational level: In Scotland, Holocaust education is not anchored in the curriculum; its enforcement is mainly due to (state-sponsored) events, such as Holocaust Memorial Day. In Austria, Holocaust education is compulsory in the curriculum and events play a lesser role. The embedding of the issue at secondary level in Austria leads to a focus on the 13–14 age group, whereas in Scotland the issue can also be addressed at primary level. An incentive system (Scotland) contrasts with a more regulatory system (Austria).

At the level of content, only rough comparisons can be made, as insights into concrete teaching practices are not sufficiently available. In Austria, in particular, a large research gap can be identified, which contrasts with the comparatively stronger institutionalisation of the topic. In Scotland, references are made through the treatment of fictional texts or through the life stories of people who have emigrated to Scotland. The focus is clearly on the victims. In Austria, until the turn of the millennium, the focus was almost exclusively on the victims' stories, but since then there has been a diversification; gradually, the perpetrators have also come to the fore. Fictional texts seem to play a subordinate role in Austria. There is a big difference in the breadth of the subject matter: Scottish Holocaust remembrance does not only refer to the policy of extermination of the Jews, but also includes other genocides. The Austrian curriculum includes the comparison of different genocides, but the teaching materials provided e.g. by the main player *erinnern.at*

focus on the Nazi period. With regard to this period, in Austria different groups of victims are dealt with, in Scotland the focus is clearly on Jewish victims.

There are also significant differences in the framing and aims of Holocaust education. When Holocaust education in Scotland is situated in the context of citizenship education, the aims are very general: positive values of empathy, responsibility, understanding of justice, stereotyping, etc. Even dedicated Holocaust education initiatives focus on improvement: “learning from genocide – for a better future”, as a slogan states (HMDT, n.d.-a.). In Austria, framing refers more to historical responsibility as a post-Nazi country. However, the general objectives such as building empathy or awareness of stereotypes are similar.

In terms of the treatment of antisemitism in the classroom, it is much more widely addressed in Austria than it is in Scotland.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, antisemitism is widespread among young people in Austria, and studies show that there is a great lack of knowledge about the concept of antisemitism in both Austria and Scotland, where the neglect of antisemitism corresponds to the de-Judaisation of Holocaust education (Cowan, 2018).

These similarities and differences should be considered against the background of the historical roles and national memories of the two countries. “Holocaust education, as it exists in Britain today, reflects the British context in which it has evolved”, as Kara Critchell (2014, p. 1) stated in her study on Holocaust education in British society and culture. It reinforces

positive interpretations of British national identity and the benefits of liberal democracy whilst, simultaneously, distancing the crimes committed during the Holocaust from the British public through representing these acts as the very antithesis of what is deemed to be British. (Critchell, 2014, p. 1)

Against this background, an intensive examination of perpetrators is not considered necessary; civic values are at the forefront. Holocaust education in Austria also reflects the context in which it has evolved. For a long time, the victim myth contributed to the suppression of the subject in the classroom. One’s own victimhood, the alleged suffering of an Austrian majority, was dominant. Despite the change in the culture of remembrance at the end of the 1980s, it took a long time for perpetrators to be considered (Meissel, 2017). Guilt is still a reluctantly taught subject. However, the phenomenon of secondary antisemitism shows us that even 80 years after the liberation from National Socialism, feelings of guilt and their denial still play an important role in post-Nazi societies (IFES, 2023).

What unites the two cases is the personalised way of remembering. Personalisation provides a counterpoint to the dehumanisation that took place in the Holocaust and is a prerequisite for empathy with the victims (Totten, 2001). It also permits insights into the individual consequences of antisemitism. Yet without a thorough understanding of the social context of the Nazi period, it becomes difficult to integrate individual narratives. This gap can inadvertently reinforce stereotypes and obscure the specific context of persecution, namely antisemitism, potentially leading to the de-Judaisation of the Holocaust. Moreover, in a post-Nazi society a focus on victims’ stories and thus an identification with the victims allows descendants of perpetrators to switch to the “morally right side”, as Meissel (2017, p. 407) pointed out. It often leaves out the question of who victimised the victims and can thus help to avoid questions of guilt. Furthermore, the life stories

of the victims show us only the effects of antisemitism, but don't teach us about the nature of antisemitism and the functions it performs for the majority of society (Adorno, 2005a, p. 192 f.). In order to prevent a repetition of Auschwitz, the focus must also be on the society that produced such conditions and on the continuities of toxic conditions. In this sense, (Holocaust) education should become sociological, to paraphrase Adorno (2005a, p. 203) one last time.

To conclude: What the case study shows are some challenges with regard to antisemitism in the context of Holocaust education in two very different social contexts. In both cases, opportunities to address and reduce antisemitism are being missed: In the first case, by teaching about the Holocaust in a way that downplays the specific Jewish experience and fails to address antisemitism, or does so in a very simplistic way. Care should be taken not to deprive the Holocaust of its specifically Jewish dimensions in order to make it a universal or supposedly "more relevant" issue. In the second case, antisemitism is talked about, but in the context of widespread secondary antisemitism, there is a danger of explaining and understanding it in ways that are themselves antisemitic. While the de-Judaisation of Holocaust education seems to be more of a problem in the former allied states, the Austrian example shows that the opposite, a central place for Jews in Holocaust remembrance, can easily go hand in hand with a re-enforcement of antisemitic stereotypes or even secondary antisemitism. Particularly in post-Nazi societies educational measures "need to give more consideration to the role and impact of defense mechanisms, notably to forms of rationalization and projection" (Bernstein et al., 2022, p. 34). The cross-country comparison showed that the development of Holocaust education, its content and goals are highly dependent on the historical context of each country (Gundare & Batelaan, 2003). But eradicating antisemitism is as much a question of responsible citizenship as it is of historical responsibility. It therefore fits into the approach of both countries and should be taken seriously.

## Notes

1. In this paper, ineffectiveness is understood as missed opportunities to address antisemitism and an increase in antisemitism due to distorted or inadequate explanations of the Holocaust and antisemitism. Of course, there are also structural and not only content-related limitations to Holocaust education.
2. For different manifestations, see also the IHRA's working definition of antisemitism (IHRA, n.d.). The ideology critical understanding of antisemitism underlying this paper is explained in more detail in the Theory section.
3. Unfortunately, this debate cannot be explored in detail here.
4. On the reinforcement of antisemitic stereotypes when the Whiteness frame is applied to Jews, see for example Karin Stoenegner (2020).
5. As Oliver Rathkolb (2021, p. 269) points out, the number of Austrians in the Waffen-SS may well have been significantly higher than the Austrian population in the Reich. See also Botz (2012) for the involvement of Austrians in Nazi crimes.
6. In order to differentiate between participants, those affected and those not directly involved in the mass murder of the Jews, Holocaust studies, following Raul Hilberg (1992), distinguish between perpetrators, victims and bystanders. The latter group can be divided into helpers, profiteers and onlookers. It is important to recognise the complex interrelationships between these groups and to consider positions on a sliding scale (Ehrenreich & Cole, 2005).
7. Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is based on four capacities, one of which is responsible citizenship (Education Scotland, n.d.-a). Young people should be able to explore ethical



- issues, to develop an understanding of the principles of democracy and citizenship through experiences of critical and independent thinking, to show mutual respect, to counter prejudice and intolerance and to consider issues of discrimination; the Holocaust, antisemitism or racism are not explicitly mentioned (Education Scotland, n.d.-b).
8. The Vision Schools Programme rewards schools that embed Holocaust education, provides opportunities for teachers to share good practice, and promotes and presents professional development in Holocaust education (University of the West of Scotland, n.d.).
  9. In social psychological research on prejudice, subtyping describes the suggestion of a hierarchical structure within a discriminated group in response to disconfirming information. Subtypes are exceptions that are not considered representative of the group as a whole. The formation of subtypes within a category may result in the overall stereotype remaining unchanged (Johnston et al., 1994, p. 238).
  10. Kurt Waldheim, an Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) candidate for the Austrian presidency, was accused by a popular Austrian news magazine of having been a member of the SA and a witness to the deportations of Greek Jews. This sparked a widespread debate about the atrocities committed by Austrians during this period. Nevertheless, he was elected president in 1986. For further insights into the contours of memory in post-Nazi Austria, see e.g. Robert Knight (2000).
  11. As a constantly modifying syndrome, antisemitism has specific functions depending on its bearers and historical phases. Accordingly, its forms vary, reflecting the social, political and cultural distortions of each social order. It enables the individual in modern mass society to heal the excess of frustration, powerlessness, diffuse unease, anxiety and alienation caused by incomprehensible conditions – a process Freud called "Schiefheilung" (Busch et al., 2016).
  12. The study design was based on that of Foster et al. (2016), so the results are comparable with the English study (Mittnik et al., 2021, p. 35). A comparison was made by Christoph Kühberger (2017).
  13. The term secondary antisemitism is "commonly restricted to the German-speaking context, as describing a particular form of post-Nazi antisemitism that involves different forms of defensiveness against guilt. Conceptually, secondary antisemitism is related to the inability to adequately come to terms with the Nazi past and may also be called 'antisemitism after Auschwitz', or 'antisemitism because of Auschwitz'" (Stoegner, 2018, p. 719).
  14. Anecdotal evidence shows that the teacher training courses offered by the author in recent years have mostly had to be cancelled due to lack of interest from teachers. Several Austrian colleagues reported the same experience to the author.
  15. However, it has to be said that the inclusion of antisemitism in curricula, teaching materials, etc. is a very recent development in Austria. Most of the changes in this area can be traced back to the last 5–10 years. The impact of the National Strategy against Antisemitism adopted in Austria in 2021 remains to be seen.

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