

The Weiss-Livnat
International Center
for Holocaust Research
and Education

The University of Haifa, Israel

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Sites of Tension: Shifts in Holocaust Memory in Relation to Antisemitism and Political Contestation in Europe

Editors:

Nurit S. Novis-Deutsch

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principal investigators:

Prof. Arie J. Kochavi and Dr. Nurit S. Novis-Deutsch

Project manager:

Dr. Shmuel Lederman

Main research team:

Dr. Nurit S. Novis-Deutsch, Dr. Shmuel Lederman, Prof. Arie J. Kochavi, Dr. Tracy Adams,

Dr. Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann and Anat Wiener

Researchers (in alphabetical order):

Dr. Tracy Adams, Yale University, U.S.

Prof. Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland

Misha Brenner, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel

Dr. Piotr Forecki, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

Dr. Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel

Dr. Anikó Félix, The Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities, Hungary

Maximilian Hauer, Germany

Prof. Wulf Kansteiner, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark

Prof. Arie J. Kochavi, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel

Dr. Shmuel Lederman, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel

Adam Musiał, Krakow, Poland

Dr. Nurit S. Novis-Deutsch, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel

Dr. Marta Simó, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

Language editing: Dr. Sarah Mandel

Graphic design and typeset: Noga Yoselevich

Covers design: Orli Hatzofe

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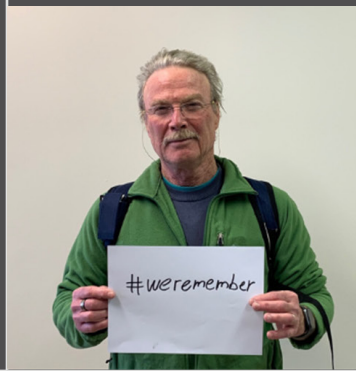
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Executive Summary

This report surveys and analyses how Holocaust memory was shaped, enacted, and discussed in Poland, Hungary, Germany, England, and Spain, between 2019 and 2022. We report on the changes taking place in Holocaust memory across three domains of the public sphere: the political, educational, and in social media. This is an interdisciplinary and multinational study, involving scholars from seven countries (Poland, Hungary, Germany, England, Spain, Israel and Denmark) and from seven fields (Education, History, Media Studies, Memory Studies, Political Science, Psychology and Sociology).

The report is innovative in its interdisciplinary perspective, methodological triangulation and broad scope on the topic at hand. It is intended for those involved in teaching, commemorating, and researching Holocaust memory as well as for policymakers, journalists and anyone interested in deciphering the complex intersections of past and present.

The report focuses on three main sets of comparative and cross-disciplinary questions.

The first set of questions relates to the dual role that Holocaust memory serves in today's public discourse. Holocaust memory has gradually transformed into the basis for a common global identity and human rights value system, but at the same time nationalist, far-right, and counter-hegemonic revisionist versions of the past are being articulated. This leads to questions about when and how these various Holocaust memory tropes are expressed differentially in various domains, and in various groups such as nations, eastern/western European blocs, and left/right political factions. How do these tropes interact or compete, and what are the similarities and differences in their manifestations?

A second set of questions pertains to the effects of the past on the present, and of the present on memories of the past. In this period of heightened anxiety, including the rise of extreme right parties, a significant increase in immigration and refugees, the Covid pandemic and the ensuing economic instability, how are contemporary events related to the memory of the Holocaust? Do they supersede it, leading to the gradual fading from memory of the mass-murder that shook the twentieth century? Do they reshape it, shedding new light on its lessons, or are they amplified by its memory, in the way that foundational traumas taint events with fear of their recurrence? These explanations are not mutually exclusive, and we explore the possibility that the present and the past engage in multidirectional dialogue over diverse memory platforms.

A third set of questions revolves around the juxtaposition of the roles that countries played in the Holocaust with their contemporary coming-to-terms with the past. The five selected European countries played very different roles during the Holocaust, and their post-WWII histories differed greatly as well. How do these past roles and histories shape the memory of the Holocaust today? How is the consolidated Holocaust memory used and negotiated in public spaces? How is the Holocaust being taught in each of these countries and to what extent do national curricula reflect the ways in which each country has been processing its past in the public sphere?

The time frame (2019-2022) was selected to capture a typical period of Holocaust memory in Europe, with the 75th Holocaust Remembrance Day as a major discursive event. The countries were chosen for their similarities and differences, the former offering a shared basis for comparison and the latter reflecting

important aspects that we wished to explore relating to national histories. The three cultural domains were chosen since each provides a unique perspective of shifts in Holocaust memory, and all three combined tell a more comprehensive story of how the Holocaust is being remembered and expressed today.

Political discourse and media shape and construct the memory of the Holocaust in the public sphere and can help us decipher the strategic and instrumental use of the past in the present. To gain insight into this domain, we analysed thousands of media sources, parliamentary debates and political speeches referring to the Holocaust, which were published and delivered between 2019 and 2021. **Educating about the Holocaust** is the domain through which remembrance is formally transferred to the next generation. We explored it as a site of interaction between teachers' personal, professional, and national Holocaust memory legacies and did so by conducting in-depth interviews and surveys with 98 teachers (around 20 teachers per country). The use of **social media** in memorialization practices is becoming increasingly prevalent, with new practices emerging that transcend established boundaries. Social media can amplify distortion, antisemitism, and hate speech, but also contribute to creating and expanding Holocaust knowledge and memory, especially among younger generations. We collected over half a million Holocaust-related tweets from the five countries and conducted quantitative and qualitative analyses to gain insight into the interactions between Holocaust memory and key contemporary topics.

Findings

The findings are divided into three domain sections – public-political, educational and social media. Each section includes a review of the subject in the academic literature, a methods chapter, findings by country and a comparative analysis. The report concludes with an integrative discussion highlighting central findings and similarities and differences between domains and countries and ending with a series of recommendations.

Holocaust remembrance in the public-political discourse

This section highlights the ways in which Holocaust memory serves to express political views, social identities, and cultural concerns. It also identifies differences and similarities in the public-political discourse surrounding the Holocaust in the selected countries. Each country is discussed in a separate chapter that provides an overview of how Holocaust memory has been consolidated since the end of WWII, then turns to analyse references to the Holocaust in that country's central media venues, parliamentary debates and political speeches, from 2019-2021. We find that, while the extent and intensity of discussing and referencing the Holocaust varies significantly across these countries, Holocaust memory plays a role in reconstructing the past and negotiating the present in all of them. In other words, the Holocaust remains an important part of the European collective consciousness.

In all countries except Germany, we identified a tendency to present a mostly heroic or guilt-free narrative of the nation's behaviour during the Holocaust. The Polish government's "historical policy" denies any significant involvement of Poles in the murder of Jews. The Hungarian

government acknowledges the collaboration of the Hungarian state with Nazi Germany but fails to acknowledge the significant involvement of portions of the Hungarian people in atrocities against the Jews. Ignorance and denial of Spanish collaboration in the extermination of the Jews similarly prevail in Spain, and, while the historical context is very different, there is a parallel tendency in England to focus on its heroic legacy in WWII and to overlook less savoury aspects of its history, such as Britain's treatment of Jewish refugees, during this period.

Holocaust memory is often invoked when addressing antisemitic actions and expressions in each of these countries. Antisemitism is treated with genuine concern and at the same time used as a political tool in all the countries under examination. While the governments in Poland and Hungary have publicly committed to protecting the Jewish community from antisemitism, various public figures use coded antisemitic language to further their own political agenda or accuse others of doing so. Denouncing rivals as antisemitic is a common theme in Spain, England and Germany as well. Holocaust revisionism, more than outright denial, is prevalent among the far-right in the countries we examined. Furthermore, to defend themselves against accusations of antisemitism, far right parties as well as the governments of Poland and Hungary emphasize their support for Israel and condemn leftist and anti-Zionist antisemitism. They also portray Muslim immigration as a national threat that endangers local Jewish communities. In contrast, in English public discourse, political actors tend to relate antisemitism to Islamophobia and minority discrimination as equally pernicious phenomena.

The study finds that the division between east European and west European Holocaust memory cultures is not straightforward. There are memory camps across the political spectrum, with conservative-nationalist voices promoting competitive victimhood and a heroic national identity, centrist voices promoting a cosmopolitan memory that emphasizes the singular evil of the Holocaust and its universal lessons, and leftist voices using Holocaust memory to critique hegemonic memory cultures and promote recognition of other mass atrocities. The position on the political spectrum is more determinative than geographical location when it comes to the invocation of Holocaust memory in public discourse. In all camps, however, Holocaust memory is primarily used to construct and negotiate national identity, also in relation to the European Union.

Overall, the enduring presence of Holocaust memory in public-political discourse illustrates its deep entrenchment in western European collective consciousness, even if it is often through popular associations rather than deep historical knowledge or used instrumentally to promote social and political views and interests.

Educating about the Holocaust

This section begins by describing the state of educating about the Holocaust (EaH) in each of the five countries, based on an extensive scholarly literature review. Next, we turn to a mixed-methods analysis of in-depth interviews and quantitative questionnaires, to explore the experiences of 98 teachers in EaH that we interviewed. The findings regarding each national group of teachers are presented separately, offering a rich and detailed picture of EaH today in that country. We conclude with a comparative analysis.

Overall, we found that country-level EaH map onto a two-dimensional space that considers two parameters: 1) the historical and geographical proximity of each country to the events of the Holocaust and (2) the approach of the country to public self-reflection about the historical period of WWII and the Holocaust. In terms of proximity, Germany, Hungary, and Poland were directly involved or affected by the Holocaust and England and Spain were more peripheral to the event. We found that teachers in countries closer to the Holocaust engage their students more easily with the topic, while teachers in countries more distant from the subject struggle more with a sense of distance. Polish and Hungarian teachers in particular, have been effective in harnessing local history to teach about the Holocaust. In Spain and England, distance remains a challenge. However, it is the pedagogical implications of the second dimension, national style of public reflection, that are especially instrumental in shaping EaH: The more a nation is comfortable acknowledging its own role and responsibility in the Holocaust, the more comfortable teachers are in expressing themselves creatively in Holocaust education. We found that teachers in Germany and England are more willing to work through the Holocaust, while Poland and Hungary are noted as being more resistant. When teachers in the latter countries wish to present a self-critical view of the Holocaust, as many of them do, they must implicitly oppose the attitudes of their government. Spain also has a problematic past when it comes to Jews and antisemitism, but not all Spanish teachers are aware of this. In sum, the extent to which a nation has worked through its past and taken responsibility for various aspects of it affects how Holocaust education is taught and how comfortable teachers are in expressing themselves.

A comparative examination of themes that emerged from the interviews and a categorical analysis of over 3000 coded interview segments crossed with survey data, identified various underlying patterns. Some were shared across locations. For example, teachers in all five countries were committed to EaH and articulated its importance, often employed creative pedagogies to engage their students in the topic, and experienced challenges in their work including encountering elements of antisemitism among students. In their teaching, most teachers use comparative frameworks to discuss the Holocaust in relation to other events. Another preferred educational response to challenges is to offer an ethical perspective on Holocaust memory. Most teachers reported that once engaged, students tend to react positively to the topic, leading to increased emotional and cognitive resonance with Holocaust memory.

Other aspects of EaH differed by country. For example, attitudes of indifference and “rivalry of victimhood” in relation to the Holocaust were most reported by Polish and Hungarian teachers. English and German teachers mostly described a “supportive environment” for EaH. The endorsement of “shock pedagogy” in EaH was more common among Spanish teachers and developmentally sensitive EaH was mostly found among the English teachers. Teachers in Spain tended to connect EaH to a human rights framework while in Poland this framework was uncommon.

Teachers also discussed EaH goals, content, pedagogy, changes taking place in EaH in recent years, training and sources of support. Among other findings, training in EaH was significantly related to the number of hours spent teaching about the Holocaust per course: teachers with EaH training taught about the Holocaust for

nearly double the average time that teachers without training dedicated to it.

A major difference between teachers of central-eastern Europe and those of western Europe related to their perceived educational freedom and affinity to their current nation's narrative about the Holocaust. While Polish teachers were managing difficult "history politics" and Hungarian teachers were offering a counter-narrative to the nationalist and populist discourse of their government, German teachers and English ones typically identified with their national Holocaust memory narrative. Many of the teachers from eastern-central Europe tended to oppose their governments' policies but we also observed a chilling effect on EaH due to governmental policies in these countries.

Our findings suggest that Holocaust education should be based on factually accurate and academically grounded historiography, and that it should entail national self-criticism where appropriate and encourage critical self-reflection. Furthermore, Holocaust education should be approached as a whole-school, interdisciplinary endeavour, and educators should pay attention to the shifts in students' sources of information on the Holocaust due to the digital era.

The Holocaust on social media

This section asks about the prevalence, content and context of Holocaust memory on social media (SM), while discussing how it intersects with other topics of interest, in each of the five countries. SM constitutes "a counter-public sphere," which includes alternative- or even counter-memory that is less regulated than that of other public domains. Holocaust memory on SM is therefore always a form of

conflicting or "agonistic memory" and within the networked structure of SM, it becomes "connected memory," with an affinity towards analogies and multi-perspective approaches to history.

Our study focused on one particularly discursive and political platform: the short-text blogging platform Twitter. We contextualized this by reviewing current studies and research reports that explore Holocaust memory on all the main social media platforms of the early 2020s.

Our review of Holocaust memory on various social media platforms indicates that SM is a form of memory-engagement that undermines traditional "top-down" models of collective memory. For Holocaust memory, this has positive and negative implications. While all social media platforms present a "dark side" in the form of hate speech, antisemitism, racism, distortion and denial, they also allow for more active and personal engagement with the subject, and each platform does so in its unique ways. We review the characteristics and affordances, content moderation strategies and levels of antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and Telegram, based on previous reports and studies. We conclude that Holocaust-related discourse on SM is characterized by two sets of juxtapositions: commemoration versus denial/distortion, and a historical focus versus a currents-affairs one. Intersecting these two axes generates four kinds of activities that are prevalent on SM: Secondary antisemitism, Holocaust distortion, equations and analogies, and national or European memory. The report details and discusses each of these, concluding that Holocaust memory on SM intensifies all four. Another conclusion is that not all cases fall neatly into one of the four categories, with

some types of comparisons especially difficult to evaluate.

To understand the nature of such SM activities in depth, we collected 569,509 Holocaust-related tweets posted between June 25, 2021, and September 30, 2021, a randomly chosen period designed to offer insights into the everyday appearances of Holocaust mentions on Twitter, in Poland, Hungary, Germany, England and Spain. These were first analysed using Natural Language Processing programs. Next, a random sample of 580 tweets was manually coded. The abundance of references to the Holocaust in a period with no outstanding debates or events related to Holocaust memory indicates that the Holocaust is a universal reference frame that does not depend on specific triggering topics and can be evoked virtually everywhere and at any time.

The analysis of each country's Twitter discourse about the Holocaust shows that in most countries, Holocaust references relate to topics and debates in the present. 75% of the coded and agreed-upon tweets use the Holocaust in that manner, while only 25% primarily focus on it as a historical phenomenon. In four out of the five countries most tweets deal with current affairs. Some examples explored in the report include the way Covid restrictions are compared to the Holocaust in Germany, the debate in England around the accusation of Holocaust denial as a tool to attack or defend political entities, and the tying of Holocaust memory in Spain to VOX, Spain's rising far-right party, by referring to them as "Nazis." The one exception to this tendency to raise Holocaust memory in order to refer to current events was in Poland, in which a historical discourse about the Holocaust was more common than a current-events one. However, a closer look at Polish tweets demonstrates the amalgamation

of the history-related discourse and present-day topics and political affairs on SM. Thus, at first sight, a debate in Poland about the Polish role in the Jedwabne pogrom or confiscated property is purely historical. But beneath the surface, these debates are about Polish collective identities and national pride and express the difficulties in coming to terms with Poland's relation to the history of the Holocaust. We concluded that most Twitter communication about the Holocaust refers to political controversies or to political events, rather being commemorative, educational or informative.

We also analysed two specific foci on aspects of Holocaust memory in Europe today: The intersection between Holocaust memory and working through Europe's colonialist past, and the genocide of the Roma and the Sinti, since the European Holocaust Memorial Day for the Sinti and Roma fell within our study period.

In the period of our study the link between the Holocaust and colonialism on SM was twice as strong in Germany than in England. In Germany, these tweets tended to originate in the debates on the uniqueness of the Holocaust and about the justification of historical comparison. In England, some tweets highlighted the disparity between "forgotten" British colonial atrocities and its heroic self-image derived from the victory over Nazi Germany, while others related to Israel in this context. A coding of tweets intersecting Holocaust and colonialism found that a majority (55%) of them reflected a multidirectional approach, that is, using one memory as a medium for another memory.

While many of the tweets on the genocide of the Sinti and Roma in Europe focused on commemorating the victims, multidirectional intersections of themes and topics based on

victim competition were more common, often contrasting Sinti and Roma victims with Jewish ones. While commemoration dominated the German discourse, victim competition was popular in Spain and England. Hungary was unusual in having many derogatory tweets that reflected an everyday culture of antigypsyism.

In sum, Twitter users in each of the five countries primarily “use” the Holocaust to discuss contemporary issues rather raising it in order to “talk about” the Holocaust itself.

Integrative Discussion

We conclude with an interdisciplinary integration of the findings, noting, first, that the memory of the Holocaust remains alive but is diversifying and struggling for relevance in some places, especially among the younger generation.

Our findings led us to highlight a common memory practice that we termed “relating the Holocaust.” This involves making the Holocaust relevant and connected to people’s lives and times and serves several psychological processes, including analogy-making, the human need for connection and relationships, and meaning-making. We found relating to be prevalent in different contexts and countries, and to interact with various agendas, including combating racism and xenophobia, warning against Covid vaccines, cautioning against abortions, and warning of climate change. The study emphasizes the individual and personal aspects of relating, which veers between intimacy and the public sphere. We conclude that there is a need for a nuanced “ethics of comparisons” that considers intentions, mode of argumentation, sensibilities of concerned parties, and context

of expression in determining the moral value of Holocaust comparisons.

Regarding differences in the presence of Holocaust memory between countries, these can be accounted for by the role that Holocaust memory plays in the national identity-building project of each country. An especially distinguishing aspect of Holocaust memory is the political left-right identification of those remembering it, regardless of their nationality. The exception to the public domain instrumental treatment of Holocaust memory is the education arena, which is both about teaching history, and about supporting education on values, morals and identity.

Holocaust memory is expressed differently on pan-European and national levels. The European Union (EU) considers the Holocaust to be a formative event in European history and the basis for a shared value system of democratic principles, equality, and human rights. The EU’s perspective on Holocaust memory can be seen in mainstreaming the fight against antisemitism across all policy areas. This perspective on Holocaust memory is reflected in all five countries studied, but other memory perspectives are upheld parallel to it, and they are sometimes, but not always, nationalistic. Some nations uphold the cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust to serve as an entry ticket to the European Union. As a result, in the Eastern European countries, we found a compartmentalization of Holocaust memory between a global form expected by western countries and a local form of remembrance.

More prominently, Holocaust memory is shaped by politics and the media in national contexts, with politicians and media outlets often using Holocaust memory to fit their own views of national identity and needs. The political left-

right identification of those remembering the Holocaust is a distinguishing aspect, with political affiliation often more indicative of attitudes towards Holocaust memory than national historical roles played in the Holocaust. A rhetoric that eschews “politics of shame” in favour of a heroic national memory of WWII is shared by nationalists in Poland, Hungary, AfD supporters in Germany, as well as Spanish VOX supporters. Left-wing media platforms and politicians in these countries tend to critique dominant heroic national narratives about the Holocaust and frame it as part of a larger discourse on colonialism, slavery, and human rights. This finding is echoed in the educational and social media domains as well.

The role of political values and agendas in shaping Holocaust memory should be seen as part of a broader category of identity conflicts, which is local and national. Holocaust memory is a tool for shaping collective national identities while also serving specific political interests. The shaping of Holocaust memory is strongly linked to geo-historical contexts, with Europe’s memory remaining deeply asymmetrical between the western and eastern blocs. Triggers for engaging in discussion and memory of the Holocaust differ across domains. Holocaust memory in the public-political discourse reflects the goals and nature of that domain, often surfacing in national majority contexts in reaction to counter-memories by minority groups or individuals. In contrast to the reactive nature of other public memory cultures, nearly all teachers initiated teaching about the Holocaust. On social media, most of the tweets mentioning the Holocaust deal with current affairs, with a minority dealing with the historical Holocaust.

The study offers recommendations to various stakeholders. Some of our recommendations are:

- **States** should prioritise forms of remembrance more closely aligned with a climate of acceptance and tolerance, that is, forms of memory that relate to accepting otherness rather than to focusing on the nation’s victimhood or pride. One way of promoting this is by conducting an evaluation of existing Holocaust remembrance and education programs in collaboration with experts designing and implementing similar projects.
- **Educational policy makers** should strive to treat EaH as an interdisciplinary endeavour: in History, contextualize the historical facts; in Philosophy, work on ethical and political reflection; in Language, Arts and Literature, relate to first-hand narratives of the Holocaust, in Civics, discuss the role of democracy, rights and activism in preventing future genocides, and in Arts, engage on a personal and creative level with Holocaust memory. Integrative units that promote reflection should be included in the curriculum.
- **In terms of value education**, proactively promoting teachers’ and students’ internal sense of freedom by teaching them to strengthen their ‘free will muscles’ is an important educational goal stemming from EaH.
- **NGOs** should establish incubators that will focus on creating supportive and productive environments for the development of international initiatives that deal with racism, prejudice and antisemitism and work in cooperation with global organizations active in the field to promote pluralism and acceptance.

- **Institutions of Pre-Service and In-Service EaH Training** should offer teachers and teachers-in-training a range of new pedagogies and digital tools in EaH that focus on students' reflexivity, critical thinking, and social awareness. A supportive environment that compensates and supports teachers for promoting such projects can help more teachers take ownership and become proactive in EaH.
- **Social Media moderators and policymakers** should focus on the tactics that enable a wider audience to access information about the history of Holocaust and the negative effects of antisemitism, racism, prejudice and intolerance on society and develop affinity spaces (locations where groups of people are drawn together because of a shared interest) effectively.
- Finally, remembering the historical Holocaust is best done synergistically through political, educational and public administration collaboration.

While the memory of the Holocaust is alive and relevant, its transformation into a yardstick for all evil and horror, means that it is potentially losing its own memory space and becoming a point of reference for other tragedies. The associative power of the memory of the Holocaust and the importance of relationing are forces for remembering and engaging with Holocaust memory but we should beware of using the memory of the Holocaust for fearmongering, which can silence people and paralyze their action. We suggest that pedagogies of fear be replaced with conversation and dialogue, leading to engagement, growth, and activism towards a better future for all.

We hope that our recommendations will contribute to the development of more effective commemoration, Holocaust education programs, social media moderation policies and further studies on Holocaust memory in Europe and that the lessons of the Holocaust will serve as signposts for contemporary politicians. This could ultimately help to promote a culture of tolerance and acceptance across the continent.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



The introduction is written by:
Tracy Adams

with contributions by:
Nurit Novis-Deutsch,
Shmuel Lederman
Arieh J. Kochavi.

Introduction

Holocaust memory in Europe is shifting. Notwithstanding its prominence as a historical and moral watershed, and its salience as a feature of contemporary culture, its current remembrance is diversifying and often conflicting. The changes reflect the history of different European countries during and following WWII, the evolution of Holocaust memory over the years, and current internal and external political developments in each country.

The following report is the culmination of a comparative study of the changes taking place in Holocaust memory in Poland, Hungary, Germany, England, and Spain between 2019 and 2022. This research explores contemporary Holocaust remembrance and how it has been shifting and modifying in response to social and political developments. We focus on three memory sites, which we call “domains” – public-political discourses, Holocaust education and social media discourses – to explore how the Holocaust is discussed in relation to present-day concerns. Utilizing a multidisciplinary analysis between and within the countries and sites of memory enabled us to reach insights about how Holocaust memory is used in the selected countries in light of their past involvement in the Holocaust, present challenges, and political worldviews. The report is intended for all those involved in teaching, commemorating and researching the Holocaust worldwide, as well as policymakers, journalists, and practitioners who are involved with Holocaust memory directly or indirectly through policymaking. Juxtaposing past and present trends in national Holocaust collective memories using a methodological and disciplinary triangulation, it contributes to ongoing discussions and debates about Holocaust memory, political ideology, and antisemitism.

In what follows we offer a brief review of the conceptual framework through which Holocaust memory is currently discussed and researched. We explore some of the perspectives and questions addressed in Holocaust research and Memory Studies, outline the research aims and questions and elaborate on the choice of the five countries examined in this research. We then discuss the selection of the three domains, extending the discussion to consider how these can contribute to a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon beyond the scope of the existing report. Finally, we review the structure of the report and its significance.

1.1. Conceptual Framework of Holocaust Memory

Public memory of the Holocaust has changed significantly over the years. A gradual process has transformed Holocaust memory into its current status as the greatest act of brutality and genocide in human history and an expression of radical evil that transcends national and ethnic boundaries. Since the end of the Cold War, Holocaust memory has gradually become the basis for what could possibly be termed a common global identity¹ and a global human rights value system (Diner 2003,

1 Through, for instance, the founding of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research in 1998; the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust in 2000; and the 2005 UN resolution designating January 27 – the anniversary of the 1945 liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau – as Holocaust Remembrance Day.

van der Poel 2019), which includes tolerance, diversity and respect for human dignity as well as the struggle against racism and antisemitism. Holocaust memory thus evolved over time, understood as a unique historical lesson that binds together European nations under a shared set of values (Assmann 2010; Levy and Sznajder 2002).

Broadly conceived as a “cosmopolitan memory” (Levy & Sznajder 2002), during the 1990s Holocaust memory became standardized and homogenized across Western Europe. At the same time, it transformed Holocaust recognition and commemoration into a “contemporary European entry ticket” (Assmann 2010, 102–103; Judt 2005, 803): to be included in the EU, and considered a “full European,” states must first acknowledge the Holocaust and partake in its commemoration. As such, in Eastern Europe, the uniqueness and cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust is often perceived by some researchers as a Western preoccupation (Mälksoo 2009) that is externally imposed and not necessarily internally accepted. Moreover, EU Holocaust remembrance and commemoration is perceived by some East European countries as competing with memories of national suffering inflicted by Nazism and communism (Kucia 2016). Rather than revising previous national myths, some governments of Eastern European states promote nationalized versions of the past through legislation, political discourse and education (Koposov 2017; Subotic 2019).²

The act of working through the past (Adorno 2003; LaCapra 2001) is attempted by all European states in various forms. It includes a range of practices, beginning with silencing, forgetting or depicting the conscious process of “replacing painful memories with less painful ones” (Pető 2019, 472) through Holocaust revisionism and even denial. These kinds of practices are undertaken by the general population and the government, and not only by fringe groups in society.

The twenty-one years that passed since the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust have witnessed an erosion of what could have been a coherent system of human rights values and a global Holocaust memory. Instead, we are experiencing today a “clash of solidarities” (Krastev 2017, 43) wherein “national, ethnic and religious solidarities are colliding with post-national, cosmopolitan solidarities on which the commemoration of the Shoah is also based” (van der Poel 2019, 277). In Central and Eastern Europe two parallel forms of Holocaust memory exist: a local form of remembrance (Kovács 2016a) and a global form (one that is “expected” by Western countries). The polarization of Holocaust memory is growing, and with it, nationalist, alt-right and counter-hegemonic revised versions of the past are articulated (Herfroy-Mischler 2016; Ofer 2018) that manifest growing anti-immigration, antisemitic, and racist attitudes (ADL 2018; ADL Global 2015; Green 2018; FRR 2018). In light of the above we present our research aims and questions, focusing on the larger framework of the research and the potential of empirical choices to provide a deep and comprehensive analysis of how Holocaust memory shifts and changes in various domains.

2 The distinction between Western and Eastern European forms of memory does not directly apply to Spain, which has established its own particular version of Holocaust memory.

1.2. The Study: Structure, Research Aims and Questions

This research examines the shifts in Holocaust memory in five European countries between 2019 and 2022. The timeframe enables a glimpse into contemporary “uneventful” Holocaust memory (see elaboration below). Specifically, we set out to explore the relationship between current challenges and exigencies and contemporary Holocaust memory. We focus on three domains: public-political discourse, education, and social media, to explore how Holocaust memory is discussed in light of present-day political issues. Such a framework enables us to examine the interactions and intersections between various public perceptions of the Holocaust and how these are negotiated and receive meaning when discussed in juxtaposition to existing political change. Focusing on five countries enables a comparative analysis that, in turn, affords a broader and more comprehensive understanding of changes in Holocaust memory in Europe according to specific blocs.

Three questions guided this research:

1. To what extent is Holocaust memory present in public-political, educational and social media discourses on contemporary affairs in Europe? Under what circumstances does Holocaust memory surface in the countries we examined and what characterizes its expressions?
2. How do the countries we studied differ from one another in terms of Holocaust memory? What categorization scheme best organizes the differences in attitudes towards Holocaust memory? (e.g., historical, political)
3. How does contemporary Holocaust memory differ across the three domains? To what extent do they interact with one another?

The study involved a dialogue between scholars from the disciplines of History, Psychology, Political Science, Media Studies, Education, Sociology and Memory Studies. While we shared the same goals and research questions, our disciplines engendered significant epistemic and methodological disparities. Bringing diverse datasets – teacher interviews, political speeches, newspaper articles, parliamentary debates and tweets – into a joint focus was challenging. However, rather than present each set of findings side by side in a multi-disciplinary fashion, we aimed for *inter*-disciplinary dialogue. This study also included scholars from multiple countries: Israel, Poland, Germany, Hungary, Spain, England and Denmark, often with different interpretive lenses on the topics at hand. As such, this study can be described as a combination of emic and etic³ perspectives, that is, it involves experts from the inside collaborating with outsiders looking in, to generate a nuanced picture of the

3 Linguist Kenneth Pike (2015/1954) originally coined the terms *emic* and *etic* to connote the different cultural foundations of phonemics and phonetics. This distinction has since shifted to the social sciences and taken root there (Headland et al. 1990). According to Hahn et al. (2011, 45), “An etic concept is one defined by the investigator independently of any particular context and which can therefore serve as a basis for comparisons across cultures. An emic concept is grounded in the worldview of the participants, reconstructed by the researcher, and corresponds to the meanings participants themselves attach to their experience.” In the context of narrative research, Ben Ari and Enosh (2019, 24) suggest that the etic perspective corresponds to “experiencing the phenomenon from outside” and the emic perspective corresponds to “experiencing a phenomenon from within, on the personal level.” It is in this last sense that we consider our study to be dialectically emic and etic.

issues at hand. Rather than attempt to resolve disagreements, we ascribed to a pluralistic research perspective, according to which narrative polyphony reflects reality better than any single voice can (Novis-Deutsch 2018). We took care to enable each researcher to preserve their positionality with integrity (Ben-Ari and Enosh 2019), and as a result, not all chapters or sections share the same voice. Both the interdisciplinary and multi-national aspects of our study seem warranted in light of the social and cultural complexity of the phenomena we explored and the significance of their implications.

1.3. Selection of the Time Frame for This Research

To identify shifts in contemporary Holocaust memory across the five countries during the 2019-2022 period we examined how the Holocaust was discussed in public-political discourse between 2019-2021, interviewed teachers between 2020-2021, and examined appearances of Holocaust-related topics on Twitter over June-September in 2021. The analysis of this material took place over 2021-2022, and this is reflected in the inclusion of relevant events from 2022 in the analysis and interpretation of the data. Two considerations motivated this decision.

First, the “non-uniqueness” of these years (a priori, not considering Covid) is what allowed us to capture a “snapshot” of real, typical and uneventful Holocaust memory in Europe. Second, this decision enabled us to focus on the 75th Holocaust Remembrance Day as a major discursive event (in 2020) and to compare it to the previous and subsequent remembrance days (2019 and 2021 respectively). In the education section, we discussed specific themes and events that arose during this time period with the educators we interviewed (such as various antisemitic attacks, Covid, various examples of governments’ memory politics, and the challenge of immigration) and examined to what extent these were reflected in the way they teach about the Holocaust and more broadly in their perception of themselves as educators. In the social media section, we focused in-depth on a condensed time period to explore the extent that certain themes and events resonated in the broader discussion about the Holocaust, and how and to what extent the Holocaust is invoked in the everyday lives of people as they engage with their fellow citizens on social media.

1.4. Selection of Countries

This research focuses on five European countries: Poland, Hungary, Germany, England, and Spain. We purposely chose these countries for the similarities and differences between them. The similarities offer a shared basis for comparison. The differences reflect some important aspects that we wished to explore in relation to Holocaust memory.

In terms of similarity, we note three points:

First, the construction of Holocaust memory in each of the countries has developed through a framework wherein, on the one hand, the consolidated memory adheres to the country’s national political considerations (Fogu & Kansteiner 2016), and on the other hand, also accords with the wider European Holocaust memory framework. Despite the variance in evolution and consolidation of

Holocaust memory among the selected countries, the end of the Cold War is considered a decisive point in all five, since it called for a new organization of international cooperation. In the search for a political and cultural basis for the establishment of new solidarities, the Holocaust proved useful, collectively and unquestionably assuming moral value that superseded national borders and united Europe (Levy & Sznajder 2002; 2006). Second, all five countries face contemporary political, economic and antisemitism-related challenges, such as a rise of alt-right parties, immigration and refugee-related issues, and post-Covid recession. Third, at the start of the project, all five countries belonged to the EU (England rescinded its membership later in the project's timeline), thus allowing us to explore the role of this membership in Holocaust memory shifts.

In terms of differences, we note the following three points:

First, since two of the countries are Eastern-European and three of the countries are Western-European, we could examine how representatives of each bloc perceive and utilize Holocaust memory. Second, each of the five countries bears a distinct Holocaust legacy in terms of social role theory (perpetrator, collaborator, bystander, victim and helper). This allows us to explore the effect of past historical-national roles on contemporary memory. The comparison is all the more intriguing in light of contemporary historical contentions. Third, according to the Freedom House democracy index, the countries' democratic status differs. While Spain, Germany and England are considered bona-fide democracies, Poland and Hungary are considered "nations in transit" (see Smeltzer and Buyon 2022).

Our method in this study was integrative and multi-dimensional. We turn next to an elaboration of the domains we chose.

1.5. Choice of Domains

To achieve a comparative and comprehensive framework through which to examine the shifts in Holocaust memory and how these interact with current political challenges, we focused on three cultural domains, which make up the public sphere: Public-political discourses including political speeches, parliamentary debates and traditional media reporting; attitudes of Holocaust educators, collected through interviews with 100 educators from the 5 countries; and the social media discourse on Twitter. The selection of these domains intends to capture a broad spectrum of Holocaust memory in each of the countries. To this extent, while the public-political discourse portrays the national use of Holocaust memory, social media platforms may also represent alternative narratives, subversive discourses and counter-memories. The education domain is positioned between the public-political one and social media. It includes the national level political agenda that teachers are guided to abide by and the individual level that is the personal perspective and objective of the teachers. At the same time, the education domain also includes a third level, namely, the professional level that is based on educational theories, research on EaH (education about the Holocaust), recommendations and programs by professional educational organizations and aspects of teachers' professional identity.

Although we analyse each domain separately for analytic and methodological reasons, in an important sense we consider them as three facets of the public sphere (Habermas 2022).⁴ The integration of these three perspectives offers a clearer look at Holocaust memory in Europe today than any single perspective could achieve. Since each domain constitutes a distinct platform through which Holocaust memory is constructed, reconstructed and utilized, we expected to find both similarities and differences in the form of Holocaust memory in each domain.

The public-political domain

Political discourse is a critical venue in which political actors construct the meaning of their policies and wider societal challenges (Druckman and Jacobs 2015). According to Edelman, “political language is political reality” (1988, 104) and thus any political action is centred and controlled by the art of communication. Public rhetoric as genre is extremely important also in the context of establishing and consolidating memory (Crawford 2002; Graham et al. 2004; Olick 2016; Shenhav 2006; Sierp 2014). National political rhetoric is a major site where collective memory is played out (e.g., Olick 2016; Simko 2015) and public memory (Bodnar 1992) presented, constructed and reconstructed (Adams and Vinitzky-Seroussi 2022). In an age of new media, political speech has remained consistently important when trying to communicate a message to the nation. This genre is thus appropriate as a space in which to examine the articulation of Holocaust memory. As “state-sponsored memory” (Olick 2016, 22) it is particularly well-suited to the examination of the strategic and instrumental uses of the past in the present.

Media is unquestionably an agent of memory (Meyers 2007; Neiger et al. 2011; Peri 1999) and a major site where collective memory is played out (Hoskins 2011; Huyssen 2000; Kligler-Vilenchik et al. 2014; Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2008; Zelizer 1995). It is also a site where a significant amount of public discourse occurs (e.g., Alexander and Jacobs 1998; Azpíroz 2013; Edy 2011; Hong and Nadler 2011; Sheaffer & Shenhav 2009; Wolfsfeld et al. 2013; Young & Soroka 2012), thus constituting in this research a major data source. Media is not only a prominent platform through which memory is constructed and re-constructed to achieve a political and societal agenda (see Tirosh 2017; Sonnevend 2016). Examining media outlets also enables us to address the receiving side and take into consideration the impression that certain speeches (and thus certain memories) leave on their listeners. To this extent, each country included in its data collection and analysis, media outlets from all sides of political map. This widened our horizon and enabled the presentation of voices and perspectives of both central and more peripheral actors.

To realize the first goal of analysing major changes and trends in each national political discourse, each of the researchers in the respective countries used three accessible public datasets: parliamentary

4 We take into consideration how public-political discourse and social media are deeply intertwined (e.g., Kansteiner 2017), and at times fully overlap (for instance when politicians, parties or newspapers post messages on social media such as Twitter). Nonetheless, since the nature and character of each domain is distinct in terms of audience, participation, discourse tone, pace and standards of accuracy and verifiability, and since the methodology of data analysis significantly differs between the two, we decided to conduct separate analyses of each. In the discussion section, we draw these strands together.

debates, public discourse in traditional media, and addresses of political leaders that touch upon the Holocaust. To maintain cross-national comparability, each of the researchers examined public-political discourse between January 27, 2019 and June 27, 2021. Using a keyword search, a preliminary examination was conducted, to map out how the Holocaust is referred to in the various texts and according to different contexts. Respective researchers then conducted a qualitative discourse analysis (Wodak 2001) to examine the various ways in which the Holocaust is presented and addressed in the texts; also detecting and exploring the connections political leaders and actors make; and identifying or constructing connections between the Holocaust and various social and political themes, in particular the issue of antisemitism, attitudes toward Israel, and perceptions of immigration, particularly Muslim immigration. This examination also included identifying recurring themes and patterns to reveal inconsistencies and contradictions. Building on expertise and a deep understanding of the role each state played during the war, holocaust-related incidents over time, and the nature of the public in each country, researchers were able to explore and interpret the interdiscursivity of the Holocaust in the public-political debates and offer a deeper understanding of the shifts in Holocaust memory in the state across time.

Attitudes of Holocaust educators

A major venue of memory shaping and transmission is in education about the Holocaust. As an agent of memory (Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002), the teacher not only transmits information about the Holocaust, but also offers specific contemporary messages and values to students. Educating about the Holocaust (EaH) has thus become a prominent field of research, with much data collected from various educational sites (Eckmann et al. 2017a, 2017b; Foster et al. 2016; Gross and Stevick 2015; Nesfield 2015). In this study we focused on how EaH operates today in each of the countries, in order to formulate a comprehensive roadmap for EaH from the teachers' perspective. Specifically, five goals guided this section:

1. To identify interactions between teachers' personal, professional and national Holocaust memory legacies and describe their combined effects on EaH as explanatory variables for how Holocaust memory is preserved and transmitted.
2. To map current goals, pedagogical methods and educational content that characterize EaH today in each country, from teachers' perspectives.
3. To assess the level of freedom that teachers exercise, teach and offer students, in different national contexts of EaH.
4. To evaluate the state of EaH in each country in terms of challenges and how they are being met, and in terms of the changes it has undergone in recent years.
5. To explore the relation of EaH to current events, such as the rise of extreme right movements, antisemitism and Islamophobia, attitudes towards immigration and the Covid pandemic crisis – as discussed by the teachers.

To meet these goals, we conducted in-depth interviews and close-questioned surveys of 100 teachers (20 per country), which incorporated a general design shared across the five countries plus country-specific considerations and design aspects. Data-analysis was conducted first at country-

level in several stages and then across countries, using narrative and categorical analytic tools (Lieblich et al. 1998). In addition to thematic qualitative analyses of the interviews, we used the mixed-methods digital platform Dedoose[®] to code the interviews. 156 codes were used to code over 3000 interview excerpts. The mixed methods capabilities of Dedoose[®] allowed us to cross the coding with participants' survey data and answer questions regarding connections between topics and demographic attributes of the teachers.

Social media discourses

In a "culture of connectivity" (Van Dijck 2013) in which networked technologies and social media are used pervasively, memorialization practices and media are closely linked (e.g., Adams & Kopelman 2021; Hoskins 2011; Huyssen 2000). As digital-memory culture transitions toward social media (Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2020), memory-making practices are also shifting to include novel practices that "transcend established boundaries of space, time and social experience" (Keightley & Schlesinger 2014, 747). Among other utilizations, new responsive spaces to remember are forming through social media ecologies such as Instagram (Henig & Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2022) and TikTok (Divon & Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2022).

For Holocaust memory, this digital transformation is significant. Holocaust memory has become increasingly connected with the use of social media (Fagen 2019), whose architecture, mediation and ability to elicit intense reactions among users is significant (Kansteiner 2017). Not only can memories be created and changed by users, but also digitally shared and transferred through space and time. These "global memories" (Reading 2016) are constantly on the move, connecting with other images, texts, events, and contexts. In this manner online engagement with Holocaust commemoration offers a plethora of ways through which to remember and engage with the past. Counter and vernacular memories are made public through various social platforms and among versatile audiences (Pentzold & Sommer 2011).

Social media can both amplify distortion, antisemitism and hate speech, and contribute to expanding Holocaust knowledge and memory⁵, especially among the younger generations (Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2022; Goldberg & Hazzan 2015; Jakubowicz 2017; Kohn 2013; Oboler 2016; Oksanen et al. 2014; Shandler 2017; Vigo 2017). Not only Holocaust distortion, but also actual Holocaust denial are currently widespread on social media (Cohen-Almagor 2016). This is not merely a fringe phenomenon, but rather a prevalent one in platforms that are widely acceptable at all levels of society such as Facebook, Twitter and TikTok. Accordingly, Holocaust memory on social media is a highly controversial field, all the more so when the Holocaust is used analogically in the present to justify and advocate public behaviour and/or policy decisions.

5 See [Countering Holocaust distortion on social media](#) for a set of guidelines and recommendations to counter Holocaust distortion on social media channels in Holocaust museums and memorials.

Twitter is used and present in all five countries, and in four of them (Hungary excepted) it is a popular social media platform.⁶ Twitter has the advantage of ease of access and the ability to explore information propagation networks through the retweeting mechanism. Since its launch in 2007, Twitter has become the primary space for online public reaction to events. It has become a highly studied network due to the accessibility of data (Williams et al. 2017) and for our research provides a comprehensive platform through which to explore the use of Holocaust memory in conjunction with present-day concerns.

We used a data-scraping platform to collect Holocaust-related tweets between June 25, 2021, and September 30, 2021. Using a country-specific keyword dictionary, the researchers collected tweets that represent comparative standardized Holocaust discourse. Following data-collection, researchers conducted both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitatively, we first used Natural Language Processing methods, including word clouds and word networks, to gain insight into specific key topics. We then manually coded a random sample of 100 tweets from each country according to the overarching guiding question: How do people talk about the Holocaust on social media? This helped us identify two primary categories that provided a framework through which to analyse the tweets: First, when the Holocaust is used as a reference to discuss present-day issues. Second, the historical discussion of the Holocaust, namely users who discuss the history, commemoration, education or legislation of the Holocaust. To support conclusions from the manual coding, data was organized according to frequency of tweets containing key words for each of the most frequent topics in each country's respective language. Qualitatively, tweets were read and analysed within their specific context to better understand the nature of the discourse about the Holocaust on a social media platform such as Twitter. The qualitative method complemented the quantitative analysis such that various utilizations of Holocaust memory on Twitter could be identified and discussed.

In sum, analysing how Holocaust memory is constructed, reconstructed and utilized in each of these domains, and across the five countries, enables a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the shifts taking place within the field.

1.6. Structure and Layout of the Report

This report is divided into three sections according to the three domains. The first section deals with the public-political domain. This section is further divided into five separate chapters according to the specific countries, each chapter providing a separate overview of the evolution of Holocaust memory, methodology of data collection in that country, discursive events, major themes and insights, and conclusions. The public-political domain section concludes with a comparative discussion section in which major findings across all countries are discussed in an integrative manner, offering a deeper understanding of the Holocaust memory shifts in public discourse as a whole.

6 See [Social Media Stats Europe Feb 2022-Feb 2023](#) for more country-specific stats.

The second section deals with the educational domain. This section begins with a literature review that describes the current state of EaH by country. The methodology section that follows describes the research questions and hypotheses, the research design, tools, and methods of analysis. Findings are organized by country, with the analysis focusing first on the teachers as a group, next on the students as described by their teachers, and then on a thematic analysis of the interviews. Following this, we analyse shared and comparative themes and categories. We end with conclusions and recommendations.

The third section focuses on the social media domain. This section begins with a brief overview of the ambiguous ecology of social media platforms and how the Holocaust is commemorated and negotiated on social media. The methodology section includes information on data collection, data cleaning and preparation processes, and data analysis. Before delving into findings, the background section includes a review of how the Holocaust is discussed in various social media platforms, between commemoration and antisemitism on the one hand and a focus on history and current circumstances on the other hand. The findings include both a general overview of how people across countries refer to and discuss the Holocaust on Twitter and a country-specific detailed account of usage of the Holocaust. Three main topics are the focal point: Covid, Colonialism, and Sinti and Roma, each linked to the Holocaust via various connections. Finally, we conclude with a zoomed-out perspective, discussing how the Holocaust is typically evoked on social media as a reference and/or analogy that helps make sense of the present.

The fourth section of this report is a comparative discussion that integrates the findings of the report across domains and countries. In this section we revisit each of the three research questions and present our insights comparatively, by highlighting similarities and differences between domains and countries and attempting to reach shared conclusions. We also discuss limitations of this research, offer various directions for future research and suggest policy recommendations for several types of stakeholders.

1.7. Significance and Relevance of the Research

In recent years, the polarization of Holocaust memory has been growing, and with it, nationalist, alt-right and counter-hegemonic revised versions of the past are articulated (Herfroy-Mischler 2016; Ofer 2018), manifesting increasing anti-immigration, antisemitic, racist, and anti-Israel attitudes (ADL 2018; ADL Global 2015; Green 2018; FRR 2018).

Focusing on the intersection of Holocaust memory and prominent political issues such as immigration and antisemitism, this report shows how the memory of the Holocaust is constantly shaped and reshaped according to contemporary public and political needs and circumstances. We provide broader answers to the research questions presented above at both national, cross-national and trans-European levels. Since the research employs an international and interdisciplinary perspective, the report's findings may be relevant to scholars from a wide range of fields as well as educators, practitioners, members of the media, policy-makers, and politicians.

The research innovates in three central ways. First, we compare and contrast past and present trends in collective understandings of the Holocaust with current public and political challenges. We identify how Holocaust memory has developed in each country over time to establish the current positioning of the past in the present. This framework, in turn, is the basis through which we examine contemporary utilizations of Holocaust memory in light of various political concerns. In this way our findings afford a broad understanding of how the memory of the Holocaust has changed internally within each of the countries, and externally, across countries. Second, the rigorous calibration of data and data-analysis methods enable the comparison of findings across diverse settings such that findings are cross-culturally reliable and valid. Third, the triangulation of data methodologically and inter-disciplinarily, allows for a broader and deeper understanding of how Holocaust memory is shaped, enacted, and negotiated in contemporary Europe.

Seventy-eight years after the end of WWII, we set out to explore to what extent it remains one of the primary frameworks through which public and political issues are understood, discussed, and constructed. Notwithstanding the Holocaust's status in cosmopolitan memory, does it represent a consensus in national understanding or do right- and left-wing political identifications predict attitudes towards Holocaust memory, while transcending national identity? Why is it so often used to charge others as profane, labeling them as Nazis, fascists, racists, antisemitic, anti-Zionist and so on?

These questions are not merely academic, rather, they have immediate implications for our times and exigencies. One need only note how various crises lead interested parties to evoke the Holocaust. Consider the analogies drawn by vaccine resisters to the Holocaust during the Covid pandemic; or analogies drawn between contemporary asylum seekers and refugees and the Jews who escaped from the Nazis during the 1930s and 1940s.

These examples reflect the way in which the Holocaust remains a watershed event, even while its remembrance is diversifying and often conflicting. A better understanding of contemporary Holocaust remembrance and how it has been shifting and modifying in response to current social and political developments is thus critical in order to reflect on how the past is perceived and how the present is shaped. Since research insights transcend the boundaries of the five countries explored, we anticipate our conclusions to be applicable beyond the specificity of the case studies, to additional European states and other countries that share similar attributes such as past roles in the war, present challenges, and/or political affiliations. To conclude, the shifts we perceive in Holocaust memory in these five European countries, can, we argue, also be useful as a litmus test for the various perspectives and trends in Europe and as a point of comparison with future trends.

CHAPTER 2

Holocaust Memory in the Public-Political Discourses of Poland, Hungary, Germany, England and Spain, 2019–2021



Editors:

Dr. Shmuel Lederman
Dr. Tracy Adams
Prof. Arie J. Kochavi

Researchers:

(listed alphabetically)

Dr. Tracy Adams
Dr. Anikó Félix
Dr. Piotr Forecki
Maximilian Hauer
Prof. Arie J. Kochavi
Dr. Shmuel Lederman
Dr. Marta Simó

Research assistants:

Ella Imgart
Noah Krasman
Aliena Stürzer
Petra Várhegyi

2.1. Public-Political Discourse Analysis: A Methodological Introduction¹

This part of the report examines the public-political discourse on the Holocaust via the public speeches and statements of various political actors (including their posts on social media) and via various media outlets between January 2019 and June 2021. Guided by the research questions presented in the introduction, we organized our research around key discursive events that concerned the Holocaust in this period, some common to all countries (Holocaust Remembrance Days [HMDs], places of remembrance) and some unique to the specific country. Although discursive events played out in public are not synonymous with each individual's memory and perception of the Holocaust, they serve as a good indication of the current public and societal discourse that takes place in each country regarding the Holocaust.

We asked each researcher to choose up to seven discursive events that they deemed particularly important and relevant in the context of our research, and then the entire team chose the ones that allowed for both comparison between the countries and a grasp of the unique features of Holocaust memory in each country. In addition, we asked each researcher to decide on several media outlets that represent the spectrum from the far-left to the far-right in the country and enjoy relatively large audience among their constituency. We then conducted a pilot study, focusing on HMDs, to get a better sense of the material available for analysis in each of the countries, to improve our keyword search, to unify our approach to the analysis and to begin formulating hypotheses. We then conducted the main part of the research, whose results are presented here.

For the analysis, we relied on the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) (Wodak & Meyer 2009). DHA examines the relationship between different discourses, genres and texts in order to discover how they are connected to each other intertextually. It is also concerned with re-textualization, which is the process in which the individual elements of a text are extracted and relocated to a different context. Furthermore, it analyses interdiscursivity, which involves the merging of various discourses. To achieve these functions, DHA employs a multi-disciplinary and ethnographic approach and interprets the resources with the methodology of iteration based on the principles of triangulation (Wodak 2001). Its multidisciplinary nature rests on the historical, political, and sociological sciences, in addition to linguistics, evaluating texts with a diverse set of genres and approaches. The ethnographic approach ensures that discursive events are evaluated in their entire cultural and societal context (Reisigl & Wodak 2009). The methodology of iteration ensures that the researcher modifies the questions and the responses as the discussion progresses.

In our study, we examined the various ways in which the Holocaust is presented and addressed in the texts, including an exploration of the connections political leaders and public actors make, identify or construct between the Holocaust and various social and political issues. Texts were carefully examined, focusing on the context in which the Holocaust was discussed, the speaker who discussed it, and how the Holocaust was linked to issues of antisemitism, attitudes toward minorities and immigration, attitudes toward Israel, and current political and social challenges. Building on

1 This part of the Public Discourse section is written by Shmuel Lederman, Anikó Félix and Tracy Adams.

Volkov's "cultural code" (1978, 2011) and the analytical concept of intersectionality (e.g., Crenshaw 1991; Stögner 2020), we created a framework for conceptualizing the various ways in which social and political positions interact to shape the multiple meanings of the Holocaust within the society at large. Accordingly, political views were also taken into consideration, to identify and explore how political party affiliation shapes the way in which the Holocaust is discussed.

Identifying recurring themes and patterns and revealing inconsistencies and contradictions, contextual knowledge was used to embed the interactional themes of the discursive events in the wider frame of the country's Holocaust remembrance and political considerations. This allowed us to explore and interpret the interdiscursivity of the Holocaust in public and political debates, and offer a deeper understanding of the shifts in Holocaust memory in each country across time. We discuss these findings using select examples to represent the identified themes.

We applied recursively the first six steps of the eight steps of DHA. The first step of the DHA, the "activation and consultation of preceding theoretical knowledge (i.e. recollection, reading and discussion of previous research)" is expressed in the introduction of each chapter, which succinctly presents the evolution of Holocaust memory in the country to which the chapter is dedicated. We asked the researchers to focus on the major turning points in this evolution, based on the scholarly literature. The second step, "systematic collection of data and context information" involved the collection of relevant speeches and statements by politicians who significantly influence the public discourse about the Holocaust from across the political spectrum, as well as parliamentary debates and media reports on the discursive events in each country. In the third step, namely the "selection and preparation of data for specific analyses" each researcher selected the most significant texts to analyze in more detail. The qualitative pilot analysis phase (5th stage of DHA) refers to the analysis of the first discursive event, Holocaust Memorial Days. The 6th step of DHA – the detailed case studies – comprise the main part of each chapter. Naturally, there were variances between the countries in terms of the availability of different sources. They are addressed in the "sources and methodology" sections of the chapters.

2.2. The Shifting Holocaust Memory in Poland²

2.2.1. Introduction: the evolution of Holocaust memory in Poland

Since the end of World War II, the memory of the Holocaust in Poland has undergone various transformations. Its public face, however, has always been subordinate to politics, dependent on the level of intensity of nationalist tendencies, scale of antisemitism and fluctuating taboos within the Polish national community. Thus, this memory has never been formed in a manner consistent with the state of historical knowledge, independent of instrumentalization; and neither has it been free from the concerns of self-image, of what the world will say about Poles and Poland. This does not trivialize one of the key achievements of the Polish political transition that began in 1989, which was an opening up of the hitherto limited public discourse. It expanded to include a variety of issues that had previously been disregarded, ignored, silenced, or falsified. Communist Poland did not speak about the Holocaust or the attitudes of Poles towards Jews during the Holocaust, at least not in an honest way. This area is perhaps a paradigmatic manifestation of the process of collective forgetting in Poland, during which official memory corresponded with the spontaneous need of the Polish population to forget. One may even suggest that between 1945 and 1989, there developed a nationwide community of forgetting and selective remembering of the Holocaust. However, these several dozen years did not constitute a uniform period of time in relation to the memory of the Holocaust.

In comparison to later periods, a lot was said and written in public about the Holocaust in the first few years directly after WWII. Difficult and sensitive subjects were not ignored. Some Polish intellectuals made the brave attempt to face the challenges and ghosts of the recent past in magazines such as *Odrodzenie*, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Kuźnica* and *Twórczość*. They wrote about antisemitism, both before and after the war. They broached Polish attitudes towards the Holocaust and pointed at the prevailing indifference. They criticized Poles who had supported the Nazis in the Holocaust or took part in pogroms and murdered Jews after the war (Andrzejewski 1947; Libionka 1999; Hopfinger & Żukowski, 2019).

The Holocaust and the problematic attitudes of Polish society towards the Holocaust were reflected not only in the Polish press but also in film (Mąka-Malatyńska 2012; Preizner 2012), poetry and literature (Brodzka-Wald, Krawczyńska & Leociak, 2000). The first post-war textbooks provided information about the Holocaust in a relatively extensive, if still somewhat fragmented fashion. Until the political transition in 1989, no subsequent textbooks devoted additional space to the subject, while continuing to distort the historical truth (Radziwiłł 1989). Polish historians at the time also devoted attention to the Holocaust (Aleksiun 2005). Such relative freedom of speech and research on the Holocaust was possible primarily because the official interpretation of the Polish wartime experience was only in its initial phase. It was therefore a period of active and private memory, not yet monopolized by the ideological state discourse.

2 This chapter is written by Piotr Forecki. The translation from Polish is by Forecki unless the texts were available in English.

Undoubtedly, in post-war Poland most material about the Holocaust was published by Jewish historians. Suffice to say that one of the first institutions founded by Holocaust survivors was the Central Jewish Historical Commission (*Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna*). It was established in August 1944 and its main task was to document German crimes against Jews and obtain accounts and testimonies about the Holocaust, as well as prepare them for print. Between 1945 and 1946, the Central Jewish Historical Commission established regional offices in larger cities, while its correspondents worked in smaller towns (Horn 1985). Holocaust survivors, as Aleksion points out, considered the documentation and publication of the fate of Polish Jews during the war to be their obligation. Their sense of mission was strengthened by the fear that otherwise the Holocaust would be forgotten or incorporated into the general history of Poland (Aleksion 2003). Their concerns would prove fully justified.

The period of initial debates and publications about the Holocaust in Poland was short. It lasted two to three years after the war. It was soon replaced with the need to address the difficult reality of German occupation and the even more disturbing memories. For several decades, the topic of the Jews and the Holocaust was eliminated from public discourse and the writing of Polish history. If this subject ever appeared, it was falsified and distorted. Jews were only mentioned when they were used as scapegoats during periods of political crises and party reshuffling (Machcewicz 1993).

Silence on the subject of the Jews and the Holocaust in the People's Republic of Poland also stemmed from the propagandist tenet about the national homogeneity of Poland. The reasons for this homogeneity, however, were never analysed. There was no public discussion about the Jews or other ethnic minorities who had lived in Poland before the war, or about the impoverishment of Polish culture and the emptiness of its ethnic landscape. This subject simply did not fit the vision of an ethnically homogenous country that was promoted by the government. Hence, the word "Jew" was continually avoided. It was occasionally replaced with various phrases or allusions, in order not to invoke the ghosts and to affirm the conviction that the People's Republic of Poland was an ethnically homogenous country.

The silence about the Jews and the Holocaust was also borne of the accepted and popularized communist historiography of the war. The government made national martyrdom, heroism and anti-fascism the basis of the memory of the war. The stories of Polish heroes and victims became the dominant memory. It corresponded with a national demand to commemorate heroism and suffering and it was the perfect cement for the collective identity of the nation. Its canonical version included emphasizing Poles as the main (if not the only) victims of the war and illustrating their heroic resistance against the Nazis. The victims of other ethnicities – mainly Jews – were ignored. For various reasons, they were not suitable members of the "political cult of the fallen" and the murdered (Traba 2006, 125-133).

The authorities turned to the past to consolidate the nation and to find sources to legitimize their power. Memories of the war were abused, shaped according to current needs and framed into an official and potentially cohesive version. The task was simple enough as the government took full control of the institutions that were responsible for memorializing the war. The Holocaust

was forgotten, as Polish historiography was subjugated to a singular focus on Polish suffering. The forgetting came in different forms and manifested in different ways.

First of all, the Holocaust was deprived of its *unprecedented character*. The fact that the Nazis targeted the Jews for specific reasons and that their fate was different from other groups was silenced. In other words, the Holocaust was not regarded as a specific historical event that required special attention. Secondly, the difference between the position of Jews to that of non-Jewish Poles under German occupation was blurred and the number of murdered Jews was counted together with the number of Polish victims. Therefore, Jewish suffering was mixed into the Polish martyrological vision of the occupation period and the Holocaust – as a solely Jewish experience – was erased from the pages of Polish history. All of this was intended to create a conception of the Holocaust as something that had happened to Poles.

Thirdly, if the image of the history of the war was dominated by the vision of the martyred and heroic Polish nation, anything that could contradict this image was eliminated. Thus, indifferent and shameful attitudes of Poles towards the Jews during the Holocaust and crimes committed by them, were silenced and the focus was on actions that could ease the national conscience and suppress moral anxiety. For this purpose, the Righteous Among the Nations were celebrated, while Jews were somehow made partly responsible for what had happened to them. They were criticized for their passivity, for lacking the “spirit of resistance” and for collaborating with the Nazis (e.g. *Judenräte*). Thus, the authorities attempted to unburden the conscience of the bystanders by accusing the victims of complicity. They deliberately avoided any discussion of pre-war antisemitism. Instead, they presented evidence of the Jews’ alleged anti-Polonism and their collaboration with the enemies of Poland (Kichelewski 2006, 254-255).

This process of forgetting the Holocaust was an official policy with respect to WWII history. The evidence for this can be found in academic literature and fiction approved for publication, in history and Polish language textbooks, articles in the official press and in feature films. A specific historical policy to standardize monuments and memorials was also implemented (Young 1993). For many years this policy also embraced the anniversaries of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, attaching new, Polish-centric meanings to it (Kobylarz 2009). In other words, the efforts to forget the Holocaust were manifold and implemented by means of a whole spectrum of communication media and “carriers of historical memory” (Kula 2002).

A specific process of “reconstructing the memory” (Steinlauf 2001, 89-121) of Jews, the Holocaust and the Polish-Jewish past and, at the same time a kind of recognition and “a breach in the prevailing area of silence,” as Szlajfer put it (2003, 21), began in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The shape of this recognition was determined by the restricted freedom of speech and the psychological barriers to raising certain uncomfortable questions. In other words, one could not say in public everything one wanted to say and, in any case, there were things that people did not want to speak about. Nevertheless, the last decade of the People’s Republic of Poland included various attempts to break the long silence. Manifestations of this complex process of memory reconstruction were visible in bookshops, where literature on the subject, memoirs of Holocaust survivors and books evoking

the pre-war world of Polish Jews appeared on the shelves. Also, activists in the Polish democratic opposition demanded that the Holocaust and its victims be remembered and several publications on the Holocaust (books and articles) appeared in the 1980s in the so-called second publishing circuit (Grądzka-Rejak & Olszek 2020). To some degree, the state's monopoly on the commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was broken and alternative ceremonies were certainly seen as meaningful events (Kobylarz 2009).

The most important turning points in the process of the reconstruction of the memory of Jews and the Holocaust were certainly the first, timid public debates over Claude Lanzmann's film, *Shoah* (1985) and Jan Blonski's essay, *The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto* (1987). Both dealt with Polish bystanders of the Holocaust, the problem of passivity, indifference and antisemitism. However, their range was limited and these debates were held by intellectuals in very narrow circles. A national, general debate involving various social circles was simply impossible under the ruling political regime. Nevertheless, the discussions mentioned above prove that such a debate could, in a limited way, take place at the time. They also demonstrated that the most important obstacle preventing Poles from facing their pre-war attitudes to Jews and the attitude of Polish society to the Holocaust were mental barriers and prejudices (Polonsky 1990; Forecki 2013).

A new era in the Polish memory of the Holocaust began with the political changes symbolized by the year 1989. From this moment, the problem of Holocaust memory, Polish-Jewish relations during WWII and, in general, Jewish history, culture and martyrdom, increasingly became a significant element of public discourse. These issues were no longer omitted by the Polish press, many important books appeared on the market and filmmakers as well as other art creators also waded in. Polish researchers, few though they were, also gradually approached the subject and started to make amends for the lost decades. The topic of the Holocaust and of Polish-Jewish relations during WWII repeatedly rose to prominence on the occasions of the commemorations of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the liberation of Auschwitz, the Kielce pogrom and during the heated conflicts about the presence of religious symbols in the area of the former Auschwitz camp (Zubrzycki 2014). Above all, however, the topic of Polish attitudes towards the Holocaust appeared when important books were published and sparked public discussions, such as Jan Tomasz Gross' books: *Neighbors* (2000), *Fear* (2008) and *Golden Harvest* (Gross & Grudzińska-Gross 2011). Undoubtedly, one could list more contexts and occasions when the topic of the Holocaust was raised but what is certain is that it always stirred up intense emotions, as though it violated an intimate sphere within the nation and trespassed upon national taboo (Forecki 2010; Dobrosielski 2017; Nowicka-Franczak 2017). These emotions demonstrate that the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations pose a challenge for Poles, one that is serious, deeply rooted and of complex origin.

In hindsight, the most important, multi-threaded and the longest national debate so far has been the one over Gross's *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne*. The uniqueness of this book resulted mainly from the specificity and significance of the problem that Poles were forced to confront: direct complicity in the extermination of Jews. Unfortunately, the publication of *Neighbors* did not only result in a stormy debate over Poles' complicity in the Holocaust and in research advancements in the field. In retrospect, we can also identify other ramifications,

which are definitely deeper, more far-reaching and long-lasting. They prompt us to question the previously held belief about a Polish willingness to confront a difficult past, about a reorientation of Poles' historical consciousness and about their readiness to question their national mythology. The Jedwabne debate, which at first gave rise to some optimism, was followed by a wave of rejection and Holocaust distortion. There were various attempts to return to the pre-Gross times and to an innocent and heroic Poland, which was supposedly violated by *Neighbours*. A campaign was launched to defend the good name of Poland and the Poles, who were allegedly accused of mass complicity in the extermination of Jews. In other words, the Jedwabne debate was followed by a backlash. This term can be used to refer to all the defensive and confrontational reactions to the publication of *Neighbours* and to the defensive and reactive policy towards memory, popularly referred to as a politics of history, which has been pursued in Poland in response to Jedwabne for the last two decades.

This politics of history does not belong to any particular political party. It is adopted regardless of which party is in power, although it undoubtedly intensified in Poland with the consecutive Law and Justice governments. Since the 2005 parliamentary elections this party turned its historical policy into its hallmark and made it a foundation of its political agenda. It set objectives for the policy at home and abroad and, above all, institutionalized it. It is this "new politics of history," a term that has become the key instrument of the backlash, which has determined some of the party's unique features. This "new politics of history" has been used, not only in Poland, to legitimize state power, reproduce social order, build identity and consolidate various political entities, particularly nations, by taking advantage of or erasing certain events from the past (Forecki 2018). It is in the context of the aforementioned backlash that the research results presented in this section should be read and understood.

2.2.2. Sources and methodology

Many discursive events related to the memory of the Holocaust took place in Poland between January 2019 and June 2021. The theme of the Holocaust keeps recurring – it can even be said that it is constantly present in public discourse. It appears regularly for instance, on the anniversaries of the liberation of the Auschwitz camp and the outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Since 2017, it has also been formally present on the National Day of Remembrance of Poles saving Jews. This new public holiday was established on the initiative of the President of Poland and is celebrated each year on March 24, which is the anniversary of the death of the Ulma family from Markowa. The Ulmas, along with the Jews they hid, were shot by German gendarmes. Many different events are organized all over Poland by state institutions, especially the Institute of National Remembrance, on this public holiday. The subject of the Holocaust, however, appears informally much more often. It arises when historians publish the results of their latest research on the participation of Poles in the Holocaust, but also in general articles published in the Polish and Western media. This chapter considers the following discursive events from 2019 to 2021: The International Holocaust Remembrance Day / Anniversaries of the Liberation of Auschwitz (2019, 2020, 2021); the campaign against the authors of *Night without End: The Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland*; the scandal around the Paris conference; and the case of Masha Gessen's article.

This list could undoubtedly be longer. However, the discursive events selected above can be considered the most important ones in the years 2019-2021 and at the same time useful for showing the currently dominant discourse on the Holocaust in Poland. Moreover, many of these events had wide repercussions also outside Poland – especially in Israel and the USA.

The chapter is based on an analysis of several newspapers and Internet portals representing different sides of the political spectrum on the left-centre-right axis. For clarity, we list them here with a short description:

Gazeta Wyborcza – a nationwide daily with a central-liberal profile, published by the Agora Company. It was established in 1989 and its editor-in-chief is Adam Michnik. It is available in print and also has an electronic edition. *Gazeta Wyborcza* is considered a magazine of the liberal intelligentsia. The editors openly criticize the current state authorities and are critical of the governing Law and Justice party. *Gazeta Wyborcza* is considered a Jewish newspaper in the antisemitic discourse due to the presence of journalists of Jewish origin on the editorial board.

Polityka – an opinion-forming socio-political weekly with a liberal and moderately left-wing profile. It was established in 1957 and the editorial office is located in Warsaw. *Polityka* is the sales leader among other opinion weeklies. The editor-in-chief is Jerzy Baczyński and the editorial board includes Marian Turski, a Holocaust survivor. The weekly is published in print and has an electronic edition as well.

OKO.press – an Internet information service on social and political issues. It was established in June 2016 by the OKO Centre for Civic Control Foundation. This website is a non-profit endeavor and is financed exclusively by voluntary donations and grants awarded by independent non-governmental organizations. As a civic tool for holding the authorities accountable, the *OKO.press* website aims to verify the statements of politicians and public figures. The editorial team includes several journalists previously associated with *Gazeta Wyborcza*, in relation to which *OKO.press* is positioned much more to the left. In July 2020, in a study by the Institute of Media Monitoring, *OKO.press* was included in the ten most important opinion-forming Internet portals in Poland. The editor-in-chief of the website is Piotr Pacewicz.

KrytykaPolityczna.pl – a left-wing website devoted to social, political and cultural issues. It was established in 2012 as the virtual equivalent of the daily newspaper. It operates thanks to the financial support of the Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe as well as the Open Society Foundations. The name of *Krytyka Polityczna* also refers to a publishing house and activists' clubs in various Polish cities. *Krytyka Polityczna* serves to build a new leftist milieu in Poland. Its editor-in-chief is Agnieszka Wisniewska.

Do Rzeczy – a conservative and right-wing opinion weekly, established in Poland in 2013. It is available in printed and electronic versions. The editorial office appeals to Catholic values and supports economic freedom. Above all, however, this weekly openly supports the Law and Justice political party currently ruling in Poland. Its editor-in-chief is Paweł Lisicki.

wPolityce.pl – a right-wing website created in 2010. It is devoted primarily to political issues. The editorial office supports the current government and sympathizes with the Law and Justice party. According to the ranking of the Institute of Media Monitoring, *wPolityce.pl* ranked third on the list of the most frequently cited online media in Poland in 2019. It also maintained its high ratings in subsequent years. Its editor-in-chief is Marzena Nykiel.

Publications were found on the basis of the following keywords:

1. The International Holocaust Remembrance Day/Anniversaries of the Liberation of Auschwitz (key words: Holocaust, Holokaust, Zagłada, Oświęcim, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Yad Vashem, Moshe Kantor, Międzynarodowy Dzień Pamięci o Ofiarach Holokaustu, Żydzi).
2. The campaign against the authors of *Night without End: The Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland* (key words: Dalej jest noc, Barbara Engelking, Jan Grabowski, Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, proces historyków, Filomena Leszczyńska, Korekta obrazu, Korekty ciąg dalszy).
3. The Paris conference (key words: Jacek Leociak, Jan Tomasz-Gross, konferencja paryska, konferencja w Paryżu, nowa polska szkoła historii Holokaustu, nowa szkoła historii Holokaustu).
4. The Masha Gessen controversy (key words: Masha Gessen)

The chapter also analyses public statements by leading Polish politicians, primarily representatives of the state authorities: Andrzej Duda (President of Poland), Mateusz Morawiecki (Prime Minister), Przemysław Czarnek (Minister of National Education), Jacek Czaputowicz (Minister of Foreign Affairs), Piotr Gliński (Minister of Culture and National Heritage), Zbigniew Ziobro (Minister of Justice) and other politicians from the ruling party. The chapter also looks at statements by the presidents (Jarosław Szarek and Karol Nawrocki) and other employees of the Institute of National Remembrance. This state institution, subordinated to the state authorities, was established in 1999 and has branches in various cities in Poland. It has extensive research, educational, archival and investigative powers. Its activities have caused much controversy. The Institute is accused primarily of writing history to serve the official, nationalist narrative about the past. In recent years, historians from the Institute have become involved in defending “the good name of Poland” against accusations of complicity in the Holocaust. They also question the latest research on the subject and set their own findings against them.

2.2.3. Findings and analysis

International Holocaust Remembrance Day

On January 27, 2019, more than 50 former prisoners met at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum to commemorate the 74th anniversary of the liberation of this Nazi concentration and extermination camp. The event was held under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda. The former prisoners were accompanied, among others, by Prime Minister Matusz Morawiecki, Deputy Prime Minister Beata Szydło, representatives of the Polish state authorities, ambassadors and diplomats, representatives of the clergy, the regional authorities and employees of museums and memorial sites. Two former prisoners of the camp took the floor during the ceremony: Janina Iwańska and Leon Weintraub. Apart from laconic news footage, these celebrations did not receive

much coverage in the media, primarily because it was not a milestone anniversary, which is always given more attention. The only speech during these ceremonies that caught the attention of the media was the speech of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki.

In his speech, Morawiecki stated:

[T]he extermination that took place then was not done by some Nazis but by Nazi Germany. It was Nazi Germany that fed on fascist ideology, which was later described in this way by all historians and has been called so until today. Yet all the evil came from this state and this must not be forgotten, because otherwise we relativize evil.

The Prime Minister also said that:

[T]he Polish state acts as the guardian of the truth, which must not be relativized in any way. I want to make a promise to [preserve] the complete truth about that era, because we must face the truth so that the terrible cruel death of those imprisoned here and in other German extermination camps [...] so that they would not perish again.³

It was these words from the Prime Minister's speech that triggered comments. The right-wing media welcomed them with approval and emphasized their importance.⁴ They correspond to the historical policy pursued in Poland for many years, according to which the perpetrators of WWII and the Holocaust should not be called Nazis but Germans. This was one of the key points of Lech Makowiecki's article, "Thank you, Prime Minister Morawiecki, for the Words of Truth about Auschwitz," enumerating who and how many times they used the word "Nazis" during the anniversary celebration.⁵

Morawiecki's speech met with a completely different response from the liberal *OKO.press* Internet magazine. The historian and journalist Adam Leszczyński pointed out that the Prime Minister, speaking of the nationality of the perpetrators and not their ideology, made a political choice:

Many right-wing activists believe that the use of the word "Nazis" – without specifying their nationality – blurs the responsibility of the German state for crimes committed during WWII, including the Holocaust. The Nazis did not have a homeland – they adhered to a criminal ideology. PiS [the Law and Justice party] politicians sometimes even claim, like the right-wing media, that the German state denies responsibility for the Holocaust, blaming it on undefined Nazis.

3 ["Premier Mateusz Morawiecki podczas obchodów 74. rocznicy Wyzwolenia Auschwitz: Państwo polskie stoi na straży prawdy, która nie może być relatywizowana,"](#) January 27, 2019.

4 ["Mocne wystąpienie premiera w Auschwitz. 'Żadni naziści, tylko Niemcy',"](#) *Do Rzeczy*, January 27, 2019.

5 ["Dziękuję, Panie Premierze Morawiecki za słowa prawdy w Auschwitz,"](#) *wPolityce.pl*, January 27, 2019.

Leszczyński also wrote that the use of the word “Nazi” is important because it emphasizes the role of Nazi ideology, which was at the root of the crime. Moreover, this crime was not committed only by Germans but also by people of many nationalities, citizens of countries cooperating with Germany, as well as citizens of the occupied countries, including Poles. He also added that many Germans were victims of Nazism – activists from left-wing parties, homosexuals, mentally ill people, etc. Talking about “Germans,” one leaves out these groups. Leszczyński also stressed that describing WWII in terms of a struggle between nations and not ideology had a political goal. In this way Germans are constantly reminded of their collective guilt and it also serves the goal of demanding reparations from Germany.⁶

Gazeta Wyborcza also referred to the content of Prime Minister Morawiecki’s speech. Its journalist Estera Flieger wrote that putting an emphasis on the Holocaust as having been committed by the Germans is “one of the favourite historical policies of the Polish right.” The journalist also pointed out that the Prime Minister, by bowing to the populists, erased the perpetrators of Austrian, Ukrainian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Russian and other descent from history. Moreover, she noted that Polish populists who demanded that the Germans be named as responsible for the Holocaust were not able to admit that, for example, Jews from Jedwabne were murdered by Poles. The Polish perpetrators “are always referred to as a mob, bandits and even Germans. But Poles? Never,” wrote Flieger. Moreover, the journalist noted that “the universal lesson of the Holocaust disappears in the words of the Prime Minister. What also vanishes is the danger of totalitarian ideology and the reflection on individual guilt that Karl Jaspers, Hannah Arendt and Zygmunt Bauman wrote about.”⁷

Morawiecki’s words were also the subject of an article in *Gazeta Wyborcza* by the journalist Maciej Stasiński, who asked why the perpetrators of the murders of Jews committed in Jedwabne, Kielce and other places are called “bandits,” “antisemites” or “mobs,” and not referred to explicitly as Poles: “Thus, of what nationality were the neighbours of the Jews of Kielce and Jedwabne? Why is it not allowed to say that Poles murdered Jews?” The journalist ended his article with the following comment: “The difference is that contemporary Germany does not deny Nazism but the contemporary Polish nationalist right [...] completely denies its antisemitism and the participation of Poles in the pogroms.”⁸

The celebration of the 74th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz was accompanied by a march organized by nationalists “in honour of the murdered Poles,” led by Piotr Rybak, a well-known nationalist and extreme antisemite sentenced for burning an effigy of a Jew in the Wrocław Market Square in 2015.⁹ A group of about 200 nationalists marched from the Oświęcim train station to the

6 Adam Leszczyński, “[Morawiecki: 'Zagłady dokonali Niemcy, nie naziści'. Pomijanie ideologii to relatywizacja historii](#),” *OKO.press*, January 28, 2019.

7 Estera Flieger, “[Historyczny Populizm Premiera](#),” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 29, 2019.

8 Maciej Stasiński, “[Kto zabijał w Jedwabnem](#),” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 30, 2019.

9 See also “[Skazany za spalenie kukły Żyda pozostanie w więzieniu](#),” *Polsat News*, December 15, 2017.

gate of the former Auschwitz camp. It was there that Rybak spoke, saying, among other things, the following:

It is a march in honour of Poles murdered in Oświęcim. Information has been disseminated for 74 years that only Jews died here. A lot of Poles, Hungarians died and only then Jews. We are sorry that the government of the Republic of Poland has forgotten that it is the government of Poles. Jewish nations organize anniversaries in which Poles do not participate at all.

Several counter-demonstrators with a “Stop Fascism” banner, as well as an Israeli flag and an EU flag, tried to stop the nationalists’ march. It was towards them that the following hateful and antisemitic statements were directed: “Be glad that you are talking to a Slav. Otherwise you would have gone up in smoke by now”; “Don’t provoke us, because you don’t know what will happen”; “And where are your sidelocks? Show your foreskin”; “Please tell us who the Kapos were. They were not Poles, they were Jews”; “With such a flag [of Israel] you follow the people who are fucking fighting for the Polish nation. May God forgive you.” The “chairman” of this assembly, Piotr Rybak, exclaimed: “Are we an independent country? It’s time to fight against Jewry and free Poland from it! Where are the rulers of this country? With their snouts in the trough! And this needs to be changed.”¹⁰ The police present nearby did not react. These incidents can be seen in an amateur video footage shared by one of the participants.¹¹

These events were recounted in the media. Based on the available reports, it is clear that the right-wing media treated this antisemitic demonstration in a lenient manner. The *Do Rzeczy* weekly wrote on its website that “the nationalist circles organized a march in Oświęcim to commemorate the Polish victims of KL Auschwitz,” and the editors mentioned these victims in the article, yet they did not mention the word “antisemitism.”¹² The liberal media, in turn, did not hide its indignation. The journalist Michał Olszewski wrote in *Gazeta Wyborcza*:

In a symbolic sense, it is difficult to go beyond that. An antisemite talking rubbish is terrible. But an antisemite talking rubbish at a place where over a million Jews were murdered is a scandal, a monstrous phenomenon that defies any logic. Rybak spits survivors in the face and practices a dead man’s dance on the ruins of the crematoria.

Olszewski also pointed out that “Rybak is extreme,” but the path has been paved by others, including the Polish authorities associated with the Law and Justice party, for whom the Auschwitz-Birkenau

10 All these quotes are taken from an article published on *OKO.press*, where they were criticized. See Magdalena Chrzczonowicz, “‘Pokażcie napletek’. Tak narodowcy antysemitę Rybaka czcili rocznicę wyzwolenia Auschwitz,” *OKO.press*, January 27, 2019.

11 The 74th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz: [video report on nationalist march](#).

12 “Oświęcim: Gorąco wokół Piotra Rybaka i marszu narodowców,” *Do Rzeczy*, January 27, 2019.

Museum is a place where “allegedly, the role of Polish victims is insufficiently emphasized.”¹³ Jan Hartman, a philosopher and ethicist, wrote about the events in the *Polityka* weekly. In an article entitled “Nationalists surround Auschwitz,” he looked for an answer to the question “Where does the aggressive antisemitism of Piotr Rybak and others like him come from?” In response, he pointed to the deep roots of antisemitism in Poland and its stoking during the war by Nazi propaganda. He stressed, however, that “these archaic factors are probably not the most important and constitute only the background for the new antisemitism, which was bred during the communist era, and after 1989 was driven by an opportunistic and hypocritical narrative on Polish-Jewish matters.”¹⁴

The demonstration organized by the nationalists was also noted by Jarosław Gowin, the then Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Education and Higher Education. He declared it a “morally outrageous behaviour” and called its participants “useful idiots,” who harm the image of Poland. At the same time, the minister stated that “we live in a democratic state with the rule of law and everybody has the possibility to express their views as long as they are not against the law.”¹⁵ The case of Piotr Rybak was dealt with by the prosecutor’s office on the basis of a complaint submitted by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum. The court in Oświęcim sentenced him to five months in prison and community service.

The weeks leading up to the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz were overshadowed by the scandal related to the organization of alternative ceremonies in Jerusalem, i.e., the 5th World Holocaust Forum organized in Yad Vashem by the association led by Moshe Kantor. The President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, was also invited to the ceremony, yet the organizers did not plan for him to speak, while the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, who had presented his own version of the history of WWII to the public a few weeks before, was invited to speak. Putin had accused Poland, among other things, of starting the war. The Polish diplomatic services did not manage to convince Yad Vashem to include Andrzej Duda’s speech in the programme of the World Holocaust Forum. As a result, the President of Poland decided not to participate in this event.

The media from left to right expressed their approval of the President’s decision. Right-wing publications covered it most indignantly and determinedly, defending Poland’s “good name” against Putin’s provocation. All these texts were aptly and ironically summarized by Kaja Pluto, a journalist from *Krytyka Polityczna*: “When one reads comments on this subject in the right-wing press, one gets the impression that Putin thinks of nothing else but Poland; that he is afraid of its power, risen from its knees; that he envies Poles for the crystal-clear attitudes of their ancestors and that Poland once again falls victim to the Kremlin’s foreign policy.”¹⁶

13 Michał Olszewski, “[Kłamstwo oświęcimskie pod flagą biało-czerwoną](#),” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 27, 2019.

14 Jan Hartman, “[Nacjonaliści okrażają Auschwitz](#),” *Polityka*, January 27, 2019.

15 “[To pożyteczni idioci. Szkodzą wizerunkowi Polski](#)”. Mocne słowa wicepremiera,” *Do Rzeczy*, January 28, 2019.

16 Kaja Pluto, “[Czy Putin uwziął się na Polskę?](#)” *Krytyka Polityczna*, January 27, 2020.

However, it was not only the right-wing media that poured fuel on the fire. It is enough to mention the titles of some of the articles published in the liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza* at that time: “Tanks of Putin’s Historical Policy Crush Our Hussars,”¹⁷ or “Putin’s Propaganda Invasion of Poland.”¹⁸ They reflect the atmosphere prevailing in Poland at that time. It is worth noting, however, that it was also in *Gazeta Wyborcza* that the journalist Dawid Warszawski pointed out that Putin, like Netanyahu and Prime Minister Morawiecki, treats history instrumentally:

The trouble is that such historical demagoguery is not only Putin’s domain. When the Polish Prime Minister claims that all Polish Jews who survived the war survived “because they [had] met Poles,” or when the Israeli Prime Minister claims that it was the great mufti of Jerusalem who suggested to Hitler the idea of the Holocaust, they do not only commit revisionism themselves but also create favourable conditions for Putin’s version of it.¹⁹

By far the sharpest comment on the question of not giving the floor to the Polish President during the event organized at Yad Vashem was published by *Krytyka Polityczna* and written by Professor Jan Grabowski. Noting that Putin’s statements, which accuse the Polish state of cooperation with Hitler and participation in the planning of the Holocaust, are an example of a cynical falsification of history, Grabowski nevertheless claimed that “the Polish authorities, brought into disrepute by years of distorting the history of the Holocaust, have lost any credibility and moral legitimacy to enter into a dispute in this very field.” Grabowski also wrote that it takes “a really great deal of typically Slavic hutzpah to dare to speak on behalf of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust,” given the disreputable record of falsifying the truth about the Holocaust and thus, he added, President Duda could not expect to be given the floor at Yad Vashem.²⁰ In response to Grabowski’s statement, Michał Sutowski from *Krytyka Polityczna* noted that the image of Poland created by Russian propaganda, that of a perpetrator in WWII and an antisemitic country, had a double role. Firstly, it legitimizes and strengthens the antisemitic and nationalist forces in Poland. Secondly, it weakens the Polish position on its eastern policy and on other issues important from the perspective of Russian politics. Referring directly to Grabowski’s article, he wrote:

Unfortunately, drawing conclusions unfavourable for the Polish government and the president, the eminent historian of the Holocaust ignores the key context of the whole matter, which has nothing to do with history, memory and historical truth but with Russia’s plan to break up the European political community, of which Poland is the weakest link and is thus, horror of horrors, apparently becoming the target of the Kremlin’s media operation.²¹

17 Paweł Wroński, “[Czołgi polityki historycznej Putina rozjechały naszą husarię](#),” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 21, 2020.

18 Wacław Radziwinowicz, “[Putina propagandowy najazd na Polskę](#),” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 16, 2020.

19 Dawid Warszawski, “[putin nie zawsze kłamie](#),” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 11, 2020.

20 Jan Grabowski, “[Duda nie ma żadnej moralnej legitymacji do przemawiania w Yad Vashem](#),” *Krytyka Polityczna*, January 8, 2020.

21 Michał Sutowski, “[To twarde interesy geopolityczne stoją za dyplomatycznym ostracyzmem wobec Polski](#),” *Krytyka Polityczna*, January 9, 2020.

There were also articles that sounded antisemitic or were based on far-reaching allegations about Putin's presence at Yad Vashem and his influence on the organization of the ceremony. For example, the article, "Red Star in Yad Vashem" claimed that the institution is not an academic one and that Moshe Kantor supports Putin's anti-Polish historical policy. "Putin's Jewish Card," in turn, pointed out that Putin was a philosemite who wanted to have influence in Jewish circles and, along with them, accuse the West of antisemitism.²² The author of the article, "Professional Absence," suggested that many Israeli government officials had been committing various forms of slander against Poland and Poles for many years.²³ The article, "Stalin's Words in Putin's Mouth" claimed that Russia was using its historical policy to destroy the European Union and NATO. The journalist Rafał Ziemkiewicz argued that Israel was dominated by Russian Jews whose attitude towards Poland was negative and had been shaped by Stalinist propaganda. He also claimed that the whole thing served the purpose of advancing financial claims, because the Jews wanted to "rob Swiss banks" in Poland. Ziemkiewicz wrote explicitly that the Jews had "gangster intentions" towards Poland.²⁴

On the other hand, the editor-in-chief of the *Do Rzeczy* weekly argued that "removing Poland" from the Yad Vashem ceremony served to prevent the equation of Nazi and communist crimes in order to preserve the uniqueness of the Holocaust, an aspect from which he implicitly suggested the Jews derive benefit. He also wrote that it had been Jews who played a significant role in the creation of the genocidal communist system.²⁵ In turn, Professor Jan Żaryn, a historian and politician, gave an interview to the *w.Polityce.pl* portal, in which he stated, inter alia, that Poles are "natural enemies of the Jewish-Soviet memory of the Holocaust." He also insinuated that "it was the Poles, as carriers of racism, nationalism, chauvinism and all possible -isms, who were always and everywhere the major weapon in the collusion of the former Jewish-communist and post-Soviet circles."²⁶

More examples of similar texts could be given, as leading Polish politicians did not avoid various insinuations. For instance, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jacek Czaputowicz, spoke in one of his interviews about the long-standing alliance between Russia and Israel in the context of a common historical policy.²⁷ President Andrzej Duda also decided to speak and his article "The Truth that Must not Die" was published by the American *Washington Post*, the French *Le Figaro* and the German *Die Welt*. It included many familiar themes from the repertoire of the Polish historical policy. President Duda wrote mainly about German guilt and Polish noble deeds; Polish hospitality and tolerance; help offered to Jews at the risk of Poles' own lives; and the care that the Polish state extends over the memory of the Holocaust. Here are some notable examples from this article:

22 "Żydowska karta Putina. Wojna pamięci' wymierzona w Polskę," *Gazeta Polska*, January 14, 2020.

23 "Profesjonalna absencja," *Gazeta Polska*, January 14, 2020.

24 This article was released in the Western media in English: Rafał Ziemkiewicz, "[Auschwitz Commemorations in Jerusalem without the President of Poland](#)," *Visegrad Post*, January 25, 2020.

25 Paweł Lisicki, "[Wspólne wybielanie komunizmu](#)," *Do Rzeczy*, January 12, 2020.

26 Jan Żaryn, "[Prezydent nie jedzie do Jerozolimy. Prof. Żaryn: 'Jesteśmy naturalnymi wrogami żydowsko-sowieckiej pamięci Holocaustu'](#)," *wPolityce.pl*, January 8, 2020.

27 Maciej Pieczyński, "[Rosji brakuje wiarygodności](#)," *Do Rzeczy*, January 21, 2020.

Very early on, the Polish resistance movement took up the mission of uncovering the truth about the Holocaust and of supporting Jews threatened with extermination. The Polish Underground State, established on our occupied territories, tried to protect all those who until recently were citizens of independent Poland [...]

At the same time, the Polish Underground State established the Council to Aid Jews at the Government Delegation for Poland. That allowed nearly 50 thousand people to obtain documents, shelter, money and medical care. Polish diplomats were organizing escapes for Jews to territories not controlled by Nazi Germany. A significant percentage of Holocaust survivors owed their lives to thousands of Polish Righteous Among the Nations. In our family stories, historical and literary documents, the memory about many people of Jewish origin hidden in attics, cellars and barns, is still alive. So are the memories of sharing with Jewish fugitives a modest meal or showing them a safe escape route. And it must be remembered that in Poland, every such gesture was punishable by death at the hands of German occupiers, something that happened hundreds of times. Among millions of Poles there were also people who could have helped Jews in the hiding but did not because they could not overcome their fear for their own lives and for the lives of the loved ones [...]

German Nazi concentration camps built in occupied Poland were and still are an unbearable humiliation for us today. They stand in a stark contrast with our one thousand years' long culture and history, with the Polish spirit of freedom, tolerance and solidarity. The genocide of the Jews, albeit perpetrated almost all across war-time Europe, came as a particularly heavy blow to the Polish state, which was for centuries multinational and multi-confessional. The Jewish community in pre-war Poland was one of the most numerous in Europe [...].²⁸

The President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda, did not appear at Yad Vashem but took part in the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, held on January 27, 2020, in Oświęcim. His official speech contained various references to the Jerusalem forum and Putin's participation in it, as well as to the postulates of the Polish historical policy.²⁹ However, during the commemorations in Poland, it was the speech of Marian Turski, a Holocaust survivor, that stirred up emotions. Turski spoke about the stages on the path leading to the Holocaust, which began with hate speech and through subsequent racist laws and dehumanization led to genocide. Turski also warned against indifference:

We in Europe are mainly rooted in the Jewish-Christian religion. Both religious and non-religious people regard the Ten Commandments as their civilizational canon. My friend, the President of the International Auschwitz Committee, Roman Kent, who gave a speech here

28 This article is available in various language versions on the official website of the President of Poland. See: ["Prezydent o Holokauście: Prawda, która nie może umrzeć," Oficjalna strona Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej](#), January 23, 2020.

29 Andrzej Duda's speech is available in English and Hebrew. See: ["Wystąpienie Prezydenta RP podczas obchodów 75. rocznicy wyzwolenia KL Auschwitz \[PL/ENG/עברית\]," Oficjalna strona Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej](#), January 27, 2020.

at the last anniversary five years ago, could not come here today. He has formulated an Eleventh Commandment that embodies the experience of the Shoah, the Holocaust, the terrible epoch of contempt. It says: 'You should never, never be a bystander.'

And that is what I want to say to my daughter, to my grandchildren. To the peers of my daughter and my grandchildren, wherever they may be living: in Poland, in Israel, in America, Western Europe. It is very important. Don't be complacent, whenever you see historical lies. Don't be complacent, whenever you see the past being misused for current political purposes. Don't be complacent, whenever any kind of minority is discriminated against. The essence of democracy lies in the rule of the majority. But democracy itself lies in the fact that the rights of minorities must be protected. Don't be complacent, whenever any government violates already existing, common social contracts. Remain faithful to the Eleventh Commandment: Never be a bystander. Because, if you become complacent, before you know it, some kind of Auschwitz will suddenly appear from nowhere, and befall you and your descendants.³⁰

Turski's speech, entitled "Auschwitz Did Not Fall from the Sky," was met with great appreciation among the Polish liberal intelligentsia. There were even suggestions to award Turski the Nobel Peace Prize. At the same time, numerous right-wing media attacked Turski, interpreting his words as a political commentary on the current situation in Poland. The Holocaust survivor was reminded of his communist past and the stereotype of Judeo-Communism was once again used in right-wing discourse. Turski was accused of serving a system as murderous as Nazism.³¹ The *wPolityce.pl* website published an article which contemptuously stated that Turski "remembered his Jewish roots" when communism in Poland had collapsed and now instructs Poles from Auschwitz on "what democracy is all about."³² A journalist on the same news website also asked the following question: "Is Turski to become 'the guardian of Jewish memory'? But which memory? The one which glorified communism? Or that which is the memory of Polish citizens of Jewish origin murdered in Katyn?"³³

Krzysztof Bosak, a politician running for the office of President in 2021, also took part in the attack. He said on the *Polsat News* TV channel that "the floor was given [during the ceremonies at Auschwitz] to a man who decided to use this anniversary to attack the government or the Parliament." His words provoked a violent protest from the other participants in the programme. Yet Krzysztof Bosak continued. Referring to Turski's speech, he stated that the thesis that the road to Auschwitz led from

30 See Marian Turski, [speech at the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz](#), January 27, 2020; Marian Turski [spoke about the eleventh commandment](#).

31 "Auschwitz nie spadło z nieba. Ale komunizm też nie, a jednak lewicowi publicyści nie zacytują słów p. Turskiego, w których wspierał ZSRR," *wPolityce.pl*, January 29, 2020; "Na jego słowa powołuje się opozycja. Kim jest ocalały z Holokaustu Marian Turski? SPRAWDŹ," *wPolityce.pl*, January 28, 2020; "Jerzy Bukowski: Marian Turski – sojusznik morderców Żołnierzy Niezłomnych," *Tysol.pl*.

32 "Jak to możliwe, że młody człowiek tuż po doświadczeniu obozu koncentracyjnego Auschwitz wstępuje do PZPR?" *wPolityce.pl*, February 8, 2020.

33 "Nobel dla Mariana Turskiego? Jak w przypadku Stefana Michnika, Józefa Cyrankiewicza i Wisi Szymborskiej jestem na tak. A nawet przeciw," *wPolityce.pl*, February 3, 2020.

words to deeds and of the potential of hate speech to result in another Auschwitz was not true, because this is “typical left-wing rhetoric.”³⁴

Commemorations on the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau were also held in Berlin, where Poland was represented by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. His speech was widely commented on in the Polish and foreign media. The Polish Prime Minister said, among other things, that Auschwitz “was not the only hell on earth,” as there was also another one called the Gulag. He called for the memory of both, so that “the past would be a lesson for the future generations.” To strengthen this point, he instrumentally referred to Irena Sendler: “This is what Irena Sendler, a Righteous Among the Nations, a woman who saved nearly 2,500 Jewish children from the Holocaust, would certainly wish. Polish heroes, whose deeds have not lived to see films or books, would desire it. All witnesses of both Nazi and Soviet communist totalitarianisms would wish it.”³⁵

The Prime Minister’s speech was celebrated by the Polish right-wing media. On the other hand, an article published in the German daily *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* was received with indignation by the same media outlets. Its author, Daniel Broessler, pointed out that Morawiecki called in Berlin for a kind of joint commemoration of the Holocaust and the Gulag, the crimes of the Nazis and the Soviets. In this way, the Prime Minister questioned the uniqueness of the genocide against European Jews, which must be at the centre of German memory. The journalist also pointed out that the historical policy practiced in Poland hinders relations with Germany.³⁶ It was as part of this historical policy that Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki tweeted on Holocaust Remembrance Day: “The German Nazi camp Auschwitz-Birkenau is a symbol of cruelty that falls beyond any definition. Evil had one source, the German Reich, which fed on the ideology of Nazism. We must not allow the history of this unimaginable crime to be falsified.”³⁷

In 2021, the International Holocaust Remembrance Day took place during a pandemic, which determined the course of its commemoration. Unlike in previous years, no ceremonies were held at the former Auschwitz-Birkenau camp and only a dozen or so people attended the wreath-laying ceremony at the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes in Warsaw. The media broadcast a speech recorded by President Andrzej Duda on the occasion. Duda recalled the monstrous crime of the Holocaust, the victims of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp – Jews, Poles, Roma and Soviet prisoners of war. He spoke about the obligation to remember and praised Poland for preserving the material evidence of the crime. Above all, however, he repeated several times in his short, three-minute

34 [“‘Turski wykorzystał rocznicę, by zaatakować rząd’. Burza po słowach Bosaka w 'Polityce na Ostro’,”](#) *Polsat News*, January 27, 2020.

35 [“Warto o tym pamiętać! Szef rządu w Berlinie: Auschwitz-Birkenau nie było jedynym piekłem na ziemi. Drugie z piekieł miało na imię Gulag,”](#) *wPolityce.pl*, January 27, 2020.

36 [“Absurdalny atak! 'Sueddeutsche Zeitung' o wystąpieniu Morawieckiego w Berlinie: Zakwestionował wyjątkowość Holocaustu,”](#) *wPolityce.pl*, January 29, 2020.

37 See [Mateusz Morawiecki](#), January 27, 2020.

speech that the crimes of the Holocaust were committed by the Germans: "The Germans set up their genocidal industry in the Polish land they occupied."³⁸

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki similarly wrote on Twitter that "when Poland regained independence after 123 years in 1918, no one thought the German Nazis would build the most terrible death machine in world history, KL Auschwitz-Birkenau, on its territory."³⁹ Former Prime Minister Beata Szydło (currently a member of The International Auschwitz Council) shared the tweet on Facebook and wrote: "76 years ago, the last prisoners of the German extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau were rescued. Before that, however, the Germans had murdered millions. They killed in death camps but also right in the streets. We must never forget the victims of German atrocities!"⁴⁰

The Minister of Justice Zbigniew Ziobro, who rarely spoke publicly on these matters, wrote on Twitter: "On the anniversary of the liberation of the German Nazi Auschwitz-Birkenau camp in 1945, celebrated as the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, we honour millions of victims of the German genocide and remember that these crimes have not been accounted for or punished."⁴¹

All these statements by Polish politicians were quoted and received with satisfaction in the right-wing media. Several articles appeared in these media outlets, which not only reminded readers of the German responsibility for the Holocaust but also emphasized that the perpetrators of the crimes avoided punishment. The historian Bogdan Musiał spoke about it on the *wPolityce.pl* portal and argued that there is no mention in Germany of the fact that after WWII, perpetrators from Auschwitz were protected by the German state authorities, which never wanted to prosecute war criminals. Musiał also emphasised that the world owes the knowledge of what happened in Auschwitz to Poles and the "Western narrative" is based mainly on the accounts of Jews who survived the Holocaust and presents only "a part of what happened."⁴² The right-wing journalist Cezary Gmyz wrote that Germany "celebrates the all-German day of hypocrisy" on the occasion of International Holocaust Remembrance Day and that leading German politicians take photos of themselves with the words "we remember."⁴³ Hanna Radziejowska, the head of the Pilecki Institute in Berlin, also spoke about unpunished German crimes.⁴⁴ She took part in an online discussion entitled *Auschwitz and the Challenges of Historical and Civic Education*, where she said:

38 "‘Żeby ludzkość nigdy nie zapomniała’. Prezydent: Nigdy więcej ludobójstwa, nienawiści i rasizmu!" *Do Rzeczy*, January 27, 2021.

39 See: [Mateusz Morawiecki](#), January 27, 2021.

40 "Mocny wpis Szydło: Nie możemy nigdy zapomnieć o ofiarach niemieckiego bestialstwa!" *Do Rzeczy*, January 27, 2021.

41 See: [Zbigniew Ziobro](#), January 27, 2021.

42 "Prof. Musiał: W Niemczech w ogóle się nie wspomina, że sprawcy z Auschwitz byli chronieni przez RFN po II wojnie światowej," *wPolityce.pl*, January 28, 2021.

43 "‘Dziś ogólnoniemiecki dzień hipokryzji’. Mocny wpis Gmyza," *Do Rzeczy* January 27, 2021.

44 For more about this Institute, see: [The Pilecki Institute in Berlin](#).

When it comes to education about the Holocaust, the fact is also important that it is unknown that many crimes and atrocities committed by the Nazis against the Jewish population remained unpunished after the war. Most perpetrators were not punished. This also needs to be talked about.⁴⁵

Stanisław Żaryn, the spokesman for the Minister of Secret Service, also spoke about the national identity of the perpetrators and victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau. On Twitter, he criticized the President of the European Commission, who issued a special statement on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Stanisław Żaryn saw it as “lacking in precision” and wrote:

The concentration camp was established and run by the Germans, not by nationless Nazis. The text does not mention the German criminals who are responsible for creating this infernal place. The text of the statement referring to the victims murdered in Auschwitz mentions Jews, Gypsies and Sinti and others. The statement does not mention Poles, who were the first inmates and victims and of whom over 140,000 were murdered.⁴⁶

All these statements illustrate very well the current trend of the historical policy in Poland, which consists of constantly repeating that the crimes of the Holocaust were perpetrated by Germans, not by some abstract Nazis without any nationality. This, of course, serves to claim that only Germany as a state and the Germans as a nation are responsible for the Holocaust, while ignoring the fact that they found many helpers among representatives of other nationalities, including Poles.

A long poem was published in the *wPolityce.pl* portal on this occasion, whose concluding stanzas were aimed at Jews. Its content not only remembered Poles who saved Jews and asked for gratitude but also gave instruction on how to talk about the war in the spirit of the historical policy in Poland:

You live because somebody hid your ancestors in their house. You live because fate bought your life with the blood of these people [i.e. saviours]. You live to bear witness to the old accounts. You are alive! So never confuse the executioner and the victim [...]⁴⁷

On January 27, 2021, *OKO.Press* published the latest survey results on Polish memory of Auschwitz-Birkenau and the Holocaust. They presented the findings of a nationwide survey carried out through personal interviews, Internet surveys and telephone interviews by the Public Opinion Research Centre from September 21, to November 25, 2020. These studies were commissioned by Prof. Marek Kucia from the Institute of Sociology at the Jagiellonian University, Kraków, as part of his research project entitled *Auschwitz in the Social Memory of Poles 75 Years Later*. This research shows

45 [“Szefowa Instytutu Pileckiego w Berlinie: Większość oprawców z czasów Holokaustu nie została ukarana. O tym trzeba mówić,”](#) *wPolityce.pl*, January 27, 2021.

46 [“Fakty mają znaczenie”. Żaryn zwraca uwagę szefowej KE,”](#) *Do Rzeczy*, January 26, 2021.

47 [“W 76. rocznicę wyzwolenia niemieckiego obozu koncentracyjnego Auschwitz-Birkenau. 'Czasami widzę we śnie twarze bezimienne’,”](#) *wPolityce.pl*, January 27, 2021.

that the Auschwitz camp was indicated as one of the most important places and events of WWII. When asked about such places and events, Poles tended to mention only the beginning of the war as well as fighting and resistance. The Warsaw Uprising also appeared in the responses slightly more often than Auschwitz. At the same time, however, it turned out that Poles do not know exactly how many Jews died during the Holocaust. Only every tenth Pole (11%) was able to quote the symbolic number of 6 million victims. One-third could not say at all how many Jews were murdered during the war. Poles also do not know how many Polish Jews died during the war and when asked about it, they underestimated their number. Most respondents (43%) gave numbers lower than 2 million. Only 10 per cent gave the correct number – from 2.7 to 3 million. More than a third said they did not know or did not answer. Moreover, about 20 per cent were convinced that it was mainly ethnic Poles, not Jews, who died in Auschwitz. Only slightly more than a half mentioned Jews as the largest group of Auschwitz victims.

The survey also revealed that the vast majority of Poles believe their ancestors helped Jews during the occupation “as much as they could.” This answer was given by 82 per cent of respondents. Only 14 per cent thought that Poles could have done more. Half of the respondents justified the complicity of Poles in the Holocaust by fear and coercion on the part of the Germans. In addition, 19 per cent of those questioned agreed with the following opinion: “War is a terrible thing, but it is good that as a result there are not as many Jews in Poland as there used to be.” 71 per cent disagreed with this opinion. Moreover, more than a half (55%) believed that “Jews have too much influence in the world.” Almost half (41%) think that “Jews cannot change their bad national traits, because this is what they are like” and more than a quarter of those asked (28%) believed that Jews have too much influence on political life in Poland.⁴⁸

The results of this survey were commented on by its initiator, Professor Marek Kucia for *OKO.press*. The sociologist noted that, especially in the context of Poles’ perception of themselves as a nation of the Righteous, there is clear correspondence with how Polish authorities want Poles to be perceived in the world – as a nation that saved Jews and did as much as possible in this matter. “I would attribute this to the influence of the historical policy of our authorities – the president, the government and the ruling party,” Kucia stated.⁴⁹ Interestingly, the results of this latest research were also presented on the right-wing *wPolityce.pl* portal. However, the article omitted the questions and answers demonstrating Polish antisemitism.⁵⁰

It is clear from the many quoted statements of representatives of the Polish state authorities and the journalists who support them that currently the most important goal of historical policy towards the Holocaust is to remind the whole world that the responsibility for it lies solely with Germany. In turn, any attempts to speak of co-perpetrators of other nationalities are treated as attempts

48 Adam Leszczyński, “[Niewiedza Polaków o Zagładzie: Uważają, że cierpieliśmy tak samo, jak Żydzi. \[NOWE BADANIA\]](#),” *OKO.press*, January 27, 2021.

49 Ibid.

50 “[76. rocznica wyzwolenia niemieckiego obozu Auschwitz. Dla Polaków obóz zagłady pozostaje symbolem totalnego zła](#),” *wPolityce.pl*, January 27, 2021.

at dangerous and unauthorized historical revisionism, especially in the context of Poland and the Poles, who allegedly mainly rescued Jews and were themselves subjected to Nazi violence. From the perspective of the Polish authorities, the anniversaries of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau provide an excellent opportunity for this reminder, as the international celebrations in the light of cameras make their voice loudly heard abroad. Of course, such a narrative is not something new, as it has continued since the end of World War II. However, it has definitely been intensified following the advancement of research on Polish complicity in the Holocaust and the rise to power of the Law and Justice party. The party has turned the defence of Poland's good name into a tool for building political support. The implementation of this historical policy leads to serious distortions in the Polish memory of the Holocaust, as the public opinion polls clearly demonstrate.

The campaign against the authors of *Night without End*

The book *Night without End: The Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland*, edited by Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski, is a two-volume publication that sums up a multi-year research project carried out by the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Among other things, the book presents well-documented examples of murders by Poles of Jews seeking help. The book came out in April 2018 and its release was followed by meetings and discussions with the authors. At the beginning of 2019, this publication became the target of an attack by right-wing media and the state-controlled Institute of National Remembrance (IPN). Numerous texts prepared by employees and associates of the Institute of National Remembrance reached the media.⁵¹ The most extensive of them was a brochure published as a supplement to the *IPN Bulletin* by historian Tomasz Domański, entitled "Image Correction? Source-Related Reflections on the Book *Night without End*."⁵²

In view of the accusations made – which concerned, inter alia, the selection of source, the methodology, and the allegedly unfounded accusation against Poles of complicity in the extermination of Jews – the authors of *Night Without End* decided to respond. They prepared a set of separate responses to the articles of right-wing journalists and reviewers from the Institute of National Remembrance. They were all published on the website of the Centre for Holocaust Research.⁵³ In his own answer, Grabowski drew attention to the common feature of publications by historians from the Institute of National Remembrance and their supporters: "This type of writing has a name in the literature of the Holocaust: it is a specific form of denial, widespread today in Eastern Europe," which Gerstenfeld calls "Holocaust deflection."⁵⁴ The Institute of National Remembrance's response included another

51 Some of these articles are available for download on the [website of the Institute of National Remembrance](#).

52 Tomasz Domański, "Korekta obrazu? Refleksje źródłoznawcze wokół książki 'Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski' – do pobrania," Institute of National Remembrance.

53 See: [Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów](#).

54 Jan Grabowski, "Odpowiedź na recenzję," Centre for Holocaust Research.

publication. In September 2020, during a specially organized press conference, it presented the book by Tomasz Domański entitled *Correction: A Continuation*.⁵⁵

The authors of *Night without End* were formally accused by 80-year-old Filomena Leszczyńska from the village of Malinowo. She charged them with defaming the memory of her uncle Edward Malinowski, who was the head of the village of Malinowo during the war. Leszczyńska demanded an apology, financial compensation and an admission by the authors that the purpose of their publication was to accuse Poles of murdering Jews. In fact, however, the lawsuit was inspired by an association called Reduta Dobrego Imienia (The Good Name Redoubt – The Polish League Against Defamation), which had contacted Filomena Leszczyńska, persuaded her to file a lawsuit, financed the lawyers and publicized the case in the media. This association is funded by the state and supported by the authorities. Its main goal is to fight the alleged “anti-Polonism” (understood as the counterpart of antisemitism), the various manifestations of which they continually monitor. The Redoubt eagerly supports the historical policy implemented in Poland and stubbornly defends the narrative that Poles did not take part in the Holocaust but on the contrary, saved Jews *en masse*.⁵⁶

The mistake that The Good Name Redoubt found in the well-sourced publication *Night without End* of over 1,800 pages, concerned the content of one short paragraph and one of the hundreds of people mentioned in its pages. It turned out that there were two Edward Malinowskis in pre-war Malinowo and Barbara Engelking confused them in the chapter of the book she wrote. Moreover, the author quoted two different testimonies about the attitude of the mayor Malinowski, the relative of Filomena Leszczyńska: the testimony of a Jewish survivor, which showed that he was jointly responsible for the crimes against Jews and the sentence of a post-war court, in which the same woman testified in defence of the village administrator and the court acquitted him. Both versions of events were quoted in the book, although Engelking was more confident of the testimony that implicated Malinowski. She wrote about the reasons for the mistake and the documents prompting the adoption of such an interpretation in an extensive article.⁵⁷

On February 9, 2021, the court of first instance in Warsaw issued a judgment in the case. The court stated in its ruling that the rights of the relative of the village administrator Malinowski have been violated and ordered an apology. It did not, however, impose financial compensation on the historians. The accused historians announced an appeal against this sentence. Ultimately, in August 2021, the appeals court dismissed the claim against both historians in its entirety.⁵⁸

55 [“Korekty ciąg dalszy”? – briefing prasowy IPN na temat publikacji dotyczącej stosunków polsko-żydowskich – Warszawa, 14 września 2020,”](#) Instytut Pamięci Narodowej; [“Korekty ciąg dalszy. Odpowiedź redaktorom i współautorom książki 'Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski',”](#) Instytut Pamięci Narodowej.

56 See: [The Good Name Redoubt – The Polish League Against Defamation](#).

57 Barbara Engelking, [“On Eстера Siemiatycka, sołtys Edward Malinowski, and lawsuits,”](#) Centre for Holocaust Research.

58 The final verdict of the appellate court was issued outside of the time frame of the research results presented in this chapter.

The case against the historians and the first verdict given by the court led to hundreds of media comments. From the moment the book was published right-wing journalists had informed Polish readers that *Night without End* was an unreliable, anti-Polish publication, based on lies and distortions. Initially, they relied primarily on the aforementioned reviews prepared by historians from the Institute of National Remembrance and argued on their basis that the authors of *Night without End* had committed a number of falsifications and manipulations. At that time, the right-wing press published many articles and interviews with historians who presented the results of their own research. The historian Bogdan Musiał called the authors of *Night without End* “falsifiers.”⁵⁹ The cover of the *Sieci* weekly featured a photo of Grabowski and Engelking captioned *Caught in a Lie* and this sensational cover was to encourage people to read the article by the IPN historian Piotr Gontarczyk.⁶⁰ A photo of Grabowski and Gross was also published in the *wPolityce.pl* portal as an illustration accompanying the article entitled *Acting Poles*.⁶¹ The same website also wrote about the authors of *Night without End* that “more and more data indicate that it is a school of hypocrisy against the Holocaust,” which is all about slandering the Polish nation, rather than the tragedy of the Jews.”⁶²

Jan Żaryn, a right-wing historian and senator of the Law and Justice party, said that those who introduce lies into the public sphere condemn themselves to “automatic exclusion.” He also predicted that there would certainly be “more publications of this type” because it was “an element of [a] hybrid, multifaceted war, concerning not only Polish-Jewish relations but in general European civilization, which we define as Christian.” He also stated that the manipulations in *Night without End* are not a simple mistake but an element of a larger campaign aimed at confirming the thesis that Poles took part in the Holocaust, proven through Bolshevik methods. He also added:

We need voices on the Jewish side. The ball is in their court now. As Poles, we have been so deeply affected by various anti-Polish statements from important people that there is nothing for us to do when it comes to getting closer to Jewish points of view. Now it is the Jews who have the duty to come closer to the search for the truth and start a conversation with us, apologizing that there are people in their communities who are unworthy of being called politicians or scholars.⁶³

59 [“‘Nagonka jak z marca 1968 r.’? Czuchnowski w ‘GW’ broni Grabowskiego i Engelking: Państwo PiS chce zrobić z nich kłamców,” wPolityce.pl, January 22, 2021.](#)

60 Piotr Gontarczyk, [“Złapani na kłamstwie,”](#) March 9, 2019.

61 [“Pełniący obowiązki Polacy. O pedagogice wstydu konserwatywne media piszą od lat, koncentrując się na wpajaniu zażenowania Polakom,” wPolityce.pl, December 1, 2020.](#)

62 [“Tak proszę państwa, to jest ‘nowa szkoła’, ale nie badania lecz zakłamywanie Holocaustu,” wPolityce.pl, March 10, 2019.](#)

63 [“Żaryn o manipulacji Engelking i Grabowskiego: Jeżeli ktoś stosuje kłamstwo, skazuje się na wykluczenie,” wPolityce.pl, March 12, 2019.](#)

The statements quoted above are only a sample of what the right-wing media wrote about the authors of *Night without End* and the publication itself. The vast majority of articles and comments published on this subject had the same tone. It is also worth noting that none of the previous books published by the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research has faced such an attack from the right. The *wPolityce.pl* portal was one of many to write that the lies about the Holocaust were exposed in court and that it turned out that “calumnies and lies are used by professors from the great city of Warsaw who receive thousands worth of grants, award-winning researchers from certain elites valued abroad.”⁶⁴ Maciej Świrski, the head of the Good Name Redoubt, did not hide his satisfaction and considered the court proceedings a step in the right direction. He sees his response to the book *Night without End* as part of “a broad trend of deconstructing the narrative that blames Poles for the Holocaust and triggering WWII.”⁶⁵

The Polish right did regret the court’s decision not to impose a financial punishment. Tadeusz Płużański told the *Do Rzeczy* weekly that such a penalty “would be an effective deterrent against the creation of this type of publication in the future.” He saw no problem, however, in the fact that bringing the historians to trial interfered with their freedom of academic research: “The freedom of academic research and anti-Polish lies, which are in fact a manifestation of anti-Polonism, i.e. hatred towards Poland and Poles, a form of defaming Poles, are two different things. There are historical studies that prove conclusively that the book by Engelking and Grabowski is untrue and is a manifestation of anti-Polonism.”⁶⁶

The Chairman of the Council of the Institute of National Remembrance, Professor Wojciech Polak, not only regretted the court’s failure to impose financial penalty, but also expressed his hope that there would be more such trials in the future:

I hope there will be more similar cases. There are a lot of such cases regarding slandering Poles for what they did during the occupation. Poles are often blamed for crimes committed by the Germans. In any such case, I believe that the case should be brought to court. There should be some mechanism to compensate people who file lawsuits in such cases, because in fact these are not their private lawsuits but *pro bono publico* lawsuits that are supposed to prevent the defamation of Poles.⁶⁷

The Minister of Justice Zbigniew Ziobro tweeted that Filomena Leszczyńska “proved in court the manipulations of B. Engelking and J. Grabowski” and this brave woman “opposed the deceptive

64 [“Katolicka gorliwość, podlaski upór, babcina troska. Z wizytą u Babci Filomeny, która pokonała Grabowskiego i Engelking,” wPolityce.pl, March 11, 2021.](#)

65 See: Paweł Zdziarski, [“Świrski: Książka Grabowskiego i Engelking to dekonstrukcja polskiej narracji historycznej,” Do Rzeczy, February 10, 2021.](#)

66 [“Płużański: Szkoda, że Grabowski i Engelking nie zostali ukarani finansowo,” Do Rzeczy, February 11, 2021.](#)

67 [“Prof. Polak komentuje wyrok ws. książki 'Dalej jest noc': 'Szkoda, że sąd nakazał tylko przeprosiny,’” wPolityce.pl, February 9, 2021](#)

propaganda slandering Poles.”⁶⁸ He said, however, in *Radio Maryja* (a Catholic, nationalistic and antisemitic radio station) that the book *Night without End* was written to fit a certain thesis and there are those who, “as part of cynical propaganda, try to assign responsibility for participation in the Holocaust to the Polish nation,” and that Poles did not take part in it but were its victims.⁶⁹ Przemysław Czarnek, the Minister of Education and Science, called *Night without End* an “anti-Polish rag.” He also stated that such research should not be financed by the state budget.⁷⁰ Senator Jan Żaryn, who said that “the Polish state has the right to use tools to discipline liars,” did not hide his joy at the verdict.⁷¹ Karol Nawrocki, the Director of the WWII Museum and the newly elected President of the Institute of National Remembrance, called the researchers from the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research “fantasists, haters and academic grifters.” These comments were made before he was appointed the President of the Institute of National Remembrance, though he later announced that the Institute under his leadership would not invite them to speak.⁷²

Politicians from the opposition parties hardly commented on the court’s verdict. Much was written about it in the liberal media, especially on the *OKO.press* website, which regularly informed its readers about the campaign against the Polish researchers of the Holocaust. It wrote about its development and analysed the statements of representatives of the Polish authorities and historians from the Institute of National Remembrance. The accused researchers were given a forum to explain the controversies that had arisen. *OKO.press* considered the trial against Engelking and Grabowski not only an unprecedented attack on freedom of scholarly research, but most of all an attempt to silence all those who write about the complicity of Poles in the Holocaust, a tactic of intimidation.⁷³ The disturbing results of a survey were also published, in which the following question was asked: “Should historians who compromise Poland’s reputation, for example by writing about the complicity of Poles in the Holocaust during WWII, be brought to justice?” It turned out that 39 per cent were in favour of bringing historians to trial and 51 percent against it. The results of this study were commented on by the social psychologist Prof. Michał Bilewicz:

Where does this need for censoring history come from? Firstly, from cognitive conformism. People blocking off new knowledge and willing to adapt to the majority will react with fury

68 [“Ziobro o wyroku ws. książki 'Dalej jest noc': Pani Filomena przeciwstawiła się kłamliwej propagandzie oczerniającej Polaków!”](#) *wPolityce.pl*, February 10, 2021.

69 [“Fakty nie miały znaczenia dla autorów tej książki”. Ziobro o 'Dalej jest noc',”](#) *Do Rzeczy*, February 10, 2021.

70 Adam Leszczyński, [“Czarnek: 'Dalej jest noc' to 'antypolski szmatławiec'. My finansujemy badania polskiego bohaterstwa,”](#) *OKO.press*, March 14, 2021,

71 [“Prof. Żaryn o wyroku ws. książki Engelking i Grabowskiego: Wolność nie polega na tym, by czuć się bezkarnym w kłamaniu,”](#) *wPolityce.pl*, February 9, 2021.

72 [“Dr Karol Nawrocki o roli IPN, zbrodni w Jedwabnem i kontrowersjach w sprawie 'Burego’,”](#) *Radio Gdansk*, May 19, 2021.

73 Jakub Szymczak, [“W sieci kłamstw. Historyk IPN manipuluje, aby zaatakować badaczy Zagłady,”](#) *OKO.press*, March 17, 2019; Jakub Szymczak, [“Po wyroku na badaczy Zagłady. Prof. Engelking: 'Nie czuję się winna’,”](#) *OKO.press*, February 9, 2021; Barbara Engelking, [“Prof. Engelking odpiera zarzuty. Cała prawda o Żydówce Esterze i sołtysie Malinowskim,”](#) *OKO.press*, January 30, 2021.

to any attempt to shake the consensus about history. The story is supposed to be the way they learnt it at school. Period. Another source of the censorship tendency is an uncertain, narcissistic national identity. Thus, the greatest censors are not people who are truly proud of the history of their own nation but those who have a deep feeling that their ancestors behaved immorally and the nation itself is not such an ideal at all.⁷⁴

The author and journalist Adam Szostkiewicz wrote about the court's sentence in the case against Engelking and Grabowski in the *Polityka* weekly. He unequivocally stated that this outrageous trial should never have happened, and it was enough to point out to the editors of the book the misleading information "without adding anti-Polish insinuations to it." The journalist also noted that whenever politicians write history to serve ideology, the historical truth loses. It is the duty of historians, however, to reliably present the mechanisms of genocide based on the available evidence of the crime. Only in this way can the memory of the tragedy of particular children, women and men be restored. Szostkiewicz concluded by saying that "casting a shadow on the honesty of researchers' intentions under the pretext of one wrong paragraph raises objections."⁷⁵ The journalists Daniel Passent⁷⁶ and Krzysztof Burnetko⁷⁷ and the anthropologist Ludwik Stomma⁷⁸ wrote equally critically about the lawsuit against the historians in the *Polityka* weekly.

Gazeta Wyborcza also wrote extensively about the trial of the authors of *Night Without End* and the campaign waged in Poland against independent researchers of the Holocaust. It emphasised that the court proceedings were not the first attack on the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research but were undoubtedly the most aggressive. "Their monograph," the newspaper wrote, "caused the fury of right-wing politicians and journalists because it falls completely outside the framework of the historical policy of PiS." It disrupted the laboriously constructed story of Poles as a nation of the Righteous Among the Nations, which is why "nationalists and pseudo-patriots became hysterical."⁷⁹ *Gazeta Wyborcza* also noted that the verdict against the authors of the book sparked an "antisemitic orgy on right-wing Internet forums," and that reading these voices is "a depressing testimony to the state of mind of a large part of our society and supporters of the historical policy" conducted by the Law and Justice party.⁸⁰ The purpose and meaning of the court case was interpreted by Wojciech Czuchnowski, a *Gazeta Wyborcza* journalist, as follows:

74 Adam Leszczyński, "[Niemal 40 proc. Polaków za karaniem historyków ujawniających polski współudział w Zagładzie \[SONDAŻ\]](#)," *OKO.press*, February 24, 2021.

75 Adam Szostkiewicz, "[Bulwersujący wyrok ws. autorów książki 'Dalej jest noc'](#)," *Polityka*, February 9, 2021.

76 Daniel Passent "[Poprawki krawieckie](#)," *Polityka*, March 26, 2019.

77 Krzysztof Burnetko, "[Proces prawdę ci powie](#)," *Polityka*, July 23, 2019.

78 Ludwik Stomma, "[Wstają widma](#)," *Polityka*, March 26, 2019.

79 Mirosław Maciorowski, "[Reduta Złego Imienia](#)," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 13, 2021.

80 Wojciech Czuchnowski, "[szkoda mi sędzi jończyk](#)," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 13, 2021.

The case of Engelking and Grabowski did not appear before the court because “the memory of a village leader was defamed” in a dozen or so lines of a book a thousand pages long. If this is about anything, it is the least about the mayor of the village of Malinowo and his old relative. For the formation now ruling Poland, this story has become a pretext to punish historians who do not share the “new historical policy” forced by the PiS government, which consists in writing a history in which Poles are only heroes and victims and anyone who claims otherwise will be prosecuted for “anti-Polonism” and “insulting the Polish nation.”⁸¹

It is worth quoting one more excerpt from an article published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* on this matter:

Researchers describing the complex history of the extermination of Jews and revealing the truth about the complicity of Polish society in it are the target of attacks by public and pro-government media. The official teaching of history is to be dominated by a polished narrative about heroic Poles who saved Jews. And possibly about ungrateful Jews who introduced communism in Poland. Writing the truth is referred to as the “pedagogy of shame,” and lying assumes the dimension of the “historical policy.”⁸²

The Western media also reported on the trial against Polish researchers of the Holocaust without hiding their indignation. Letters and statements on this matter were issued by many Polish and Western institutions and associations. These included the POLIN Museum,⁸³ the Jewish Historical Institute,⁸⁴ the Polish National Historical Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences,⁸⁵ the Institute of Philosophy of the Polish Academy of Sciences,⁸⁶ the Polish-Israeli Friendship Society,⁸⁷ IHRA⁸⁸ and many others. All these public statements criticized the historical policy pursued by the Polish authorities, defended the accused and above all, the freedom of scholarly research. The trial against Engelking and Grabowski was interpreted as an attempt to silence historians researching the problem of Poles’ complicity in the Holocaust. The very fact that the court case took place at all was considered an attack on core principles of liberal democracy. It was especially in the context of these international reactions that the Polish liberal press drew attention to how The Good Name Redoubt actually harmed Poland: “The Good Name Redoubt claims to fight to ensure that Poland is spoken of in the best possible way. So far, however, its actions have proven counter-productive.

81 Ibid.

82 Wojciech Czuchnowski and Wojciech Karpieszuk, “[Czy pisanie o historii obraża naród](#),” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 6, 2021.

83 “[Oświadczenie dyrektora Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN](#),” January 30, 2021.

84 [Oświadczenie Stowarzyszenia Żydowski Instytut Historyczny w Polsce](#), January 29, 2021.

85 See: Jakub Szymczak, “[Proces o badania nad Zagładą Żydów: historycy Engelking i Grabowski mają przeprosić za niećistość](#),” *OKO.press*, February 9, 2021.

86 See: [Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk](#), February 3, 2021.

87 “[Zarząd Towarzystwa Przyjaźni Izrael-Polska: 'Nie chcemy, aby historia naszych rodzin przepadła w dymie krematoriów'](#),” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 1, 2021.

88 “[IHRA Chair's Statement on the suing of Holocaust historians in Poland](#),” February 1, 2021.

Foreign publications mainly write about the freedom of historical research being endangered in Poland.”⁸⁹ And elsewhere:

The Good Name Redoubt has just outdone the competition. It has been a long time since the activities of one state-subsidized institution caused such a wide and wholly negative reaction of the world press, international institutions researching the past and global academic associations. And this was the effect of the trial against Prof. Barbara Engelking and Prof. Jan Grabowski.⁹⁰

Indeed, it is difficult to find a better summary of the whole scandal, the echoes of which reached beyond the borders of Poland. Of course, it was not the outcry of the Western world that was the intended result of the court case against Holocaust historians. Its primary goal was to discredit famous Holocaust researchers and to challenge the results of their many years of research. At the same time, this case was intended to frighten all those researching the complicity of Poles in the Holocaust and make them more careful about what they write and say. These intentions were perfectly identified by the accused Engelking, who wrote:

The lawsuit, de facto brought by Reduta Dobrego Imienia against the author and the editor of the book *Dalej jest noc*, is a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP). Lawsuits of such type aim, above all, to undermine the credibility and competence of the people sued, to burden them financially (with high penalties and legal costs) and to provoke a “chilling effect,” i.e. – in this case – to discourage other researchers from investigating and writing the truth about the extermination of Jews in Poland.⁹¹

In the context of the Polish authorities’ historical policy toward Holocaust remembrance, lawsuits against independent researchers should be considered a tool and a manifestation of its progressive radicalization. While Holocaust scholars have previously been discredited and slandered in various ways, so far there has been no attempt to intimidate and restrict them under threat of court sentences. The lawsuit brought against Jan Grabowski and Barbara Engelking not only in Poland, but also abroad, has sparked outrage over this unprecedented interference in the freedom of scientific research.

The Paris conference

A conference titled “The New Polish School of Historical Research on the Holocaust” was held at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* in Paris on February 21 and 22, 2019. Its honorary guest was Prof. Jan Tomasz Gross. The conference was attended by researchers from the Centre

89 Jakub Szymczak, “[Proces o badania nad Zagładą Żydów: historycy Engelking i Grabowski moją przeprosić za nieścisłość](#),” *OKO.press*, February 9, 2021.

90 Mirosław Maciorowski, “[Reduta Złego Imienia](#),” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 13, 2021.

91 Engelking, “On Estera Siemiatycka.”

for Holocaust Research, the Jewish Historical Institute and other Polish research centres on the Holocaust and antisemitism. The scholars from the Centre for Holocaust Research presented the individual studies that make up *Night Without End* and perhaps that is why the Institute of National Remembrance sent its historians to Paris. They were not invited by the organizers and did not present their own papers, but they were among the audience and the purpose of their visit remains unclear. Undoubtedly, however, they tried to defend the “good name” of Poland in Paris.

They were not alone. There were about 30 people among the audience of the conference who tried to disrupt its course by whistling, shouting and making noisy comments. Additionally, this group waited for the speakers outside the building, shouting antisemitic statements about “Jewish henchmen,” “Jewish money,” etc. Faced with this behaviour, the conference organizers informed the protesters they would be asked to leave the room. Additionally, representatives of this aggressive “Polish group” did not respect the rules of the conference and recorded the presentations. These recordings then reached the media.⁹²

Representative of certain camps within Poland had earlier protested against the organization of this conference. They sent an open letter to various institutions, in which they wrote that the participating Polish researchers had nothing to do with academia, as they were unreliable, represented an anti-Polish attitude and their academic work was xenophobic. The authors of the letter included biographies of all the Polish speakers, which were supposed to testify to their anti-Polish attitudes. The letter ended with an appeal to the conference organizers:

As descendants of Poles who fought en masse and died in the fight against Nazi Germany on all fronts, died in concentration camps, lost their health as forced laborers in the Third Reich, we cannot accept the fact that the prestigious EHESS lends its academic authority to anti-Polish, unreliable figures from the world of academia. We call for the cancellation and re-organization of the conference in a format ensuring the selection of speakers corresponding to the prestige of the EHESS and offering a multi-sided approach to the subject.⁹³

The French organizers did not succumb to this pressure but did react to what happened in Paris during the conference. At the beginning of the second day of the conference, a statement was read that described the events of the previous day of the conference as “regrettable.” It was noted that unworthy statements were made in the hall of the College de France, some of which were clearly antisemitic, “words taken straight from an old dictionary of antisemites.” It was mentioned that many of the conference participants had received threatening letters and messages. The organizers emphasized the academic nature of the event and that there was no place for patriotic rants. Those who came to the conference to defend the Polish historical policy, denying the complicity of Poles in the Holocaust and other dark pages of history, were asked to leave the room, because this was not

92 On the course of the conference in Paris, see the account by Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “[Czarownice pod ostrzałem w Paryżu](#),” *Otwarta Rzeczpospolita*, March 19, 2019.

93 “[List otwarty w sprawie konferencji: 'La nouvelle école polonaise d'histoire de la Shoah'](#),” *Polish Media Issues*, February 2019.

the place for such a discussion.⁹⁴ After the conference, the EHESS also issued a special press release mentioning attempts to put pressure on the organizers in the weeks leading up to the conference. Most emphasized, however, were the attempts to disrupt the normal course of the deliberations and the antisemitic statements by the defenders of Poland. The incident was condemned for its “unacceptable violations of freedom of thought and academic freedom, which set the worrying context of intimidating research and academics in many European countries.”⁹⁵

Following the conference, the French Minister of Science, Frédérique Vidal, wrote a letter to the Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education, Jarosław Gowin. She expressed her expectation that the Polish authorities would distance themselves from such antisemitic excesses. She drew attention to the lack of any reaction from the representatives of the Institute of National Remembrance present at the conference. She also mentioned that the Paris conference was heavily criticized in social media by the Institute of National Remembrance and the Polish Embassy in France, which could be considered an “unacceptable interference with the freedom of academic research.” Vidal appealed to Gowin for respect for the freedom of scholarly research and for an academic discussion free from political pressure.⁹⁶

The Polish minister responded with a letter written in a condescending tone. He stressed that he was pleased that Vidal cared about the “freedom of scholarly research,” which in fact in many countries “is threatened by the ideology of political correctness, by means of which attempts are made to impose various forms of censorship and self-censorship on academics.” He offered help in the reform of the French education system, assuring Vidal that he knew how huge a problem France had with antisemitism. He also criticized the organizers of the conference for not reacting when some of the speakers criticized the Polish authorities for their historical policy towards the Holocaust. He referred to the disruption of the conference as follows: “It is difficult for me to say unequivocally whether there were any antisemitic statements during the conference. The reports collected show that they did not take place. If, however, offensive remarks with antisemitic overtones were directed at the speakers in the lobby, then such behaviour is clearly unacceptable.”⁹⁷

Jarosław Szarek, President of the Institute of National Remembrance, also sent a letter to the French Minister. He defended the Institute against the accusations made during the conference in Paris (which were “extremely harmful for our institution”). He also complained to conference organizers that the participating historians from the Institute of National Remembrance were not allowed to speak and “were denied equal rights with the other participants of the discussion.” Similarly to Minister Gowin, Szarek was also unaware of any incidents in Paris and emphasized that antisemitism is a problem in Western Europe:

94 EHESS, “[Komunikat prasowy EHESS](#),” February 2019.

95 Ibid.

96 The French Minister of Science, Frédérique Vidal, “[Colloque sur la Shoah perturbé à Paris: la France interpelle la Pologne](#),” *RFI*, March 1, 2019.

97 [Letter from Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education Jarosław Gowin](#), *OKO.press*, March 4, 2019.

The Institute consequently condemns all incidents resulting from national, racial or religious prejudices and notes with concern reports on the increase in the number of these in Western European countries. Therefore, we understand your concern and your need to react. Nevertheless, in cases like this, we should always assess the confirmed facts, regardless of the social or national group we are talking about. However, we have not received any reliable confirmation that there were any incidents of this kind during the conference.⁹⁸

The events that took place at the Paris conference became the subject of numerous comments in the Polish media. Pictures of Holocaust researchers Jan Tomasz Gross, Jan Grabowski, Barbara Engelking (although she was not in Paris!) and Jacek Leociak were shown in the main news programme of the Polish Television (“Wiadomości”) to illustrate the news material about a “festival of anti-Polish lies” held in Paris.⁹⁹ The Polish right wing called the conference itself “the Sabbath of anti-Polish witches,”¹⁰⁰ and the popular journalist Jan Pospieszalski described its participants as “people who came out of Bolshevism, from the Soviets, mentally still stuck in this situation.”¹⁰¹ Senator Jan Żaryn called for “a change of the management of the French research post of the Polish Academy of Sciences” and for “the taking away of grants and administrative positions from the participating researchers.” As for the researchers who took part in the conference, he said that they lacked academic authority, were known for falsifications and lies and conducted “pseudo-research and spit at Poland with Polish taxpayers’ money.” Senator Żaryn apologized to all Polish citizens for “having to pay to have their faces spat at and their heroic family members slandered, who died under German or Soviet occupation during WWII.”¹⁰²

The speeches of Jan Tomasz Gross and Jacek Leociak caused particular indignation in the right-wing media. Some sentences were quoted, taken out of context and distorted. Gross was accused of claiming that Poles killed more Jews in the countryside during WWII than the Germans in the death camps.¹⁰³ One sentence was taken out of Jacek Leociak’s lecture that “Poles want to dig up Jewish bones from their graves and throw stones in there.” It was claimed that the professor was screaming, waving his hands nervously, “which did not resemble” a normal lecture given by an academic.¹⁰⁴ One of the right-wing journalists even suggested that Leociak was under the influence of some

98 [Letter from Jarosław Szarek, President of the Institute of National Remembrance, to the French Minister of Science, Frédérique Vidal](#), Institute of National Remembrance.

99 [“Festiwal antypolskich kłamstw,”](#) *Wiadomości*, February 23, 2019.

100 See: Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, [“Czarownice pod ostrzałem w Paryżu,”](#) *Otwarta Rzeczpospolita*.

101 See: [TVP.INFO](#), February 23, 2019.

102 [“Prof. Żaryn obnaża kłamstwa wokół konferencji w Paryżu i apeluje: Natychmiast należy zmienić kierownictwo PAN we Francji,”](#) *wPolityce.pl*, February 27, 2019.

103 [“Co Gross mówił na konferencji w Paryżu? Opublikowano fragment referatu,”](#) *Do Rzeczy*, February 25, 2019; [“‘Rydzyk jest zażartym antysemitą’. Co prof. Gross mówił o Polsce i Polakach podczas konferencji w Paryżu?”](#) *Do Rzeczy*, March 5, 2019.

104 [“Seans antypolonizmu w Paryżu! Prof. Leociak w furii: Polacy chcą wykopać szczątki Żydów z grobów i włożyć tam kamienie! WIDEO,”](#) *wPolityce.pl*, February 22, 2019.

drugs or “[had] forgot[ten] to take them.”¹⁰⁵ The Paris conference was called “the new Polish school of lying about the Holocaust,”¹⁰⁶ and the conference was described as “an attack on Poland,”¹⁰⁷ “a session of anti-Polonism in Paris,”¹⁰⁸ “spitting at Polish history.”¹⁰⁹ The *wPolityce.pl* portal published an interview with the historian Piotr Gontarczyk, who said that “the group gathered in Paris has little to do with truth and science.” He also stated that “what happened there was on the one hand quite an embarrassing show and on the other, extremely dangerous. We are dealing with attempts to revise the history of Poland, in which Poles are massively accused of participating in the Holocaust.”¹¹⁰ The same portal also published an interview with another historian, Professor Andrzej Nowak, who said that the narrative presented by the “new school of the Holocaust” is motivated by hatred of the Polish national community. Asked by a journalist how to evaluate such behaviour, Nowak replied: “It is a kind of extremely nationalist story in which you see the suffering of only one nation. It does not pay attention to human suffering but to the suffering of one nation. It is a chauvinistic story, sometimes bordering on racism.”¹¹¹

The right-wing media not only attacked the Polish researchers present in Paris. A completely different version of the events that took place during the conference was also presented. For this purpose, reports of participants were published that represented the audience from the circles of the French Polish community and claimed that no incidents had occurred. One of them wrote that there were “no antisemitic shouts” and no one interrupted the speakers.¹¹² Jakub Kumoch, the Polish ambassador to Switzerland and currently the head of the International Policy Bureau in the Chancellery of the President of Poland, reviewed the audio transcript of the conference and stated that he had found nothing to suggest antisemitic slogans had been uttered there or that anyone had tried to disrupt the conference. His words were considered a credible expert’s opinion in the right-wing media,¹¹³ and he was thanked and cited repeatedly.

105 See: [“Salon dziennikarski,” TVP.INFO](#), February 23, 2019.

106 [“Tak proszę państwa, to jest 'nowa szkoła', ale nie badania lecz zakłamywania Holocaustu,” wPolityce.pl](#), March 10, 2019.

107 [“Atak na Polskę na konferencji w Paryżu. Do sieci trafiło nagranie,” Do Rzeczy](#), February 22, 2019.

108 [“Seans antypolonizmu w Paryżu! Prof. Leociak w furii: Polacy chcą wykopać szczątki Żydów z grobów i włożyć tam kamienie! WIDEO,” wPolityce.pl](#), February 22, 2019.

109 [“Szokujące! Środowiska naukowe atakują przedstawicieli Polonii, którzy zareagowali na opluwanie polskiej historii w Paryżu,” wPolityce.pl](#), March 1, 2019.

110 [“Dr Piotr Gontarczyk o konferencji w Paryżu: przedstawienie żenujące, mające niewiele wspólnego z nauką, ale dla Polski niezwykle groźne,” wPolityce.pl](#), February 24, 2019.

111 [“Prof. Nowak: 'Nowa Szkoła Holocaustu' jest motywowana nienawiścią do polskiej wspólnoty narodowej,” wPolityce.pl](#), February 28, 2019.

112 [“Działacz Polonii we Francji: 'Byłem na konferencji o Holokauście w Paryżu. Nie było żadnych antysemickich okrzyków,’” wPolityce.pl](#), March 6, 2019.

113 [“Jest stenogram i pełne nagranie z paryskiej konferencji o Holocaustu! Zaskakujące wnioski,” wPolityce.pl](#), March 4, 2019; [“‘Rydzik jest zażartym antysemitą’. Co prof. Gross mówił o Polsce i Polakach podczas konferencji w Paryżu?” Do Rzeczy](#), March 5, 2019

The attacked Polish researchers were given space to speak in the liberal and left-wing media. *Krytyka Polityczna* and *OKO.press* published an extensive article by Leociak. An interview with Jan Grabowski and an article by Joanna Tokarska-Bakir were published in *Gazeta Wyborcza*. A coherent picture of what had happened in Paris emerged from their accounts, depicting the disruption of the proceedings and antisemitic slogans uttered there. Leociak not only commented on the course of events but also shared an extensive fragment of his paper, from which the right wing took this one sentence. Here is the context in which the sentence was mentioned:

We can argue endlessly about the number of those who saved and those who robbed, betrayed and murdered. Yet our knowledge about the period of the Holocaust in Poland, ever more profound year by year, leads to the conclusion that – unfortunately – there were more of the latter, that more harm was done to Jews than good. No spells, expressions of indignation, protests, accusations can change that. We rely on facts. It is up to us what we want to do with this knowledge. It is not joyful knowledge. We can turn away from it, deny it, pretend that it does not concern us, or polish it so that it becomes comforting and safe knowledge for us. Yet in order to do so, we must destroy the historical accounts, testimonies and documents deposited in the archives and replace them with counterfeit equivalents; we must convince the surviving victims and witnesses they did not see what they did; we must dig up the remains of Jewish victims from anonymous graves scattered around Poland and replace them with stones. Of course, this cannot be done. Thus, what can be done instead is only spells, mystifications and public rituals.¹¹⁴

Grabowski commented on the events in Paris by claiming he had never encountered such behaviour during academic proceedings. “The French, who are used to militia in the streets but not in university halls, experienced an even greater shock. It was an explosion of hatred towards researchers,” he said in an interview for *Gazeta Wyborcza*.¹¹⁵ It was also in the pages of this daily that an article by Joanna Tokarska-Bakir was published under the suggestive title, “The Witches Under Fire in Paris.” She pointed out that it was the inconvenient truth the Polish historians discovered that triggered the reaction of the “Polish group” that had come to the conference and disrupted its course. She also asked about the reasons for the presence of the representatives of the Institute of National Remembrance and the Pilecki Institute at the conference: “Were they sent to Paris by taxpayers’ money and if so, in what capacity? From now on, will the Institute of National Remembrance and the Pilecki Institute always send their representatives to foreign conferences on the Holocaust?”¹¹⁶ Ludwik Stomma, a columnist for the *Polityka* weekly, asked where this vociferous and aggressive group of Poles had come from. And he replied: “They do not want to be called antisemites and maybe rightly so. After all, they are not afraid of Jews but of facing historical truths. And rightly so, because the past cannot be eliminated with an IPN aspen stake. The ghosts get up and haunt you.”¹¹⁷

114 Jacek Leociak, “[Paryska awantura](#),” *KrytykaPolityczna.pl*, February 25, 2019.

115 Estera Flieger, “[Desant prawicy na paryż](#),” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 27, 2019.

116 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “[Ostrzał czarownic w Paryżu](#),” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 16, 2019.

117 Ludwik Stomma, “[Wstają widma](#),” *Polityka*, March 26, 2019.

The topic of the conference in Paris persisted in the Polish media for over a month. The Polish right viewed this academic event as yet another proof of the anti-Polish attitude of domestic scholars, who had long been attacked for it anyway. The fact that they presented their research findings at a foreign symposium resulted in them being ever more vehemently accused of acting against the Polish national community. They were considered traitors and a campaign against them was organized in the media.

The controversy around Masha Gessen's article

In March 2021, *The New Yorker* published an article entitled "The Historians Under Attack for Exploring Poland's Role in the Holocaust."¹¹⁸ Its author, Masha Gessen, recounted and commented on the aforementioned lawsuit against the historians Jan Grabowski and Barbara Engelking. She also referred to the historical propaganda policy implemented by the Polish authorities towards the memory of the Holocaust. One sentence from a subtitle in the article provoked an extremely violent reaction in Poland: "To exonerate the nation of the murders of three million Jews, the Polish government will go as far as to prosecute scholars for defamation."¹¹⁹ The sentence was interpreted as an accusation of Polish responsibility for the murder of three million Jews and caused a wave of indignation and protests.

Representatives of the state authorities spoke out on this matter. The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Szymon Szykowski vel Sęk wrote via Twitter: "The attempt to create an image in which the Poles are blamed for the death of three million Jews is something extraordinary. This manipulation will be the subject of a strong reaction from the Polish diplomatic service."¹²⁰

In line with this announcement, steps were taken by the Polish embassy in Washington, which sent its protest to the editorial office of *The New Yorker* and demanded that Gessen's article be removed. Other Polish politicians and public figures did not hide their indignation. Above all, however, the sentence stirred rage in the right-wing media, where Gessen's article was received as unequivocally anti-Polish. Additionally, it was interpreted as part of the long-standing attack on Poland, the purpose of which is to hold Poles responsible for the Holocaust. For example, Tomasz Łysiak, a columnist for the *wPolityce.pl* portal, said that for some time now "a large-scale attempt has been carried out to change our role: from victims of totalitarianism to accomplices of German crimes." He also added that all this is not only about Masha Gessen, but about many other world journalists associated with left-wing or Israeli newspapers and hundreds of Internet users who "participate in replicating lies."¹²¹ Similar comments on Gessen's article appeared on the same portal by Professor

118 Masha Gessen, "[The Historians Under Attack for Exploring Poland's Role in the Holocaust](#)," *The New Yorker*, March 26, 2021.

119 In the currently available version, this one sentence has been changed by the editors.

120 Adam Leszczyński, "[Amerykańska dziennikarka naprawdę oskarżyła Polaków o zamordowanie 3 mln Żydów? Wyjaśniamy](#)," *OKO.press*, March 29, 2021.

121 "[Czarny śnieg. 'Najgorsze jest niestety to, iż w dyskusji żadne racjonalne argumenty czy wprost podawane fakty nie trafiają'](#)," *wPolityce.pl*, April 10, 2021.

Wojciech Polak, a historian and Chairman of the Council of the Institute of National Remembrance. In his opinion, many circles in the USA and in Western European countries present similar views, which results from “complete ignorance” and is clearly anti-Polish. Professor Polak also firmly stated that anti-Polonism is “as dangerous as antisemitism” and the Polish state should react firmly in such cases. “The Jews,” said Professor Polak, “have a number of organisations that defend their good name, including the famous Anti-Defamation League. We have The Good Name Redoubt. The Polish state should support such organisations and cooperate with them.” He also postulated that certain procedures be introduced that would defend the good name of Poland and Poles against similar attacks. For instance, the Polish government should monitor and publish a list of anti-Polish statements in various media every month, and file lawsuits in the “most serious cases.”¹²²

A *Do Rzeczy* columnist was convinced that Gessen’s article was another attempt to attribute responsibility for the Holocaust to Poles in order to make it easier for American Jews to affect the restitution of property and financial compensation from Poland. He stated in a podcast published on the website of this weekly that New York “is the centre of anti-Polish activities in the international arena.” He also added: “In order to extract money from Poles under the guise of compensation for the Holocaust [...] which is what a gang of New York extortionists called the World Jewish Congress are trying to do, Poles must be blamed for the Holocaust.” He called Gessen’s article a “provocation” and stated that its publication was no accident.¹²³

Both of these right-wing media also reported that Gessen’s article was inspired by Professor Jan Grabowski, which was supposed to explain its anti-Polish content, because this is the attitude attributed to Grabowski by the right.¹²⁴ However, they attempted to discredit Gessen primarily via her gender identity, sexual orientation, personal life, views and family roots. They were described as a “rainbow activist,” a “divorcee,” a “lesbian,” a “leftist,” an opponent of the institution of marriage, a “non-binary person” who would like to popularise patterns of her own personal life in society. Here are two brief examples of such rhetoric:

An LGBT activist, a non-binary lesbian and a divorcee. She brings up children with a second “wife.” She makes plans to liquidate the institution of marriage. She hates Trump and considers Poles to be a nation of antisemites and homophobes. Masha Gessen, the author of the anti-Polish pasquil in *The New Yorker*, is the embodiment of the most stereotypical ideas about extreme leftists.¹²⁵

122 [“Jak walczyć z antypolonizmem? Prof. Polak przedstawia konkretną propozycję! 'Gdyby rząd oficjalnie, co miesiąc...'" wPolityce.pl, March 29, 2021.](#)

123 [“Antypolski artykuł w 'New Yorkerze'. Ziembkiewicz: Wiedzieli, co publikują,” Do Rzeczy, March 30, 2021.](#)

124 [“Antypolski artykuł w 'New Yorkerze'. Grabowski zachwycony,” Do Rzeczy, March 28, 2021; “Kto inspirował antypolski artykuł w 'New Yorker'? Przyznał się... prof. Grabowski. 'Odyłem długą dyskusję z Mszą Gessenem,’” wPolityce.pl, March 28, 2021.](#)

125 Maciej Pieczyński, [“Tęczy antypolonizm,” Do Rzeczy, April 11, 2021.](#)

It is obvious that Gessen approached the difficult subject of the suffering of Jews in occupied Poland in the same way she approached the problem of marriage. With a radical ideological programme that aims to destroy the existing reality, without respecting historical facts, and ultimately without respecting the basic postulates of common sense.¹²⁶

Looking at the family roots of Masha Gessen, readers of the *wPolityce.pl* portal were also informed that both their grandmothers were communists and “worked for Stalin” – one in the NKVD and the other one in censorship. It was a clear message to the audience – Gessen is the granddaughter of Jewish communists.¹²⁷ All this was supposed to discredit them as a human being and the author of the article, and above all, to rob them of their credibility.

Critics of Gessen’s article also instrumentally used the voice of a Holocaust survivor. They shared a short TV footage previously presented on Polish public television (TVP), starring Edward Mosberg. Dressed in a striped uniform, he made a short statement. He called the article published by *The New Yorker* disgraceful and asked the editorial office to investigate the historical facts more carefully in the future before publishing lies. He also said that only the Germans are responsible for the Holocaust, they committed all the crimes, and the Poles do not bear any responsibility. He considered Gessen’s entire article a lie and a shame for the editorial office that published it. Both editorial offices – *Do Rzeczy* and *wPolityce.pl* – used the TV footage that was broadcast by various other Polish media as an important and credible voice on the matter.¹²⁸

The Polish right wing strongly praised the Polish authorities for their quick and decisive response, especially Piotr Wilczek, the Polish ambassador to Washington. The latter not only approached *The New Yorker* and demanded that they remove the article, but also invited Masha Gessen to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau “to learn more about the Nazi German death camps, the Holocaust and the millions of people murdered during World War II.”¹²⁹ On the other hand, the former director of the Jewish Historical Institute, Professor Paweł Śpiewak, was strongly criticised for defending Gessen in an interview for *sputniknews.com*. Śpiewak said the journalist’s words were misinterpreted because the article was only about the policy of whitewashing Polish guilt towards Jews, which is actually done by the Polish authorities. He also pointed out that Poles had overreacted to *The New Yorker*

126 [“Ideologia i fakty historyczne nie mogą iść w parze. Gessen podeszła do tematu Holocaustu w taki sam sposób, jak do kwestii małżeństwa,” wPolityce.pl, March 29, 2021.](#)

127 [“Cierpienia Mashy Gessen. 'Pisanie kłamstw, nieprawdy, fałszowanie źródeł i skandaliczne przeinaczenia historyczne,’” wPolityce.pl, April 8, 2021.](#)

128 [“Ocalały z Holocaustu oburzony antypolskim artykułem. 'Wstyd i hańba!’” Do Rzeczy, April 2, 2021; “Więzień niemieckich obozów obnaża kłamstwa 'New Yorkera'. 'To hańba, co ci ludzie napisali o odpowiedzialności Polaków,’” wPolityce.pl, April 2, 2021.](#)

129 [“Dobre posunięcie polskiej ambasady! Zaproszono publicystkę 'New Yorkera' Maszę Gessen na wizytę w obozie Auschwitz-Birkenau,” wPolityce.pl, March 30, 2021.](#)

article. For right-wing journalists, Śpiewak was subject to additional criticism because he gave the interview to a pro-Russian outlet.¹³⁰

However, Masha Gessen's article outraged not only representatives of the Polish right and supporters of the current government in Poland. The Auschwitz Museum and the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research also issued statements. The director of the Auschwitz Museum, Dr. Piotr Cywiński, wrote that Gessen's article "contains so many lies and distortions that I find it a bit hard to believe that it is a coincidence." He also added: "Yes, there were cases of denunciation, collaboration, or outright murders perpetrated by Poles. Nevertheless, such reckless fiddling with the fate of three million victims can only arouse opposition." He accused Masha Gessen of downplaying the role of the real perpetrators of the Holocaust and commented: "A real journalist, a professional analyst, should know that stating such lies [...] destroys the truth."¹³¹

A much more balanced statement was issued by the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research. Regarding this one unfortunate sentence, it says:

This claim can be interpreted as an accusation that ethnic Poles or the Polish state are to blame for the Holocaust. In all ongoing debates about Polish-Jewish relations during the Holocaust – especially those about the degree of responsibility and participation of Poles in denunciation or murdering of Jews – no one ever claimed or claims that Poles or the state are responsible for the death of three million Jews. This is not only inconsistent with historical facts, but simply a lie. In our opinion, this statement from the article in *The New Yorker* should be rephrased for clarification.¹³²

Gessen's text was also commented on in the liberal media. Dawid Warszawski of *Gazeta Wyborcza* referred to it in his article "You Cannot Defend the Truth with a Lie." He also complained about this one sentence and wrote that "accusing Poles of responsibility for the Holocaust is incomparably heavier than Poles denying any participation in it." At the same time, Warszawski drew attention to the completely inadequate reaction of the Polish authorities, which Gessen rightly accused of Holocaust distortion.¹³³ The author of the text in *The New Yorker* was strongly defended by Adam Szostkiewicz in the *Polityka* weekly. In his opinion, this one sentence should not raise any objections in an unprejudiced reader who has good knowledge of English and the editorial methods of the

130 ["To jest niepojęte! Prof. Paweł Śpiewak broni kłamliwego tekstu Gessen z 'New Yorkera' w prorosyjskim 'Sputniku'," wPolityce.pl](#), April 2, 2021; ["Skandaliczny artykuł o Polsce. Prof. Śpiewak broni Gessen na łamach 'Sputnika'," Do Rzeczy](#), April 2, 2021.

131 Statement of the Auschwitz Museum Director, ["Piotr Cywiński: Reckless Fiddling with the Fates of Three Million Victims Can Only Arouse Opposition," Polish History](#).

132 ["About Certain Article from 'The New Yorker'," Polish Centre for Holocaust Research](#), March 28, 2021.

133 Dawid Warszawski, ["Nie można prawdy kłamstwem bronić," Gazeta Wyborcza](#), March 29, 2021.

American press. Moreover, he pointed out that the reactions to this article demonstrated that “there is no climate for a matter-of-fact discussion of this tragic topic” in Poland.¹³⁴

The *OKO.press* portal played an important role in explaining the meaning of Gessen’s article and in defending the journalist. Although the editors agreed with the opinion that this one sentence was in fact poorly worded, they emphasised that it did not contain an unequivocal accusation against Poles for the murder of three million Jews. The sentence can be interpreted in various ways, and besides, it was clear from the entire article by Gessen that the author did not consider Poles to be the perpetrators of the Holocaust. What the *OKO.press* editors found much more telling was the fact that the Polish diplomatic service and the media dealt with the controversy over literally one sentence from *The New Yorker* for several days. It was this exaggerated reaction that the editors took as evidence of the intensity of emotion around the issue of Poles’ complicity in the Holocaust. They also emphasised that Western public opinion is well informed of the propaganda campaign conducted by the Polish authorities about the memory of the Holocaust, which Gessen aptly described in her article.¹³⁵

Masha Gessen also reacted to this backlash. In a statement published in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the journalist wrote:

I am all too aware of the controversy that has erupted in Poland in response to this article. By “all too aware” I mean, among other things, a barrage of hate mail, including death threats, that has been directed at me in the last couple of days. Most of the reactions seem to focus on a single phrase concerning the Polish government’s “effort to exonerate Poland – both ethnic Poles and the Polish state – of the deaths of three million Jews in Poland during the Nazi occupation.” Contrary to the laws of both linguistics and logic, this sentence has been interpreted as an assertion that Poles, or Poland, is responsible for the deaths of all three million Jews killed on its land during the Holocaust. I said no such thing. Here is what I did say: Three million Jews perished on the territory of occupied Poland during the Holocaust; some ethnic Poles, and some structures of the pre-war Polish state, are implicated in some of the deaths; in its efforts to clear Poles and Poland of any blame in any part of the Holocaust, the government has gone so far as to quash intellectual inquiry.¹³⁶

Referring to the reactions to the article in *The New Yorker*, Gessen also added that they gave her “barely a taste of the intellectual climate in which Polish historians of the Holocaust now live.” They admitted that the most shocking reactions were those of various people and institutions, especially the Auschwitz Museum, which interpreted her words against the rules of logic.¹³⁷ Gessen spoke about this in an interview for *OKO.press*, stressing that the statement by the director of the

134 Adam Szostkiewicz, “Spór o tekst ‘New Yorkera’. Mamy regres w debacie o Zagładzie,” *Polityka*, March 30, 2021.

135 Adam Leszczyński, “Amerykańska dziennikarka naprawdę oskarżyła Polaków o zamordowanie 3 mln Żydów? Wyjaśniamy,” *OKO.press*, March 29, 2021.

136 Masha Gessen, “Nie twierdzę, że Polacy odpowiadają za śmierć 3 mln Żydów,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 29, 2021.

137 Ibid.

Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum was particularly painful because it was made by a man whose task is to care for and remember the Holocaust. Gessen also regretted that there was a sentence in the text that could be misunderstood. “However, I think that reading this sentence in good faith leaves no room for a misinterpretation,” they noted.¹³⁸ It was at the author’s request, and not at the request of the Polish embassy in Washington, that the editors of *The New Yorker* changed the one sentence that aroused such controversy. After the correction, it looks as follows: “Scholars face defamation suits, and potential criminal charges, in the Polish government’s effort to exonerate the nation of any role in the murders of three million Jews during the Nazi occupation.”¹³⁹

The hysteria surrounding Masha Gessen’s article showed the effects of the historical policy and defensive Holocaust denial that has been practiced in Poland for more than a decade. Were it not for such a policy, that one sentence might not have attracted attention from across the ocean in the pages of *The New Yorker*. At the same time, this tussle showed that Gessen touched a sensitive nerve in Polish feelings and tensions related to the memory of the Holocaust. These, on the other hand, have little to do with *The New Yorker* article, but with something much deeper – they are rooted in a constantly suppressed past that still needs to be worked through.

2.2.4. Conclusion

Since the debate over the massacre in Jedwabne, a wave of Holocaust denial has developed in Poland and for several years has circulated at the very centre of public discourse – not on the periphery, but in the so-called mainstream. This denial is not about the claim that the Holocaust did not happen or that the gas chambers did not exist: such a radical variant has never garnered widespread acceptance in Poland due to the centrality to its national identity of the sacrifice during the war years. The currently practiced Holocaust denial is based on the denial of various forms of Polish complicity in the Holocaust and has been called Holocaust distortion. It is especially visible in those countries where the Germans gained support in murdering Jews, which is later denied in various ways. In Poland, the evidence of the scale of this complicity in the Holocaust only grows and Holocaust distortion progresses alongside.

The Polish version of Holocaust distortion intensified when the Law and Justice party took power in Poland in 2015 and continues to this day. This ruling party made historical policy the foundation of its political programme: they defined its agenda at home and abroad and above all, institutionalized it by establishing or supporting various institutes and museums involved in defending the “good name” of Poland. The Law and Justice Party continues to try to subordinate pre-existing institutions influencing the shape of Holocaust memory by appointing loyal implementers of its historical policy. Examples include the appointment of the former Prime Minister Beata Szydło to the Council of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and Monika Krawczyk as the Director of the Jewish Historical Institute. The POLIN Museum is also still of interest to the government’s personnel policy. However,

138 Adam Leszczyński, “[Masha Gessen dla OKO.press: polskie państwo próbuje wybielić pamięć o Zagładzie \[WYWIAD\]](#),” *OKO.press*, March 31, 2021.

139 Gessen, “The Historians under Attack.”

the Institute of National Remembrance is definitely the most zealous institution subordinated to the authorities in the implementation of its Holocaust remembrance policy.

To conclude, the main insights can be summarized as follows:

1. Representatives of the state authorities take part in the *ongoing process of Holocaust distortion*. They include the President, the Prime Minister, the Minister of National Education, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Culture and many other politicians holding important public offices in Poland, as well as officials associated with the Institute of National Remembrance. The Polish authorities are *faithfully served by the right-wing media* in the implementation of the historical policy based on Holocaust distortion. Characteristically, when it comes to the problem of Poles' complicity in the Holocaust, the right-wing media in Poland speak with one voice.
2. The dominant policy towards the memory of the Holocaust consists primarily in *erasing the problem of Poles' complicity* in the Holocaust and *emphasizing Polish heroism* in saving Jews. In this form, it perfectly serves national consolidation. The Polish Righteous Among the Nations (or Poles rescuing Jews) serve as a handy retort to the problem of complicity in the Holocaust in the right-wing discourse. They are used in various ways to cover up and whitewash the crimes committed by Poles against Jews.
3. In the context of the results of the latest research on complicity in the Holocaust, an obsession with Poles' self-image abroad is conspicuous. The key question is what others will say about Poland and the Poles. The fear hidden in this question dictates the historical policy in Poland.
4. A notable trope among Polish authorities and the right-wing media is to stress over and over again that the crimes of the Holocaust were committed not by the Nazis but the Germans. This repetition on the nationality of the perpetrators is directly related to the denial of Polish complicity in the murder of Jews.
5. The authorities and public institutions subordinated to them, including the media, attack independent researchers of the Holocaust in an increasingly aggressive manner. Currently, the main target are researchers from the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research. The cases of the Paris conference and the trial against Jan Grabowski and Barbara Engelking are exemplary in this sense.
6. The liberal and left-wing parties neglect the topic of memory politics. Opposition politicians rarely comment on topics related to the whitewashing of Polish complicity in the Holocaust. The Law and Justice party is therefore unrivalled in the arena of its historical policy. There are certainly critical voices in the liberal and left-wing media against the historical policy implemented by the Polish authorities, but these are lonely voices in the wilderness.
7. The historical policy on the Holocaust implemented in Poland for several years is significantly affecting the collective memory of Poles, which has been reflected in the results of the latest public surveys presented in this chapter. More broadly, the historical policy determines the framework of discussion on the Holocaust and makes it almost impossible to honestly confront the difficult past.
8. Antisemitic content is present in the mainstream of Polish public discourse, most often in the form of the Judeo-Communist stereotype but not only. A strong tendency to equate antisemitism with "anti-Polonism" is present in right-wing discourse. This rhetorical linguistic figure itself comes from the antisemitic repertoire and its task is to counterbalance antisemitism. "Anti-

Polonism” is most often attributed to Jews from Israel and the USA. At the same time, leading politicians, public officials and right-wing journalists downplay or outright deny the problem of antisemitism in Poland. They attribute it to the West – mainly to Germany and France.

9. Finally, Polish authorities disregard international institutions dealing with the remembrance of the Holocaust. Their statements, letters and appeals are ignored in Poland and interpreted as attempts at foreign interference. This also applies to IHRA.

2.3. The Shifting Holocaust Memory in Hungary¹⁴⁰

2.3.1. Introduction: the evolution of Holocaust memory in Hungary

Holocaust memory in Hungary has evolved in different stages: an intense first period from 1945–1948; from the beginning of Communism in 1948 until the regime change in 1989 and a third period from the 1989 transition onwards, which actually signified a new period in memorization. According to Mónika Kovács (2016a), two kinds of official remembrance have existed simultaneously in Hungary in the last few decades: a global and a local one. In this analysis, I explore the parallel existence of these two types of remembrance practice through different discursive events. I identify two key themes that determine the discourse around Holocaust memory in the period under analysis: “remembrance” and “protection.” “Remembrance” appears in almost every discursive act. Speakers highlight the need to remember the Holocaust, though the reasons why Hungarians must remember vary greatly as will be shown in the analysis. One of the reasons is related to the other key theme of the analysis – “protection.” This refers to the protection needed by the Jewish community from certain types of dangers – from the distortion of Holocaust memory to the danger some “out-groups” pose for the Jewish community.

During the short period of political freedom between 1945 and 1948, some public discussion of WWII and the Holocaust was initiated, mainly prompted by several literary pieces that were published during that time (Jablonczay 2019). By 1948, these discussions had almost entirely ceased. Under the newly established Communist regime the topic of the Holocaust was engulfed by an almost complete silence. According to Randolph L. Braham (2015), the Communist Party suppressed discussion of the Holocaust due to a simple political calculation: they sought the support of those who took over the property of the murdered and who were afraid that they would have to return it if the issue was discussed in the public sphere. Presumably due to this taboo, for a long time historians also ignored questions about the fate of Hungarian Jews. A good example of this tendency was the chapter on WWII in the 1964 Marxist edition of the book “History of Hungary,” which had only 21 lines about the deportation of the entire Jewish community from the countryside in 1944 (Gyáni 2016). Moreover, when historians did write about this historical period, they mostly followed the official narrative that focused on the “anti-fascist” struggle against the Nazis, which collapsed together the Jewish and the majority Hungarian perspectives. In the field of visual art, especially in the case of public monuments, the same “anti-fascist” approach was dominant, although one cannot ignore some exceptions in the field of visual art and literature that did not follow the official narrative (Szécsényi 2017).

In the 1960s, two important memorials were installed by the Communist regime to remember Hungarian victims: one in Mauthausen and another one in Auschwitz. Both aimed to illustrate the “fight against Fascism” (Véri 2018). This “anti-fascist” narrative of Holocaust remembrance served

140 This chapter is written by Anikó Félix. Translations from Hungarian are by Félix unless the texts were available in English.

the political needs of the socialist leadership and was often accompanied by a relatively strong anti-Zionist narrative (Szécsényi 2017).

The 1970s signalled a new period, when memoirs of survivors began to be published in relatively large numbers. This tendency increased even more throughout the 1980s. Although historical research on the Holocaust remained very limited, this period saw the launch of sociological and psychological research. One such study was conducted under the leadership of the psychologist Ferenc Erős and focused on second generation descendants of Holocaust survivors. Using a variety of interview techniques, the study tried to uncover what it meant to grow up under Communism in a family that experienced persecution in the Holocaust, and how that influenced perceptions of Jewish roots and identity (Erős 2017, 1). This was the first academic attempt to “break the silence” around the topic, and even though it did not significantly alter the public discourse, it created research material that is still crucial in understanding the unique circumstances of second-generation Holocaust survivors who grew up in the years of silence and taboo.

The first monumental historical work on the Holocaust in Hungary was written by Randolph L. Braham. His book was published in 1981 in the United States but was only translated into Hungarian in 1988. The translation enabled a serious academic debate about the Holocaust to begin in Hungary (Gyáni 2016). From the 1980s onwards, public statues were installed, though most were to commemorate the rescuers. Among others, a sculpture in honour of Raoul Wallenberg and Carl Lutz was built in Budapest. However, as Gyáni (2016) pointed out, this form of remembrance was still ignoring the victims. It was only after the democratic transition in 1989 that the victims also started to appear both “physically” in the public monuments and in the public discourse.

After the communist regime collapsed, the institutionalization of Holocaust remembrance began (Kovács 2016b). This was part of a process that Kovács has termed the adoption of a global Holocaust remembrance. In practice this adoption meant the organization of commemorative events, exhibitions and “desirable speeches” that are “expected” or even required by “the Western world.” For the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe these actions seemed to be essential in order to be accepted by the West (Kovács 2016a). Around the turn of the millennium, several significant steps were taken as part of this “adoption.” From the year 2000 onwards, April 16 – the date when the first ghettos were established in Hungary in 1944 – became the Memorial Day for the Hungarian Victims of the Holocaust. On the 60th anniversary in 2004-2005, the Holocaust Memorial Centre was established. In 2005, the Shoes on the Danube Bank memorial, designed by the sculptor Gyula Pauer and the film director Can Togay, was installed on the Eastern bank of the Danube River. The memorial contained a deep message for future generations: the shoes were made from copper, therefore corroding in case of a flood. Hence it remains the choice of the descendants to take care of the memorial or let it vanish.¹⁴¹

Within a few years, Hungary joined almost all international declarations and bodies dealing with Holocaust remembrance. It was also around that time that it became more widely known that

141 József Mélyi, “[A magyaroknak nincs emlékezetkultúrájuk](#),” interview by Máté Pálos, *Origo*, August 4, 2014.

Hungarian Jews formed the biggest subgroup in Auschwitz-Birkenau. However, as Laczó (2019) pointed out, this was not accompanied by acknowledgement of Hungarian cooperation in the Holocaust. This was the period when the pro-European, liberal parties started emphasizing the importance of facing history. Germany was the “good example” in this respect, where according to this narrative the “memory work” has been accomplished (speaking of West-Germany, of course) (Laczó 2019). Apart from these concrete steps, politicians in power occasionally gave speeches that partly or fully acknowledged Hungarian responsibility in the Holocaust. While many included apologies for the trauma of the victims, the average reaction from victim groups was that these apologies were dishonest and served political goals, and that they were meant mostly for the “outside” world. They did not therefore signify reconciliation (Kovács 2016b).

The hesitancy of the victim groups in accepting these apologies might at least partly relate to what Kovács calls a local form of remembrance (or non-remembrance) that began to emerge around the regime change, almost simultaneously to the adoption of global remembrance norms. This kind of remembrance has two forms: the lack of acknowledgement or the minimization of the responsibility of the Hungarian nation in the Holocaust, on the one hand, and the portrayal of the Hungarian nation purely as a victim of Nazi Germany, on the other (Kovács 2016b, 50). Furthermore, according to the national Hungarian victimhood discourse (Kovács & Mindler-Steiner 2015, 54), victim identity is extended not only to the Trianon Peace Treaty at the end of the First World War, in which Hungary lost two-third of its territory, but to the entire course of Hungarian history. As part of this discourse, different victim positions are often compared and pitted against each other. Among these Trianon has been chosen as the main “victim narrative” event by most of the Hungarian people (Kovács 2015). The national victimhood discourse has been codified in the new Hungarian constitution called the Basic Law in 2011, which states that Hungary had no autonomy from March 19, 1944 (the Nazi occupation) until May 2, 1990 (the first free elections) (Kovács 2016b, 50).

This type of “local remembrance” and victimhood narrative resonates well with the attitudes of Hungarian society as a whole. According to a survey conducted in 2006, people mostly blame the Germans for the Holocaust (86%), as well as the members and supporters of the historical Arrow Cross Party called “nyilasok” (79%); and while the majority think that the Hungarian government was also responsible (85%), only a small percentage of respondents think that the Hungarian population was also guilty (15%) (ibid., 81).

Shortly after the Holocaust Memorial Day was declared, a memorial day for the victims of Communism was also established. Similarly, when the plan for the Holocaust Memorial Centre was announced, the House of Terror museum had already opened its doors (Kovács & Mindler-Steiner 2015, 55). Officially the House of Terror commemorates both the victims of the Holocaust and Communism, but in reality, its exhibitions deal almost exclusively with the terror of the Communist regime. The culmination of this dual remembrance was the 70th anniversary of the Holocaust in 2014, which the government named Holocaust Memorial Year; and the year after when Hungary was the chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. During these two years many commemorations took place, as well as memorial projects, publications and the establishment of the Memorial to the Child Victims of the Holocaust – European Education Centre, commonly referred to as the House of

Fates was announced (*ibid.*, 56). The House of Fates project, however, created tensions both at the national and international levels from the outset. One of the critiques revolved around the name of the institution, which somehow suggests that it was the child victims' "fate" to be murdered, not a conscious decision of the perpetrators. Others were against the then leader of the project, Mária Schmidt, who is also the director of the House of Terror and the "chief historian" of the current regime (*ibid.*). The third serious concern was that – based on a previously published version of the plans – the exhibition was to focus only on the period until 1938, thus eliminating the period of the Hungarian authorities' responsibility. Both the Jewish Federation and some international Jewish organizations protested against this.

In the same year, the government introduced a plan to install a monument to remember "all victims of the German occupation." The intention was to portray the entire Hungarian nation as the victim of the Nazi occupation. This approach rewrites the historical fact that Hungary was an ally of Nazi Germany until the very last moment and therefore also neglects the willing cooperation of the Hungarian administration in the Holocaust. Due to the controversies around the memorial year, the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities (Mazsihisz) decided to boycott it and conditioned its participation on, among other things, the cancellation of the planned monument (*ibid.*, 57). These conditions were not accepted and the Federation did not participate in the memorial year.

The Monument of the German Occupation at Liberty Square was installed in 2014 and despite the criticism it received from academics and the international public it still stands at the heart of Budapest. The circumstances of the installation reflect the controversies around the monument, as it was installed overnight and has not been officially inaugurated until this day. As a reaction to the monument, members of civil society organizations and "ordinary" people started to create a counter-memorial in front of it by putting their own family memories there. Their actions can be understood as a rejection of the official government-led remembrance by countering it with their own memories (Kovács 2016b, 50), but also as acts of civil courage that have not often been seen in Hungarian society since the regime change. The abovementioned counter-memorial became known as the Living Memorial and it remains in front of the official monument, but it also exists as an initiative that organizes debates and roundtable discussions around the topic of memory politics. As Pető (2014) and Erős (2017) also pointed out, besides the Living Memorial an online initiative was also set up, a Facebook group called "The Holocaust and My Family." The aim of the group is to share and discuss personal family stories and to create a memory community as well as a counternarrative to the official memory politics that tries to minimize Hungarian responsibility (Erős 2017, 39). Overall, one can conclude that the memorial year was not a successfully implemented project. As Andrea Pető pointed out, it did not lead to a convergence but rather to further "polarisation of different memory cultures present in Hungary" (Pető 2014).

Hungary's chairing of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) led again to a special focus on the topic. Under Hungary's directorship, the IHRA made sure that the European Union would not restrict access to the archives related to the Holocaust due to the General Data

Protection Regulation (GDPR).¹⁴² The House of Fates remains one of the crucial topics in relation to memory politics about the Holocaust in Hungary. The opening of the museum is still pending.

Another recurring topic in official memory politics is the glorification of certain intellectuals and politicians who directly or indirectly took part in the Holocaust. This is embodied in the installation of sculptures of these historical figures and also by their insertion into the national curriculum as part of the Hungarian literature course. Some were once members of the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party or even convicted criminals (Félix 2021).

To conclude, as Gyáni (2012) pointed out, the Holocaust is still not commemorated nationally. This is partly due to the fact that it is still discussed as the trauma of the Jewish people and not of the entire nation. Relatedly, the simultaneous existence of both the “local” and the “global” forms of remembrance shape Holocaust consciousness in Hungary and influence issues of responsibility.

2.3.2. Sources and methodology

In the choice of discursive events three types of topics were distinguished. We defined some topics that were related to specific events in the examined period. A subtype of this kind is those events that take place every year (returners), while there are some events that happen once in a lifetime (day flies). Apart from these, there are some topics that do not relate to any specific event but can be connected to any of the previous events and, though perhaps to a different extent, they are part of the mainstream political discourse during the whole examined period (evergreens) (Fokasz & Kopper 2009). The events analysed in this chapter were divided as follows:

Returners: January 27: International Holocaust Memorial Day; February 11: “Breakout” tour organized at the Memorial of the “Breakout” in Budapest by far-right organizations, to commemorate an attempt by German and Hungarian soldiers to break out of Buda Castle besieged by the Soviet Red Army on February 11, 1945.

Day flies: February–May 2020: Debate on the National Curriculum (NAT); February–May 2020: Turul statue in the 12th district.

Evergreens: Debates over collaboration with the Nazis during the Holocaust/WWII; Debates on Trianon and the Hungarian Soviet Republic; Places of remembrance: Museums related to memory politics; Memorial of the “Breakout”; Soros and the “background” power.

The analysis covers three types of texts: first, relevant speeches of politicians who significantly influence the public discourse from across the political spectrum, from the far right to the left-liberal parties. Second, official statements and parliamentary speeches. Certain speeches are not available in full and for opposition parties it is even more challenging to access full speeches. Therefore, the analysed texts are often public statements and/or politicians’ posts on social media. The number

142 [“IHRA Concludes Plenary Meetings,”](#) *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance*, November 5, 2015.

of the relevant available parliamentary speeches and debates is also quite small; they are discussed together with speeches given outside the Parliament.

The third genre of texts are articles in different media outlets. Three media outlets antagonistic to the government were chosen. The first one is *index.hu*, which was the most read online news platform in 2020.¹⁴³ *Index.hu* received a new, pro-government leadership during the examined period and almost the whole journalist team changed. The portal thereby became less independent. Yet if we look at the whole period, it is still worth including it as an oppositional media outlet. The second oppositional media outlet is *444.hu*, which can be considered rather liberal. Meanwhile, the third platform, *mérce.hu*, is more left-wing, sometimes labelled as far left. It is also important to note that even if *mérce.hu* has some articles that are more critical towards Israel and some that question the antisemitism in the UK Labour Party, its left-wing character is not as radical as some western European media outlets and intellectual circles when it comes to the question of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Among the pro-government news platforms we chose the largest one, *Magyar Nemzet*. As early as the pilot phase we already noticed an “additional function” of this news platform whereby the main arguments in the speeches of politicians from the governing parties are “explained” in more detail in the articles. We used it as an additional source to understand right-wing narratives on certain discursive events.

The far-right news platform that we investigated was the *kuruc.info* portal. It is an extremely antisemitic and racist news site with direct connections to the largest far-right party, Our Homeland Movement (Mi Hazánk Mozgalom). It publishes regular columns such as “Jew crime” (zsidóbűnözés), “Gypsy crime” (cigánybűnözés) and “Holo-hoax” (Holokamu). It shares the anti-Soros sentiments of the mainstream right-wing narrative and there are many articles that align with the government’s anti-liberal rhetoric (regarding gender, migration, and social policies). *Kuruc.info* is sharply anti-Israel in an unquestionably antisemitic way and is against the governments’ pro-Israel stance and the activities that support Jewish communities. It is important to note that due to political circumstances, Hungarian media is hugely unbalanced, with overrepresentation of the media outlets that are more pro-government. Both the number and the resources of oppositional publications are much more limited. This means that opposition politicians have fewer opportunities to speak to the public than politicians from the governing parties.

We searched for different keywords in different combinations in all media outlets. It must be noted that the keywords are not mutually exclusive. One article can be linked to more than one keyword search (See Table 1).

It is quite evident that *Magyar Nemzet* dealt with all topics the most during the examined period. The words “antisemitism” and “antisemite” occurred more than double the number of times in the columns of *Magyar Nemzet* than in any left-liberal news outlet. The only topic that was less “popular” in the right-wing portal is the House of Fates project, which as the analysis shows, is a sensitive topic for the government as well as for the strongly pro-government *Magyar Nemzet*.

143 “[Legolvasottabb hírportálok és weboldalak listája \(2020-ban\)](#),” *The Pitch*, May 6, 2019.

Altogether 42 speeches were selected, including parliamentary debates (mostly speeches) and social media posts by politicians, 5 official party statements and 80 articles from the selected media outlets.

Table 1: Keywords in Hungary media search

	Mérce	444	Index	Magyar Nemzet	Kuruc.info
Holocaust + WW II	8	18	40	89	64
Holocaust + education	4	2	20	28	11
Holocaust + memorial	8	3	26	62	9
Holocaust + antisemitism	6	23	32	112	80
Holocaust + Jews	15	72	98	249	204
Shoah + Jews		3	4	8	13
Genocide + Jews	46	8	13	28	17
Nazis + Jews	20	74	172	294	137
Antisemite	13	220	220	555	362
Antisemitism	112	115	190	452	262
Holocaust + Auschwitz	11	12	46	81	35
Holocaust + Never Again	7	5	3	23	18
Holocaust + Muslim	9	4	6	24	25
Holocaust + Islam	7	1	2	17	13
Holocaust + immigration	7	1	1	23	22
Holocaust + immigrants	12		4	19	8
Holocaust + migrant	11	1	5	20	7
Holocaust + Israel	27	18	44	107	86
Holocaust+ Corona/Covid	7	8	1	34	29
Holocaust + BDS		1			8
Holocaust + Apartheid	3		1		2
Holocaust + IHRA	1		1	4	7
Holocaust + Soros	18	24	11	32	8
Holocaust + National Educational Curriculum	1	1	1	5	1
Holocaust + Soros plan		2	1	1	8
Holocaust + Holocaust Museum of Budapest	1	1	2	5	4
Holocaust + House of Fates	2	6	10	3	5
Holohaux	1	3		2	24
Hollókoszt/same in English					
Holindustry					4
Holobuiseness					3
Holotrain					
Holomemorial Day					7
Jews + education	60	6	53	111	27
Jews + memorial	66		33	152	18
Jews + refugees	51	19	29	62	44
Jews + Auschwitz	30	13	58	81	35

	Mérce	444	Index	Magyar Nemzet	Kuruc.info
Jews + Never Again	67	10	13	44	27
Jews + Islam	23	16	60	153	92
Jews + immigrants	36	1	41	74	15
Jews + refugees	52	19	29	62	44
Jews + Corona/Covid	20	30	68	138	168
Jews + Israel	27	70	260	452	172
Jews + BDS	1	1	2	9	441
Jews + Apartheid	11		4	9	14
Jews + IHRA	1		1	4	7
Jews + Soros	6	41	42	129	92
Jews + Soros plan	1	5	4	3	6
Jews + background power	8	3	5	2	4
Jews + anti-white	2			2	35
Jews + anti-immigrant	5	1		27	1
Jews + multiculturalism	5	1	2	19	19
Jews + Islamization			1	11	2
Jews + migrant fondler	3				5
Jews + n**** fondler					1
Jews + Breakout tour	20		1		2
Jews + House of Fates	3	4	9	4	6
Jews + Holocaust Museum of Budapest	1	1	1	6	
International Holocaust Remembrance Day	9	3	14	15	14
Hungarian Holocaust Remembrance Day	4	1	8	32	11
Jews + National Educational Curriculum	4	2	3	11	3
Jews + Maccabi	2	8	7	39	32
Defense of the Christian-Jewish culture	5	11	5	1	7
Defense of the Jewish culture	45	28	6	21	12
Defense of the Christian culture	62	56	30	105	29

2.3.3. Findings and analysis

Holocaust remembrance days

Apart from the International Holocaust Remembrance Day (January 27), there are several other Holocaust memorial days when commemorations and speeches take place: Memorial Day of the Hungarian Victims of the Holocaust (April 16), the Liberation of the Budapest Ghetto (January 18), the Roma Resistance Day (May 16), and the International Memorial Day of the Roma Holocaust (August 2), Israeli Memorial Day – Yom HaShoah (April 17).¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Although there are speeches on Yom HaShoah only occasionally. “[Orbán, Karácsony és Varga is megemlékezett a holokauszt emléknapon](#),” *Neokohn*, April 8, 2021.

One of the recurring themes in public speeches by politicians around remembrance days is the representation of the Holocaust as part of Hungarian history, indeed as one of its biggest tragedies. In 2019, Gergely Gulyás, the Minister heading the Prime Minister's Office, talked about the loss that Hungary and eventually the whole continent experienced following the Holocaust: "This loss does not only belong to the Jewish people, but to the entire European community. Similarly, the Hungarian Jews' loss is the loss of the entire Hungarian nation as well. [...] A loss that belittled the history of the eldest continent and the thousand-years long history of Hungary by allowing this to happen."¹⁴⁵

Often, these speeches also contain an acknowledgment of the responsibility of the Hungarian state and the willing cooperation of the Hungarian administration in the victimization of the Jews. This was the case in the above quoted speech of Gulyás too. However, at the same time, he rejected the notion of a collective guilt of the Hungarian people:

It is true that the increased antisemitism of the 1930s involved Hungary and the Hungarians as well, which materialized in the Hungarian Jewry's unacceptable and disgraceful discrimination. It is also factually correct that Hungarian Jewry was taken in large numbers from all over the country to the death camps after the German annexation on 19th March 1944. And it is also true that Hungarian Jewry's organised coercion in large numbers would not have been possible without the Hungarian public administration's active participation. The Hungarian state, hence, is responsible because it did not protect its own citizens. Moreover, there were a significant number of civil servants who verbally, physically or due to malpractice became accomplices to the coercion of our fellow Jewish compatriots. There is no such thing as collective guilt, but there is state responsibility.

This argumentation about responsibility is in line with the dominant opinion based on the survey mentioned above: "we" as Hungarians are not responsible collectively, "only" the Hungarian state and the administration (Kovács 2016b, 81).

Based on the database of the Hungarian Parliament, during the three years studied, only one speech was held in the Hungarian Assembly that directly related to the International Holocaust Memorial Day; it was by István Simicskó from the governing Christian Democrats in 2020. The almost total lack of such speeches suggests that the Hungarian Assembly is not the main forum of discourse about the Holocaust. Simicskó was part of Hungary's Delegation to Auschwitz on the 75th anniversary and in his speech he "summarized" his visit to his fellow MPs. The themes included the "Hungarian tragedy" and the support of the Hungarian administration during the deportation process. He also talked about the protection of all minorities as a principle of the Hungarian government, touching on the "protection" key theme:

145 ["A magyar államot felelősség terheli, amiért nem védte meg állampolgárait," Fidesz](#), and ["A magyar államot felelősség terheli, amiért nem védte meg állampolgárait," Népszava](#), January 27, 2019.

I believe that all Hungarian citizens are safe in Hungary today. It is important that such a tragedy and such discrimination, such disadvantageous discrimination will never take place, as in the twentieth century. The Hungarian government still guarantees the safety of all minorities and all our citizens. I hope this will be the case for a very, very long time.¹⁴⁶

The mayor of Budapest, Gergely Karácsony also wrote explicitly in his 2020 Facebook post that the Holocaust is “our national tragedy. In a painfully big portion, it was committed by us.”¹⁴⁷ Over the two years his posts mentioned two artists (a photographer and a writer) who perished during the Holocaust, both were from Budapest.¹⁴⁸

In his 2020 Facebook post, the president of the largest oppositional party, Ferenc Gyurcsány also touched on the “biggest tragedy” theme and the responsibility of the wartime Hungarian administration. However, in contrast to Gulyás he also mentioned some kind of collective responsibility when he wrote: “Not only Horthy and his government, not only the state and the administration, but the thousands of ordinary people [were responsible].”¹⁴⁹

In general, the fact that politicians acknowledge the assistance of the Hungarian people in the Holocaust in their official speeches is something that should be recognized as a great step forward: it was not emphasized as much in previous decades. However, while the governing right-wing politicians talk about the authorities’ responsibility, politicians of the left-wing opposition highlight the assistance of “ordinary” people as well.

Another typical theme of the public speeches held during the Holocaust memorial days is the co-mentioning of the Holocaust with other tragedies, usually with the victims of Communism. In his already mentioned speech, Gulyás made comparisons between the “two totalitarian dictatorships”:

The two totalitarian dictatorships of the previous century have both rejected the Jewish-Christian culture and instead built themselves upon the promise of the utopia of an earthly paradise. This was National Socialism, which targeted Jewry as the enemy on a racial basis and set the goal of extermination. And there was international Socialism which sought to first exterminate anti-classism, and next the enemies of Bolshevik power, also with some degree of antisemitism.

With this argument he “incorporates” Jewish culture as an opposite of both National Socialism and “international” Socialism, both of which have the same logic against their enemies and ultimately both were antisemitic. He therefore equates the threat that the two dictatorships posed to the Jewish people. Gulyás also drew a connection between these dictatorships and their oppositional

146 István Simicskó, “ny200217. A holokauszt nemzetközi emléknapjának 75. évfordulója alkalmából megtartott auschwitz megemlékezés beszámolója”

147 [Karácsony Gergely – facebook](#), January 27, 2021.

148 [Karácsony Gergely – facebook](#), January 27, 2019; [Karácsony Gergely – facebook](#), January 27, 2020.

149 [Gyurcsány Ferenc – facebook](#), January 27, 2020.

stance to Jewish-Christian culture in another part of his speech: “It is true that the Holocaust happened within Western civilization, but its origins do not lie in the same Western civilization. In fact, the Holocaust, as well as the Gulag, was the consequence of the rejection and betrayal of the ideology, which the Western, Jewish-Christian civilization rests on.”

In 2019, on the occasion of the Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Day, Miklós Kásler,¹⁵⁰ then Minister of Human Capacities, talked about the “two bloody dictatorships” that ruined the lives of millions in the twentieth century. It is also symbolic that he held this speech in front of the House of Terror, in which the exhibition builds on the same “comparative/co-mentioning” narrative as discussed in the introduction. Csaba Latorcai, then Deputy State Secretary for Priority Social Affairs of the Prime Minister’s Office also spoke about the “dictatorships of the twentieth century” in his speech at the commemoration held at the Holocaust Documentary Centre on International Holocaust Memorial Day in 2020.¹⁵¹ Notably, this type of “co-mentioning technique” does not appear significantly in the speeches of the left-liberal opposition.

Another recurring theme in these speeches is the safety and vitality of the Hungarian Jewish population, to which a variety of meanings are attached. In his above-mentioned speech in 2019 Secretary Gulyás formulated it in the following way while combining the two key themes, “protection” and “remembrance”:

The Hungarian government is proud that currently here, in the capital city, there is a thriving cultural and religious life, in which Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians can live together safely. Among the Hungarian government and among the authorities there is no tolerance and there cannot be any tolerance for antisemitic acts. Hungary has learnt from the past; hence, we must plan and attain the future with the Hungarian Jewry.

In 2020, Judit Varga, the Minister of Justice, who participated in the commemoration in Auschwitz-Birkenau as part of the Hungarian delegation,¹⁵² gave a speech quoted by many media outlets. Although the whole speech is not available, the main parts were highlighted by the media. Similarly to Gulyás, she mentioned that “the second biggest Jewish community in Europe lives here in peace and safety more than anywhere else in Europe” and spoke of the declared zero tolerance for antisemitism,¹⁵³ as well as the prohibition on Holocaust denial.¹⁵⁴ She also talked about Hungary’s tenure as chair of IHRA: “It was an important achievement for us, that during Hungary’s 2015-2016 presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) we succeeded in making sure that the European Union’s new data protection regulation would not restrict access

150 “[Megemlékezés a holokauszt magyarországi áldozatainak emléknapja alkalmából](#),” *Origo*, April 14, 2014.

151 “[Latorcai Csaba: Rajtunk áll, tanulunk-e a múltból](#),” *Magyar Nemzet*, January 27, 2020.

152 She also posted about the visit on her [Facebook page](#).

153 “[A Nemzetközi Holokauszt Megemlékezési Szövetség keretében kidolgozott antiszemitizmus-definíció alkalmazásának előmozdításáról](#),” *Magyar Közlöny*, January 27, 2020.

154 “[Varga Judit: a kormány semmiféle antiszemitizmust nem tűr](#),” *Magyar Narancs*, January 21, 2020.

to Holocaust archives.” This part of her speech is in line with the “global remembrance” practice. In relation to the “protection” theme, she named those from whom the Jewish population should be protected. In the speeches by the governing coalition’s politicians, they tended to emphasize the idea that there are some dangers outside the country such as immigrants and there are some internal dangers such as the oppositional parties who made a coalition for the elections with the “far-right Jobbik party.” A good example is the official statement released by the governing party Fidesz on Memorial Day in 2019:

We thought that this could never happen again. However, currently there are a lot of Jews who live in fear in Western Europe because antisemitism has been allowed into the continent along with the massive wave of immigration.¹⁵⁵ Those who are allowing massive waves of antisemitic immigrants into Europe and those Hungarian opposition parties who are open to building a coalition with antisemitic, extremist forces, in the hope of taking power, are committing a historical crime. The encouragement of antisemitism in Europe and Hungary is unacceptable.¹⁵⁶

The same message was repeated by the governing party on April 16, 2019, by saying that “encouraging antisemitism is unacceptable.”¹⁵⁷ It similarly refers to the current danger theme that immigrants present in Europe, and in Hungary by the coalition of the left-liberal parties and Jobbik.

The protection of “Jewish-Christian civilization” also appears in the speeches. Then State Secretary Szabolcs Takács, talked in an interview on April 16, 2019, about the danger antisemitism posed to Jewish-Christian culture and declared zero tolerance for antisemitism.¹⁵⁸ In Gulyás’ speech, the Jewish-Christian culture is framed in opposition to the dictatorial regimes of the twentieth century: “On the contrary, the Jewish and Christian religions share the belief that the Creator built humankind in his own image. Therefore, the Jewish-Christian moral teaching views life and human dignity as sacred, unique and unrepeatable. This is what lives on in the secularized form of the fundamental human rights original declaration.”

In 2020 secretary Latoricai also emphasized the security and well-being of Hungarian Jewry. Similarly to Gulyás, he spoke about the danger to Jewish-Christian civilization caused by the “path that Europe is planning to take.” He added:

If we do not coalesce and stop this process on time, then this world may experience the consequences of a state, similar to the twentieth century’s godless dictatorships, which

155 Here they are referring to the 2015 refugee crisis, when thousands of refugees arrived in Europe mostly from Syria and Afghanistan.

156 Márk Herczeg, “[Fidesz: Elfogadhatatlan bátorítani az antiszemitizmust](#),” *444.hu*, January 27, 2019.

157 Ibid.

158 “[Takács Szabolcs: Zsidó honfitársaink tragédiája az egyik legsúlyosabb teher a történelemben](#),” *Magyar Nemzet*, April 14, 2019.

rejects the self-determination of nations and seeks to destroy their religious roots. Moreover, it pushes the continent to a road of cultural self-surrender.¹⁵⁹

In 2021, prime minister Viktor Orbán wrote a letter to the president of the World Jewish Congress, Ronald S. Lauder, in which he touched upon almost all the themes mentioned above. He emphasized that Hungarians have reached the desired conclusions from a dark chapter of Hungarian history and mentioned the declared “zero tolerance” for antisemitism.¹⁶⁰ That same year, an official statement was released again but by the European Parliament faction of Fidesz and the Christian Democrats. It also mentioned the zero-tolerance policy, as well as the rejection of those who make coalitions with people who hold anti-Roma and antisemitic views, referring to the oppositional left-wing parties’ collaboration with Jobbik.¹⁶¹

From the opposition, the mayor of Budapest posted a message on April 16, 2020 and in January 2021 about the importance of cooperation instead of division:

We must make it clear, facing each other, in our every-day actions that compassion, fellowship and trust is stronger than stigmatization and division. That our differences make us stronger, not weaker. And we are strengthening the nation, we are strengthening our city, which interlocks us in a special fate community. This requires courage and perhaps power as well. Because those who divide a community are not strong. Real power lies in being able to bring together and unite communities, while respecting the differences.¹⁶²

An interesting commonality of the above analysed speeches is that there is no mention of other victim groups, only the Jewish victims. Another strong commonality of the texts is that they all refer to the Holocaust as part of Hungarian history. The main difference between the speeches of governing parties’ politicians and the opposition is that the governing actors make direct connections to the current political and sociological circumstances while the opposition make only indirect references. There are no major differences content-wise between the speeches held at the International Memorial Days and the Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Days.

In terms of articles in the main Hungarian media outlets, both in 2020 and 2021 there were descriptive articles in *Magyar Nemzet*, in which facts about the Holocaust were presented but without mentioning Hungarian responsibility. In 2021 one article included reference to governor Horthy wanting to stop

159 [“Latorcai Csaba: Rajtunk áll, tanulunk-e a múltból,” Magyar Nemzet](#), January 27, 2020.

160 Krisztina Balogh, [“Orbán Viktor: Magyarország levonta a megfelelő tanulságokat a magyar történelem sötét fejezetéből,” Index.hu](#), January 27, 2021, The prime minister posted the letter itself on his Facebook page: [Orbán Viktor, Facebook](#), January 27, 2021.

161 [“Emlékezés a holokauszt nemzetközi emléknapján,” Deutsch Tamás](#), January 27, 2021.

162 [Karácsony Gergely – facebook](#), January 27, 2021.

the deportation.¹⁶³ In 2020, Orbán's visit to Auschwitz¹⁶⁴ and in 2021 Orbán's letter to Lauder were also included in these articles.¹⁶⁵

Index also summarized the speeches of the officials, Gulyás' 2019 speech¹⁶⁶ and the letter of the prime minister to Mr. Lauder in 2021.¹⁶⁷ Both in 2019 and in 2020, on the Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Day, a "popular science" article was published from the same author, a historian. The two articles are about the myths and truths around the Holocaust, including the "myth" that Hungarians did not take part in the Holocaust.¹⁶⁸ *Mérce* also uses the "voice of the experts" when another historian published an article in 2020 about Auschwitz, the legacy of the Holocaust and its effect on the remembrance of the Holocaust, shedding light on the other victim groups.¹⁶⁹ On the 2021 memorial day an academic debate series was launched by the same historian entitled "From Genocide to the People's Court," focusing on the perpetrators of the Holocaust. It included twenty articles by experts and was published from December 2020 to April 2021. It followed another debate series entitled "Victimhood and Decolonization," which discussed the current debates on colonization in the context of and comparison with the Holocaust (July 2020-January 2021) and in which the writer of this essay also participated.¹⁷⁰

444.hu also mentioned the officials' speeches. In addition, the portal created a documentary movie on a statue in the 12th district of Budapest and the bloody local history of the Holocaust behind it, which premiered on International Holocaust Memorial Day in 2021 (on this documentary see more below).¹⁷¹

The far-right *Kuruc.info* discussed the memorial days under the "Holohoax" topic. In 2019 the speech of Gulyás was shared almost the same way as in the other journals. The only difference was that it sarcastically framed it as the "so-called Holocaust."¹⁷² This reflects a general pattern in the case of articles that discuss topics related to the Jewish community: they cite the official news, usually taken

163 ["Másodpercek alatt döntöttek életről, halálról – A holokausztt áldozataira emlékezünk,"](#) *Magyar Nemzet*, April 16, 2021. Horthy stopped the deportation only when it was obvious that the war was close to its end. Earlier however, he did not take any action and when the governor had approved the deportation of the entire Jewish community of the countryside.

164 ["Ma a holokausztt hatmillió áldozata előtt hajtanak fejet világszerte,"](#) *Magyar Nemzet*, January 27, 2020.

165 ["Orbán Viktor: Magyarország levonta a tanulságokat történelme sötét fejezetéből,"](#) *Magyar Nemzet*, January 27, 2021.

166 ["Gulyás Gergely: Kollektív bűnösség nincs, de állami felelősség van,"](#) *Index.hu*, January 27, 2019.

167 Krisztina, "Orbán Viktor."

168 Borbála Klacsmann, ["Miért mindig csak a holokausztról beszélünk?"](#) *Index.hu*, April 16, 2019; Borbála Klacsmann, ["Öt tévhit a holokausztról,"](#) *Index.hu*, April 16, 2020.

169 Ferenc Laczó, ["A holokausztt fővárosa,"](#) *Mérce.hu*, January 27, 2020.

170 ["Sorozatok,"](#) *Mérce.hu*.

171 ["A gyilkosok emlékműve,"](#) *444.hu*.

172 ["Fontos elszólás a kormány részéről: megtanulták, hogy a zsidókkal közösen kell eltervezni az ország jövőjét,"](#) *Kuruc.info*, January 28, 2019.

from the Hungarian news agency – but use quotation marks for those words with which they do not agree like “antisemites” or “liberation” of the ghetto or concentration camp.¹⁷³

We have seen in speeches on Holocaust Memorial Days, regular acknowledgement of the responsibility of the Hungarian state. A good example is what Zoltán Kovács, State Secretary for International Communication wrote in an open letter in 2020: “Viktor Orbán is the first head of state who openly talked about the sin of Hungary during the Holocaust, saying that ‘Hungary committed a sin when instead of protecting the Jews, it decided to collaborate with the Nazis.’”¹⁷⁴ At the same time there are many acts (both verbal and concrete) by governing agents that fall into the category of white-washing/glorification of historical figures who were involved in the Holocaust, events that are problematic, or in general the Horthy regime. This kind of glorification has different forms, from installing public statues for these controversial figures to including them in a positive way in the national educational curriculum, as discussed below.

A good illustration of this phenomenon was a Facebook post by the prime minister in 2019 on the Commemorative Day of the 1956 revolution, in which he quoted Albert Wass.¹⁷⁵ Albert Wass was a Transylvanian writer, famous for his nationalistic and also strongly antisemitic writings. He was even convicted as a war criminal in Romania for taking part in the murder of Romanians and Jews.¹⁷⁶ To quote him in a national commemoration day of the 1956 revolution against the Soviet Union contributes to the normalization of his memory. Another type of whitewashing is when some contemporary “well-known” antisemitic intellectuals who also distort the Holocaust are honoured with state awards or positions. An example of this from the examined period was the historian Ernő Raffay, famous for his antisemitic statements,¹⁷⁷ who was awarded the Cross of the Hungarian Order of Merit on the occasion of the State Foundation Day of Hungary on August 20, 2020.

Nostalgia towards the Horthy regime is a common agenda of all the right-wing parties. For instance, in 2020 Our Homeland party proposed to name a park after Miklós Horthy.¹⁷⁸ The only difference between the rhetoric of Fidesz-KDNP and Our Homeland Movement is that the latter makes more direct antisemitic references and glorification tendencies when they speak about certain historical events and people. An example of this is the “March for Horthy” on March 1st, 2020, the day when the governor came to power 100 years before. The march was organized by the far-right party together with other far-right groups.

173 [“Rémálom és teljes szégyen, hogy a zsidók már megint a bőröndjeiket keresik Németországban,” Kuruc.info,](#) January 26, 2020.

174 [“Kovács Zoltán válasza a Tablet című portálon megjelent írásra,” Kormány.hu,](#) February 24, 2020.

175 András Király, [“Orbán Viktor Wass Alberttel üzent október 23-án,” 444.hu,](#) October 23, 2019.

176 He emigrated from the country and therefore never actually faced the court.

177 In his books he mostly addresses Freemasons and their alleged role in the collapse of Hungary in 1918. He frequently applies some of the most common antisemitic conspiracy theories. He made very strong statements during the refugee crisis, as well.

178 [“Sem Mandela, sem Hitler: a kompromisszumos Horthy park elnevezéséről szavaz hétfőn reggel az önkormányzat rendkívüli ülése,” Mihazank.hu,](#) July 25, 2020.

Generally speaking, the left-liberal opposition is against the activities related to the so-called “Horthy nostalgia.” One example was the reaction of the mayor of Budapest to the Horthy March of the Our Homeland party. In the post he explicitly condemned it as something that humiliates the memory of those who had been discriminated against and later “sent to death by the Horthy regime.”¹⁷⁹ The three left-liberal media outlets also tend to be critical of this tendency. A good illustration of their attitude to the government concerning the Horthy regime can be found in the following quote from an article that was published in *Index.hu* in 2019:

The fact that the frequently used “antisemitism card” this time appears in the hand of the populist right-wing can sound extremely bizarre in a country that is dotted with quotes of Albert Wass¹⁸⁰ and dripped with Horthy nostalgia. However, there is a certain logic in it. This accusation perfectly fits the line of the Fidesz narratives that are based on the same principles.¹⁸¹

Magyar Nemzet shares the admiration for the Horthy regime and specifically for Horthy, and participates in the efforts to whitewash the role of the regime in the Holocaust. From time to time, antisemitic historical figures as well as the various authorities – such as the gendarmes – who had a direct role in the deportation, are whitewashed in the articles of *Magyar Nemzet*.¹⁸² This controversial stance of the pro-government journal mirrors well the same ambiguous rhetoric of the governing coalition.

Places of remembrance

The Hungarian Soviet Republic and the Monument for the National Martyrs of the Red Terror

During the examined period there was a relatively active discussion on the memory of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The short period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic started on March 21, 1919 and lasted only 133 days. The period is surrounded by many controversies; historians are constantly disputing it and especially whether the Soviet Republic made the required steps to “take back” the lost territories of Hungary. Almost all the leaders of the communist regime were of Jewish origin, first and foremost the leader of the Soviet Republic, Béla Kun. The discourse about the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the related “red terror” is inseparable from the discourse on the Horthy regime and the so-called “white terror” that was followed by the collapse of the Soviet Republic. Growing attention has been focussed on this historical period in the last couple of years and it is closely related to the discourse about the Horthy regime, antisemitism and the Holocaust.

László Toroczkai, the leader of the far-right Our Homeland party framed it in the following way in his speech at the March for Horthy:

179 [Karácsony Gergely – Facebook](#), March 1, 2020.

180 Wass was a writer who had a controversial public role during WWII and published harshly antisemitic writings.

181 Gergely Tóth, “[Hogyan lett antiszemita a baloldal?](#),” *Index.hu*, January 24, 2019.

182 Emőke Kovács, “[Döbbenetes sorsokat tárt fel a kutató,](#)” *Magyar Nemzet*, March 4, 2020.

The time for facing things is still delayed, the time when one of their leaders, even of the left-liberals, or of the [Jewish-A.F.] Federation would start to talk about why the destroyers of Hungary, the leaders of the Hungarian Soviet Republic were all people of Jewish origin with almost no exception.[...] let's talk about the responsibility of the Jewish leaders of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in bleeding, disarming, ruining Hungary.¹⁸³

Toroczkai also mentioned that they submitted an amendment to the Trianon Treaty to the Hungarian Parliament to revise its content.

Criticism of the Hungarian Soviet Republic as well as the commemoration of the victims of the red terror was a common practice of the government and the far-right party during the examined period. Although government politicians did not mention its leaders' Jewish origin, they often referred to the red terror without mentioning the context and the so-called white terror which followed. They thus ignored the many killings and other atrocities against Jews that took place in this period. As an example of this rhetoric, in October 2019 the government inaugurated the reconstructed monument for the National Martyrs of the Red Terror, which had originally been established by Horthy in 1934. It sent the symbolic message that the government's view on that period is the same as that of the Horthy regime. The location of the monument is also symbolic: it was erected in Kossuth square, next to the parliament and it directly replaced the statue of Imre Nagy, the communist leader who was prime minister during the 1956 revolution. The inauguration ceremony included the prime minister and the speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary, member of Fidesz, László Kövér; representatives of different churches and the rabbi of the Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (EMIH), but the Hungarian Jewish Federation (MAZSIHISZ) did not receive an invitation to the event. László Kövér's speech at the ceremony illustrated the narrative of the current regime well. He recalled the period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in the following way:

It was the consequence of a tragic Hungarian civil war that happened during those one hundred and thirty-three days. A civil war which was born on Hungarian soil, fought by Hungarians with mostly Hungarian names against members of their own nation. A civil war in which people who rejected God, the homeland, the nation and family tried to wipe out people who feared God, loved their homeland, served their nation and lived their lives according to thousands-years long commandments of civilization. Yes, [they tried to destroy] even the family and every emotion and moral ties that connect humans.¹⁸⁴

In another part of the text, he described the Soviet Republic as "anti-Christian," "eager internationalist," "fierce nation-hater," "conscious destroyer of the family" and the leaders of it as globalists who prefer "homelessness" in the world, and contrasted them with those who thought that the community of the nation was the most important. At the end of his speech he made comparisons between that historical period and the current Hungary by saying that there is an ongoing civil war in the

183 ["Mi Hazánk Mozgalom Horthy Március 1. Toroczkai László beszéde,"](#) Mi Hazánk Mozgalom a Médiaiban.

184 ["A Lenin-fiúk utódai ma is itt állnak velünk szemben!,"](#) Magyar Nemzet, November 2, 2019.

form of a “political and intellectual struggle” with the “successors of the Lenin-boys.” He added that the struggle can be successful only if they realize that a “majority cannot be achieved ever again with foreign-sponsored ungodliness, treason and denial of the nation.” According to Kövér, in order to win, Hungarians have to have a political, social and moral majority against the “nation-deniers” in order to protect the nation and the country. This speech contains many examples of what is called “coded language” (Wodak 2011) and coded antisemitism – it uses antisemitic tropes without explicitly stating the word “Jew.” Therefore, the only difference between the two above-mentioned speeches is the explicit mentioning of the Jewish origin of the leaders of the Hungarian Soviet Republic.

Left and liberal opposition parties do not talk about the Hungarian Soviet Republic, neither about its positive, nor about its negative aspects.

Unsurprisingly, *Magyar Nemzet* had the largest number of articles on the history of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the so-called “red terror,” mostly following the same narrative as the government. A good example of this is the article entitled, “The bloody almanac of the Hungarian Soviet Republic” with an introduction by the antisemitic historian who received a national award, Ernő Raffay.¹⁸⁵ Apart from the one-sided introduction of this historical period, the portal also draws parallels between the Hungarian Soviet Republic and its leaders and those who currently oppose the government. For instance, in one piece they “warned” the university students who were protesting against some changes in the autonomy of universities, not to be a “Soviet republic” instead of a “student republic.”¹⁸⁶ In the same article they made the “us” versus “them” even more general by saying that the students represent the same opposition that has existed for decades:

It is clear that two completely different worlds exist in parallel. On the one hand, there are those who have family relations to Gyurcsány, Dobrev, Apró, Donáth.¹⁸⁷ They also have a Marxist, class struggle experience and knowledge of the methodology. They are the ones who stand in Gyurcsány’s kitchen, in a mansion stolen from our Jewish compatriot Sebestyán-Grünwald and defend the rule of law with their new political lover, Péter Jakab. He is the leader of the party that called Budapest Judapest, and who wanted to list Members of Parliament with Jewish ancestors. On the other hand, there is us, our fathers and grandparents from whom those mentioned above and their relatives took away their wealth, dignity, vision for a future, opportunities and youth. They took away everything that they had accumulated for generations with diligence, talent and knowledge.

185 Attila Balázs, “[Dokumentumgyűjtemény Raffay Ernő ajánlásával](#),” *Magyar Nemzet*, December 14, 2020.

186 Vince Kruchina and Károly Kruchina, “[Frankenstein ugyanaz maradt](#),” *Magyar Nemzet*, October 29, 2020.

187 These were influential families during the Communist era, except for the Gyurcsány family and their ancestors who are currently active politicians. Ferenc Gyurcsány was prime minister from 2004-9. His wife, Klára Dobrev ran to become the opposition coalition’s prime ministerial candidate before the last elections. Her grandfather, Antal Apró was deputy prime minister and the speaker of parliament at one point. Ferenc Donáth was also an influential politician in the 1950s and his granddaughter, Anna Donáth is currently a member of the European Parliament and politician of an oppositional party, Momentum.

The listed families (except the Gyurcsány family) were all of Jewish origin. On the other hand, “our Jewish compatriot Sebestyán-Grünwald” belongs to the group of “us” and thus the accusation of antisemitism is circumvented. With this manoeuvre the article incorporates the topic of the Holocaust by drawing historical continuity between the leaders of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the leaders during the socialist period: the latter are those who own the property of the “compatriot Jews.” The frequently used “strategy” to tarnish the opposition with antisemitism is also present in the text. It presents one side as the compatriots, including those Jewish people who love(d) their country and on the other side the Marxists who occupied the houses of those who perished in the Holocaust, who have been against “us” for decades and who even made alliances with the antisemites.

Magyar Nemzet published the whole speech of the speaker of the National Assembly¹⁸⁸ at the inauguration of the statue on its portal and also one that contained an ironic piece on the fact that the Jewish Federation did not receive an invitation:

The newspaper called *Népszava* blared about a lot of anger surrounding the Martyrs square yesterday. However, the article below the tabloid-like title reveals that only the president of the Jewish Federation András Heisler was angry because he did not get invited to or asked to visit the formal opening of the memorial commemorating the “National Martyrs” last Thursday. Instead, the poor thing had to be angry at home.¹⁸⁹

Similar to the articles on the Holocaust Memorial Days, *index.hu* featured scholarly pieces about the Hungarian Soviet Republic, in which they tried to explain the history with its causes and consequences and to present the whole context. On its 100th anniversary it hosted a podcast and invited two historians who are experts on the topic.¹⁹⁰ In 2021 they also published an interview with a historian who wrote a book about this historical event without making comparisons with the present.¹⁹¹ The left-wing *Mérce.hu* almost always features the period of the Soviet Republic together with the following period of the “white terror,”¹⁹² including its Jewish victims, and the Horthy regime. It also makes comparisons between the Horthy regime and the present by stating that inequalities and societal structure was almost the same as they are now.¹⁹³ It therefore represents the opposite of the narrative of *Magyar Nemzet*, as the pro-government media outlet focuses almost exclusively on the “red terror” and its “parallels” with the current left and liberal circles’ “activity.”

kuruc.info follows the narrative of the Our Homeland party when it speaks about the people who took part in the Soviet Republic’s terror activities as “Jewish murderers.” The title of the article asks,

188 *Magyar Nemzet*, “[A Lenin-fiúk utódai ma is itt állnak velünk szemben!](#)”, November 2, 2019.

189 György Pilhál, “[Emlékműbalhé,](#)” *Magyar Nemzet*, November 5, 2019.

190 “[Száz éve kezdődött a Tanácsköztársaság,](#)” *Index.hu*, March 21, 2019.

191 Matild Torkos, “[Hatos Pál: Ha 1956 forradalom volt, 1919 semmiképp,](#)” *Index.hu*, February 27, 2021.

192 “[A régi világ terroristái: 100 éve ölték meg a Népszava újságíróit,](#)” *Mérce.hu*, February 27, 2020.

193 Orsolya Sudár, “[Hamis igazságok – történelemszemlélet egy neoliborális világban,](#)” *Mérce.hu*, June 14, 2020.

“When will there be an official statement by the government or by the Jewish Federation about those Hungarians who were shot on mass by Jews into the Danube?” The article compares it to the Holocaust by saying the following:

[...] the Shoes on the Danube Bank memorial withholds the essentials. Namely, the events of 1944, when the fronts of the war destroyed many millions of Hungarian lives, it was necessary to isolate those hostile to the Hungarians and to abuse them. However, the original sin was not committed in 1944, but in 1919 when the Bolshevik Judeo-anarchy initiated the retaliation, the unstoppable attacks back and forth by murdering masses of Hungarians.¹⁹⁴

This argument not only compares the murders that took place during the different regimes but also alters the victim-perpetrator roles by saying that the Jewish people were the real perpetrators and what happened during the Holocaust was the consequence of “their” activities during the Soviet Republic. Here again, what is merely “suggested” in the softer right-wing discourse is explicitly stated in a far-right media outlet.

The Turul statue in the 12th district

Another topic that was a “sub discursive event” during the examined period was related to the so-called Turul bird statue in the 12th district of Budapest. The Turul bird is a historic Hungarian symbol but it was also co-opted during the Horthy regime, by the historical far-right organizations and especially by the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party. An infamous student organization was also named the “Turul Alliance” and was famous for its cruel incitement against the Jewish community. There are numerous Turul bird statues around the country. Even though the use of this symbol – with its problematic heritage – is already controversial, the statue in the 12th district raised some additional concerns. The local government ruled by Fidesz, the governing party, installed the memorial there in 2005, with the intention to remember local victims of the Second World War. This raised concerns about the use of the Turul as a symbol given its problematic co-optation. How can you remember victims using a symbol in whose name some were killed?¹⁹⁵ A further “problem” with the statue was that it was installed very close to a place where actual killings took place. The monument was installed without the permission of the Budapest government led by the left-liberal parties. The far-right party Jobbik then continually protested against its removal. In 2008, they even organized a protest at the statue with the participation of the then active paramilitary organization, the Hungarian Guard.¹⁹⁶ The history of this statue was further problematized during the period under examination. It was recently discovered that on the monument that aims to honour the memory of the local victims of WWII, there is not a single name of a Jewish victim but instead, some perpetrators are

194 [“Cipők a Duna-parton: a zsidók által tömegesen a folyamba lőtt magyarokról mikor lesz Mazsihisz- és kormányközlemény?”](#) *Kuruc.info*, March 21, 2019.

195 This point was made by historian Krisztián Ungváry in the documentary movie of *444.hu*, “Monument of Murderers.” He is one of the most important experts on WWII and the Hungarian role in it.

196 The report of *Index.hu* about the protest was used in the *444.hu* documentary movie “Monument of Murderers.”

named there as victims. The real outcry came, however, when the writer and journalist, László Rab published an article in 2019 that revealed that the grandfather of the mayor of the district who was also named there as a victim, was one of the leaders of a particularly cruel massacre that happened in the district's Jewish hospital during WWII.

The mayor, Zoltán Pokorni, who belongs to the governing party, gave a speech at the commemoration of the victims of the massacre at the building where it took place in January 2020. Although the whole speech is no longer available,¹⁹⁷ *444.hu* quoted the strongest parts of it,¹⁹⁸ which we can discern based on the article that was published on the website of the Jewish Federation.¹⁹⁹ Pokorni became emotional during the speech as he acknowledged that his grandfather had a meaningful, active role in this massacre. He noted: "The German occupation is not an excuse, but an explanation, at best. The victims were Hungarians, and the majority of killers were also Hungarians." He thus "stepped out" of the common right-wing narrative that "average" Hungarians were not responsible. He went a step further when he also mentioned his own duty "not only as the 'grandson of a murderer Arrow Cross Party member' ('nyilas') but as the mayor of the district": "When I became the mayor of this district, I was given the opportunity to, if not amend because this cannot be amended, but make a few things right. Not only as the grandson of a murderer, but as the leader of the district, whose job is to make things right symbolically." In the last part of the speech, he said that he had started consulting with historians about the possible options of what should be done with the statue.

Politicians from the oppositional parties also reacted to the speech. The Budapest mayor Gergely Karácsony posted the article of the Jewish Federation about the confession of the mayor with the following comment: "The future requires confessing about the past, and honestly confronting it. Not only the victims, but also the perpetrators of the twentieth century were our compatriots. I was shaken by the way Mr. Pokorni confronted the past and respect him for it."²⁰⁰ Ferenc Gyurcsány, president of the biggest oppositional party also called Pokorni's speech "touching" in a Facebook post. In the same post he also admitted his own father's "sympathy" towards the Nazi ideology: "Not very well, but he did speak German. In Pápa [the city Ferenc Gyurcsány is from] they called the

197 In the related article on the website of the Jewish Federation the video of the speech was inserted but it is not available anymore: "[Pokorni Zoltán elszírta magát a városmajori tömeggyilkosságok helyszínén](#)," *Mazsihisz.hu*, January 13, 2020. A very short part was broadcast in the newscast of the TV channel RTL Klub: "[Pokorni Zoltán leveteti nagyapja nevét az emlékműről 20-01-15](#)," *RTL Klub*.

198 László Szily, "[Pokorni Zoltán elszírta magát, miközben nyilas nagyapja rémtetteinek helyszínén mondott beszédet](#)," *444.hu*, January 14, 2020.

199 "[Pokorni Zoltán elszírta magát a városmajori tömeggyilkosságok helyszínén](#)," *Mazsihisz.hu*, January 13, 2020.

200 [Karácsony Gergely – Facebook](#), January 14, 2020.

Austrian television, Graz-ian television.²⁰¹ He watched that. He loved to watch documentaries about the Nazis. And he also saluted.”²⁰²

The story of the statue continued throughout the year with discussions of different scenarios about what should be done with it. *444.hu* featured a detailed report about the meeting of the Cultural Committee of the 12th district held in June 2020 about the fate of the statue.²⁰³ According to the article, during the discussion the oppositional politicians suggested removing it while the governing coalition stated that it should remain in place. One member of the latter, local Fidesz politician Róbert Marosvári referred to the then ongoing Black Lives Matter movement’s protest and the debate over the removal of some statues: “It is not befitting the European traditions to knock down and destroy statues. History must be respected. If there is a memorial, it must be kept. There, where it stands. The renaming of the statue will cut off the gordian knot. What is the difference between the Taliban or Al-Qaeda knocking down statues and the removal of the Turul? Nothing. It is the same thing.”²⁰⁴

The decision was made to rename the monument in memory of the victims of the First World War after removing the names of the murderers that were inscribed there. Although the names had been removed, the mayor reconsidered his opinion and in February 2021 he suggested not removing the statue but instead completing it with detailed information on the Turul and what it symbolizes. In the meantime, a decision was made to install another monument in the district in memory of the victims of the Second World War.

The far-right party, Our Homeland politician, Előd Novák who was active from the beginning in the protests to protect the Turul statue, held a speech in which he declared the formation of a “Turul protector action group.” Novák also announced the suggestion of his party to rename the park where the statue stands as Turul Square. The video of the speech was shared in the article about this news on *Kuruc.info*.²⁰⁵ The politician “remarked” that Pokorni had not attended the ceremony when the statue was installed, but a few days earlier had participated at the installation of a “N+1st Holomonument” [pejorative way to refer to the Holocaust – AF]. *Kuruc.info* also published several other articles on the statue, one of which was an op-ed by a writer from Transylvania, Attila György, with the title, “If someone touches the Turul I am going to break his hand at least.”²⁰⁶ The article

201 Graz is the second largest city in Austria, and it had one of the oldest Jewish settlements in Austria. On April 2, 1945 the Gestapo and the Waffen-SS committed a massacre against resistance fighters, Hungarian-Jewish forced labourers and prisoners of war at the SS barracks, while the Allied were bombing the city. See “[Austria Virtual Jewish History Tour](#),” *Graz*.

202 [Gyurcsány Ferenc – Facebook](#), January 16, 2020.

203 Dániel Ács, “[A turul az elkövetők szimbóluma, és nem az áldozatoké](#),” *444.hu*, June 24, 2020.

204 *Ibid.*

205 “[Szoborvédő akciócsoporthoz szervez a Mi Hazánk](#),” *Kuruc.info*, June 30, 2020.

206 “[Attila György: aki a turulhoz hozzányúl, minimum letöröm a kezét](#),” *Kuruc.info*, June 25, 2020.

introduces the Turul as the symbol of the nation. Furthermore, it makes a direct connection between the debates in the US about the removal of certain statues and the removal of the Turul:

This world is already ready for decay. Have they ever thought it through, if these idiotic social justice warriors think at all, that they will die of hunger if they destroy the producer, the host body that keeps them alive, if there is nobody left to steal from, nobody to rob? Of course not. They will knock down the statues of Jefferson, Lincoln, Churchill and Columbus, and there will be statues of Michael Jackson and of some transgender people. [...] Not to give ideas but there are a few more statues in this country: Zrínyi, Wesselényi, Török Bálint. Oh, and Árpád and Attila were Nazis for sure.²⁰⁷ And then we arrive at the current times, when they want to knock down a statue of the Turul in the 12th district of Budapest, in Hungary [...] Hungarian lives also matter.

Here the same dynamic can be seen between the governing parties' rhetoric and the far-right. While the governing parties' rhetoric referred to the Black Lives Matter movement and the statue-removing initiatives discussed in the Cultural Committee, the far right explicitly said that the same tendencies are emerging in Hungary.

Every examined media outlet featured some sort of content on the "Turul case." *Index.hu* posted news reports focusing on the statue²⁰⁸ and published the op-ed of the chief rabbi of the Jewish Federation, Zoltán Radnóti. The rabbi discussed the confession of the mayor in a positive light by saying that a chance should be given to the path Pokorni chose with his speech, in order to "reach the hope of a future solidarity and a responsible Hungarian nation."²⁰⁹ The same tone appeared in the op-ed of the researcher Róbert Braun, who also saw the opportunity in the mayor's speech to start a real discussion about this sensitive part of Hungarian history.²¹⁰

Apart from the article of *444.hu* on Pokorni's speech, which quoted the Jewish Federation article, they also published articles at each phase of the story. As already mentioned, *444.hu* featured a report about the meeting of the district Cultural Committee in 2020. In 2021, the news site created a documentary about the whole story of the Turul statue, including the history of the cruel mass murder that took place close to the statue. Experts on this historical event and politicians who have been active since the statue was installed were interviewed. Mayor Pokorni refused to give an interview for the documentary but afterwards commented on it for the Hungarian News Agency by saying that it made "the story into an artificial political matter which 'broke' on his head." He stated that even though "the movie represents a false narrative, it highlights the importance of not hiding

207 These were important Hungarian historical figures, but not antisemites, according to our knowledge.

208 Ádám Kolozsi, "[A turulszobor mai formájában kegyeletsértő, az önkormányzat új funkciót ad neki](#)," *Index.hu*, June 20, 2020.

209 Zoltán Radnóti, "[Egy igazi történet: Pokorni Zoltán nemzete](#)," *Index.hu*, January 22, 2020.

210 Róbert Braun, "[Sorsközösség/sorstalanság](#)," *Index.hu*, January 20, 2020.

but showing the history.”²¹¹ This interview was shared by three of the examined media outlets with different highlights. The pro-government *Magyar Nemzet* shared more parts in which Pokorni explains why the movie is problematic, explaining each statement “one by one.”²¹² *Index.hu*²¹³ and *444.hu*²¹⁴ focused less on the mayor’s arguments but instead reported on the whole story and its most current developments. Moreover, *Magyar Nemzet* also published reports on the Turul case throughout the three years and the portal was the first to publish information about the district Cultural Committee’s proposal in June 2020 to rename the monument²¹⁵ that was later shared by the other media outlets.

The story of the Turul statue in the 12th district shows how the question of collaboration and even the perpetrators’ legacy is handled in a case of a “local” story of the Holocaust (Pető 2019). It coincided with the international Black Lives Matter movement and the related debates on the removal of some “problematic” monuments, comparisons have inevitably been made between the two cases. The statue symbolizes how controversial elements of the past are suppressed in the Hungarian political discourse and the possible steps towards acknowledgement of responsibility and the process of reconciliation. Since the Jewish community accepted the public apologies in this case, it can be understood at least in part as an example of a “local form” of “identity-related emphasis of intergroup reconciliation” (Nadler 2012).

The Breakout and the Siege of Budapest

Another historical event that was widely discussed in the examined period is the so-called “Breakout” and the related commemorations. The Breakout was the last desperate action of the German Defence Forces against the Soviet Army in Budapest on February 11, 1945. A few thousand people (German and Hungarian soldiers, SS soldiers and members of the Arrow Cross Party) attempted to break out from Buda Castle. The majority of them died during the attempt and only a few hundred survived. Since 1997, far-right circles have celebrated the anniversary of this event, calling it the “Day of Honour.” It has become known worldwide as a far-right occasion that many international right-wing groups also attend. In addition, there is a hiking tour every year that promotes the same narrative about the “heroism” of the sieged soldiers. It advertises itself as a separate initiative, yet there is a significant overlap in the participants of the two events. The organizers of the tour also have direct financial links to the current government. As experts on the topic have noted, there are at least two major concerns with the narrative that describes the Breakout as a heroic act. First, as there was no chance of winning this battle, the decision to break out was not a strategically wise or heroic act but rather a mass suicide without reason. The other problem with this narrative is

211 István Bereznay, “Pokorni: 'Aktuálpolitikai furkósbotot' csináltak a Turul-szobor ügyéből,” *Index.hu*, February 1, 2021.

212 Orsolya Nagy, “Pokorni Zoltán: Aktuálpolitikai furkósbot a 444.hufilmje,” *Index.hu*, February 2, 2021.

213 *Index.hu*, “A turulszobor mai formájában kegyeletsértő, az önkormányzat új funkciót ad neki.”

214 “Pokorni Zoltán újabb fordulata: nem lesz I. világháborús emlékmű a turulszobor,” *444.hu*, February 1, 2021.

215 Orsolya Nagy, “Átminősítenék a turulszobrot,” *Index.hu*, June 20, 2020.

that those who broke out included plenty of war criminals, such as concentration camp guards and senior leaders who participated in the mass murder of Jews of both German and Hungarian descent. Describing them all as heroes diminishes the crime they committed.

From the oppositional parties MP Bence Tordai asked the Prime Minister an open question in Parliament in 2019: why were they “hosting the neo-Nazis?”²¹⁶ He referred to an investigative article in *Mérce.hu*, in which they discovered that the owner of the boat where the Day of Honour far-right event took place has a direct connection to the governing Fidesz party: “Dear Party Leader! During Fidesz’s move to the far-right, while looking for connections with international far-right parties, is it acceptable for the members of Fidesz’s company network to host neo-Nazi events?”

Instead of the prime minister he received an answer from the Secretary of State in the Prime Minister’s Office, Csaba Dömötör, who said that it is not in the “competence of the government.” In the second part of his speech, Dömötör “suggested” to the politician to focus on his own coalition partner Jobbik, who “would have listed the MPs of Jewish origin” and whose politicians have called the Holocaust “Holohoax” (“kamukauszt”).²¹⁷ This argument is a very typical response by the government when opposition politicians ask about or even accuse them of their connections with far-right organizations or ideologies. The far-right Our Homeland party obviously supports the Day of Honour and opposed the police’s decision when it moved to ban the event. The vice-president of the party, Előd Novák suggested dismissing the chief policeman who gave this order and even proposed that the Assembly create a Day of Honour commemoration day on February 11.²¹⁸ The other action related to the vice-president when he “sued himself” for participating in the Breakout tour despite the pandemic restrictions.²¹⁹

Regarding the anniversary of the Breakout and the siege of Budapest in general, in 2020 there was an unprecedented political move that somehow built a bridge between three local leaders from apparently opposite sides. One of them was the mayor of the 12th district, Zoltán Pokorni, a member of the governing Fidesz party. The other two were from the opposition, one from the Socialist Party (2nd district), Gergely Órsi, and the other one from a small left-wing party called Párbeszéd (1st district), Márta V. Naszályi. The three mayors of those districts, which are in the area of the Breakout as well as where the far-right commemorations usually take place, held a commemoration together. In addition, the three local municipalities created a common open-air exhibition about the siege of Budapest with the help of the well-known historian, Krisztián Ungváry. The aim of the exhibition was to show the siege of Budapest as a common tragedy for different groups: for the civilian population, both Jewish and non-Jewish as well as for the innocent soldiers who were part of the Breakout. As Mayor Márta V. Naszályi said in her speech, everyone has his or her own family stories and these

216 Bence Tordai, “[Parliamentary submission no. K05165](#),”.

217 Ibid.

218 “[A Becsület napi megemlékezéseket betiltó rendőrfőkapitány leváltását követeli a Mi Hazánk](#),” *Mérce.hu*, February 3, 2020.

219 “[Videóösszeállítás az idei kitöréstúra-bűnözésről – Novák feljelenti magát](#),” *Kuruc.info*, February 16, 2021.

sometimes contradict each other. That is why a new memory politics is needed that focuses on the personal stories, that is what “could lead to healing.”²²⁰

The Socialist Mayor Gergely Órsi spoke about the importance of taking back the anniversary from the extremists and out of the political frame. He emphasized that the participants of the Breakout and the siege were not heroes but victims.²²¹ The 12th district Mayor Pokorni said that the “good and bad are not between us but inside us” and mentioned that he had initiated the Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Day. All of them emphasized the importance of being respectful to each other despite the different family stories and narratives about this period. Gergely Karácsony, the mayor of Budapest, also gave a speech at the exhibition opening. He conveyed a message of mutual understanding, stating that instead of debating with each other ‘we’ should acknowledge the different stories of suffering.²²² He also emphasized the importance of the exhibition for which mayors from the different sides worked together. He noted the promising development that the Fidesz Mayor Pokorni, who joined the exhibition, also “faced” his own family story.

In 2021, the only minor political action related to the Breakout was taken by the 2nd district mayor Gergely Órsi and the oppositional MP Bence Tordai. The two politicians went to the “candle-lighting” ceremony of the far-right movement Légio Hungária on the anniversary of the Breakout and tried to give them some leaflets to protest against their activity. The action was broadcasted by *Mérce.hu* together with an article entitled “Gergely Órsi and Bence Tordai do not allow the far-right to own the right to remember.”²²³

Generally speaking, the left and liberal media outlets feature long articles about the Day of Honour. They share recent news regarding the event and report at the event itself. In 2019, a journalist from *index.hu* even participated in the Breakout tour and shared his experiences in an article with the public.²²⁴ In one of the photos in the article there were two people holding the flag of the Third Reich. The photo was shared later on many platforms and was included in the Jewish Federation’s report about antisemitic incidents (Félix 2021). In 2020, *Mérce.hu* also published a long article about the Breakout tour and its connection to the government.²²⁵ And while *Magyar Nemzet* focuses more

220 *Magyar Nemzet*, “[Közös kiállítással emlékezik Budapest ostromára három budai kerület](#),” February 7, 2020.

221 Pósfai Orsi, “[Ennek az ostromnak nem voltak győztesei és nem voltak hősei](#)” – a budai önkormányzatok közös megemlékezést tartott,” *Mérce.hu*, February 8, 2020.

222 Ibid.

223 Vanessza Juhász, “[Tordai Bence és Órsi Gergely nem engedi át az emlékezés jogát a szélsőjobboldalnak](#),” *Mérce.hu*, February 11, 2021.

224 Gábor Tenczer, “[Német neonácikkal meneteltem a Kitörés túrán](#),” *Mérce.hu*, February 11, 2019.

225 “[A Kitörés Emléktúrával masírozik be a mindennapjainkba a náciizmus](#),” *Mérce.hu*, February 6, 2020.

on the “heroic” narrative of the historical event,²²⁶ *kuruc.info* pays more attention to the Day of Honour²²⁷ and the Breakout tour every year.²²⁸

The common initiative of the three districts in 2020 was received well in almost all examined media outlets. Both *Mérce.hu*²²⁹ and *Magyar Nemzet*²³⁰ published a relatively long article about the exhibition with quotes from the three mayors but highlighted different aspects. While *Mérce.hu* focused on the message that the Breakout was not a heroic act, *Magyar Nemzet* did not mention this aspect. *Mérce.hu* also shared the whole video of the opening ceremony at the bottom of the article. Another difference between the two reports is that *Magyar Nemzet* did not mention that Budapest mayor Gergely Karácsony also attended the opening.

The 2021 Day of Honour was adapted due to the Covid pandemic, and the Breakout tour was officially cancelled (though some went ahead with it anyway). However, it remained very much present in the news. One of the main themes was the op-ed style article of the main organizer of the Breakout tour, Zoltán Moys, in *Magyar Nemzet* with the title “Glory to the heroes!”²³¹ The article repeats the narrative of the heroic Breakout participants. This caused a big outcry, and information about the article was shared by the other media outlets too.²³² A few days later, however, the well-known left-wing historian László Karsai published an article in *Magyar Nemzet* in which he countered the arguments of Moys and stated that the participants were not heroes.²³³

The other major topic was a virtual tour created by the same historian, Krisztián Ungváry, who curated the exhibition in the 12th district the previous year. The virtual tour was placed on a website where a lot of information related to the Breakout was posted. The whole project aimed to show this historical period in an objective way. Both *index.hu*²³⁴ and *444.hu*²³⁵ focused on the website in their articles. Meanwhile, *Mérce.hu* and *Magyar Nemzet* had nothing to say about the project, unlike *kuruc.info*, which had several articles about the cancelled Day of Honor and also introduced the historian’s project in a sarcastic way.²³⁶

226 Moys Zoltán, “[Dicsőség a hősöknek!](#)” *Index.hu*, February 11, 2021.

227 “[Festung Budapest](#),” *Kuruc.info*, February 11, 2021.

228 “[Toroczkai: legyen hivatalos állami ünnep a Becsület napja!](#)” *Kuruc.info*, February 11, 2021.

229 *Mérce.hu*, “‘Ennek az ostromnak nem voltak győztesei és nem voltak hősei.’”

230 “[Közös kiállítással emlékezik Budapest ostromára három budai kerület](#),” *Magyar Nemzet*, February 7, 2020.

231 Zoltán, “Dicsőség a hősöknek!”

232 Zsolt Sarkadi, “[A Magyar Nemzetben követel dicsőséget a kitörés résztvevőinek a Kitörés emléktúra szervezője](#),” *444.hu*, February 11, 2021.

233 László Karsai, “[Hősök vagy áldozatok?](#)” *Magyar Nemzet*, February 16, 2021.

234 “[Virtuális emléktúrát szervezett a budavári kitörés emlékére Ungváry Krisztián](#),” *Index.hu*, February 14, 2021.

235 Sándor Czinkóczi, “[Egy szélsőjobbos portál feljelentése miatt letiltotta a Facebook Ungváry Krisztián ismeretterjesztő oldalát](#),” *444.hu*, February 15, 2021.

236 “[Semmit és senkit sem kímél már az őrült cenzúragépezet: Ungváry kitörésetérítő oldalát is lelőtte a Facebook](#),” *Kuruc.info*, February 15, 2021.

As in the case of the Turul statue, discussions around the Breakout or rather the whole topic of the siege of Budapest, were means to a temporary “ceasefire” in the memory war: both opposition politicians as well as journalists of various political affiliations approached it as a common tragedy. However, a spectrum of narratives – including the representation of the participant soldiers as heroes – were expressed, so we cannot generalize about a particular tendency within the ceasefire.

The House of Fates project

In June 2019, there was some confusion regarding the House of Fates Holocaust museum project. On the one hand, State Secretary Gulyás stated on June 4 that the government was counting on the cooperation of the Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (EMIH) and made it clear that Mária Schmidt, the controversial director of the House of Terror museum, was still part of the project. The only obstacle that the State Secretary saw at that time was the lack of “international agreement.” He also stressed that “naturally” the government was open to hearing the opinions of “all other” national and international Jewish organizations about the project. In this vein, he mentioned that they already introduced the concept to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance at its Plenary Assembly.²³⁷ However, a day after this public statement, chief rabbi of EMIH, Slomo Köves gave an interview to the *Jerusalem Post* in which he stated that Mária Schmidt was no longer part of the project, which was to be led by the previous director of Yad Vashem.²³⁸ In November, 2019 Köves said in an interview that it would open in 18 months,²³⁹ but according to his most recent statement, it will open in 2022.²⁴⁰ It seems that in the case of the House of Fates, the rabbi was given the “right” to speak about project developments and he is being portrayed as the real face of the project.

As seen in other topics related to the Holocaust, when addressing the House of Fates project, leftist and liberal party politicians also try to question the government about the problematic part of the narrative and challenge their controversial acts. For instance, two politicians of the opposition Democratic Coalition party submitted a written question in Parliament about the House of Fates project, asking whether it will deny historical facts or not:

Dr. Robert Rozett, the director of the Library of Yad Vashem and the expert on the Hungarian Holocaust said that the already false concept remained in force without any modifications and the applied narrative hides the wider historical context of Hungarian Jewry and the Hungarian government before the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party came to power. Most of the Hungarian Jewish victims were among those who were deported between May and July 1944. The concept he presents does not acknowledge the essential role of the Hungarian administration and individuals in the period between the German occupation in March 1944

237 “Gulyás Gergely: A kormány mindkét közreműködőre számít a Sorsok Háza projektben,” *Magyar Nemzet*, June 5, 2019.

238 Ádám Kolozsi, “Schmidt Máriát kitették a Sorsok Háza projektből,” *Index.hu*, June 4, 2019.

239 Dániel Kacsoh, “Közös értékőrzés és útkeresés,” *Magyar Hírlap*, November 23, 2019.

240 “2022-ben nyithat ki a Sorsok Háza,” *444.hu*, January 15, 2021.

and the takeover of the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party in October. In this light, we ask the minister: 1. Why does the government violate its previous promise that the House of Fates exhibition would only be opened with the agreement of the legitimate organizations of Hungarian Jewry? 2. Why did the government not think it was necessary to at least negotiate with the largest organization of Hungarian Jewry, MAZSIHISZ, before changing its previous decision? 3. What harm will this newest attempt to present a false picture about Hungarian history cause to the interests of Hungary and to the way the country is seen internationally?²⁴¹

The last time one of the two MPs, Gergely Arató, asked the same question was in February 2021.²⁴² In the question with which he addressed State Secretary Gulyás, he mentioned that the Jewish Federation was excluded from the project in 2018 and also that the president of the Jewish Federation brought ideas about how to solve the problems around the project to the meeting with Gulyás in 2020 but he had not received any response since then. Arató also challenged the Secretary that every year it promises to open the following year and asked these questions:

How much does it cost to guard and upkeep the buildings of the House of Fates this year? Have you seen the script of the planned exhibition? In your opinion, when can the exhibition open? Who is responsible for the additional delay? Do you still think that it is a good idea that EMIH took over the arrangement of the project? Do you still refuse to include the Jewish Federation in the arrangement of the project?²⁴³

The State Secretary's answer is not available in the Parliamentary database.

A similar tendency could be identified in the columns of *Magyar Nemzet*, where the latest article relating to the House of Fates project was published in June 2019.²⁴⁴ The left and liberal media outlets published the same news during the three examined years, sharing updates about the project.²⁴⁵ At *Mérce.hu* a more detailed analysis was published in 2019, written by the same historian who initiated the previously mentioned debate series.²⁴⁶ He reviewed all the criticisms that were raised in regards to the project, including the content-related ones and the critique that the government "outsourced" the project to the Hungarian Chabad community. The far-right *kuruc.info* also highlighted the relationship between EMIH and the government, but added a strong ironic layer to the piece by emphasizing how much money the project was costing the Hungarian tax payer.²⁴⁷

241 Gergely Arató and Lajos Oláh, "[Parliamentary submission no. K1710](#)".

242 Gergely Arató, "[Parliamentary submission no. K14860](#)".

243 Ibid.

244 *Magyar Nemzet*, "Gulyás Gergely."

245 "[2022-ben nyithat ki a Sorsok Háza](#)," *444.hu*, January 15, 2021.

246 Ferenc Laczó, "[Autentikus és elfogadható Az elhomályosítás szándéka a Sorsok Háza napvilágra került tervében](#)," *Mérce.hu*, September 9, 2019.

247 "[Ezt is kijárta Slomó a nagynemzeti kormánynál: minden diák köteles lesz ellátogatni a legújabb holomúzeumba](#)," *Kuruc.info*, February 22, 2020.

The House of Fates is a heavily debated topic that evokes the main arguments of the government and the left-liberal opposition regarding the memory of the Holocaust: the right-wing government initiated something that is the subject of international criticism but does it with the participation of the Hungarian Chabad community, thereby heading off any criticism. The left-wing opposition is left with little option but to merely react to the concept, not daring to criticize the project directly to avoid being labelled as antisemitic.

The National Curriculum

During the examined period one important discursive event was the debate around the National Core Curriculum. The first outcry was on the confirmation, in 2019, that the harshly antisemitic, far-right literary historian Mihály Takaró would be entrusted with the revision of the curriculum. The other focal topic was the content changes made by the revision. It was criticized both for over-focusing on lexical knowledge and taking out those parts that develop competences, and for its nationalist tone. Jewish organizations, student and teacher organizations and intellectuals protested against the revisions.²⁴⁸ In the name of improving “national identity,” the latest national curriculum introduced in 2019 includes new elements, including some authors who played important roles between the two World Wars or even during the Second World War, becoming part of the compulsory curriculum.

The government has special argumentation techniques when defending this particular segment of the national curriculum. On the one hand, they emphasize that these authors are important for their writings and not because of their role in history or their antisemitic views. One example of this argument is a speech by Zoltán Maruzsa, State Secretary of Public Education:

They [leftist parties and organizations] oppose everything that strengthens national identity, because they don't want to preserve the nations' Europe, but want to create a Europe that is full of immigrants and has lost its identity, with weak nation-states and with “gender schools,” in which pupils do not get neither national nor sexual identity [...] we don't want this [...] Albert Wass was part of the NAT already in 2012, so it is not new in the curriculum. József Nyírő – together with Áron Tamási – are the classics of Sekler²⁴⁹ literature.²⁵⁰

These kinds of “us” versus “them” referential or nomination strategies (Wodak 2001) are repeated many times by government officials. As far as the opposition party politicians are concerned, they formulated their critiques of the curriculum revision from the very beginning. In a speech by the opposition MP Bence Tordai, he raised his concerns about the fact that the government wants to give this project to a “Nazi-friendly” person whose main mission is to “exclude the writers of Jewish

248 Zsófia Blaskó [“Elavult szemlélet, alulreprezentált női írók: az irodalmi élet is kritikával illette az új Nemzeti Alaptantervet,”](#) *Mérce.hu*, February 4, 2020.

249 Hungarian minority in Transylvania, Romania.

250 Maruzsa Zoltán, [“Köznevelésért Felelős Államtitkárság,”](#) February 6, 2020.

origin from Hungarian culture.” At the end of his speech he asked the government explicitly whether the “infamous antisemitic, Nazi-friendly” Takaró is still part of the project.²⁵¹

The answer by State Secretary Bence Rétvári was the same as with other topics: the left-wing opposition had formed a coalition with the far right. He gave examples where left-wing politicians did not condemn acts by their partner Jobbik and/or refused to comment on it. The State Secretary argued that the left-wing politician had accused a person (Takaró) of being a Nazi but had no evidence to prove that accusation.²⁵²

Focusing on the topic of the national curriculum, many articles in *Magyar Nemzet* explain in more detail the government’s narrative about why these writers were not antisemites or why it is not problematic to include them. One argument in this narrative is that their antisemitism was not at the centre in their artistic work: “The majority of Albert Wass’ life work deals with questions of the fate of those Hungarians who got stuck on the other side of the border. Those are questions, which the Hungarian liberal left wing has refused to even listen to, or even give answers to for one hundred years.”²⁵³

Another frequently used argument is that if we label these authors as antisemitic, we must also label other public figures as such, in cases where this accusation does not apply:

Should Lőrinc Szabó be thrown out of the pantheon just because he wrote an eager article about the rhetoric of Adolf Hitler? Should we not read Martin Heidegger, Konrad Lorenz, Karl May, not listen to Richard Wagner, not look at Aba-Novák’s pictures or at Salvador Dalí’s paintings who was a fan of Franco? With the same impulse, should we throw out every Russian and Hungarian poet and writer who even once glorified Joseph Stalin?²⁵⁴

In the right-wing newspapers, similar to the statement by Maruzsa, the whole opposition is depicted as against the national identity. Those who criticize the new curricula are often labelled as unpatriotic or even “foreign-hearted” in the articles of *Magyar Nemzet*. One of the recurring targets of these articles was László Miklósi, the President of the Association of Hungarian History Teachers as the following quote also illustrates:

But Mr. Miklósi, please, think about those who gave their lives for this country, think of the sacrifices our heroes have made and do not be unpatriotic. In the era of wild globalization, do not challenge identity-building. As a history teacher this is an unforgivable sin. We know that a cowardly nation does not have one, but pardon me, do you have a home?²⁵⁵

251 Bence Tordai, “[‘Nácibarátok a Nemzeti Alaptanterv körül?’ – interpelláció a fiatal generációk agymosásáról](#),” Facebook video, July 8, 2019.

252 Bence Tordai, “[‘Nácibarátok a Nemzeti Alaptanterv körül?’ – interpelláció a fiatal generációk agymosásáról](#).”

253 János Bán, “[Gyalázkodások a levegőben](#),” *Magyar Nemzet*, March 9, 2020.

254 *Magyar Nemzet*, “[Gyalázkodások a levegőben](#).”

255 Tamás Pataki, “[Kérem, ne legyen hazafiatlan, Miklósi úr!](#)” *Magyar Nemzet*, June 25, 2020.

Labels like “unpatriotic” or “foreign-hearted” are typical antisemitic tropes and they were also used frequently in the 1990s to underline antisemitic arguments by the then far-right antisemitic parties. The most explicit historical antisemitic reference used in the columns of *Magyar Nemzet* was the call for “the change of the guard” (őrségváltás) that was declared during the Horthy regime under the Gömbös government, to replace Jews in administrative and government positions with Christians:²⁵⁶

Thank you and respect to Árpád Szakács, who brought the opinion and will of the nationalist-conservative societal majority – who István Csurka once called the bitter heartland – into the political agenda. Namely, that there must be a changing of the guard in the conscience formation and that the public money taps must be turned off for the anti-Hungarian intellectual workshops and fields of force.²⁵⁷

The left and liberal outlets followed updates around the new curriculum closely, with quite a critical tone. All of them published articles about the different aspects and stages of the scandal around the curriculum,²⁵⁸ including the problematic leader of the revision (labelling him “far right”²⁵⁹) and also highlighted the protests against the revised curriculum.²⁶⁰ The far right *kuruc.info* portal supported the changes and ridiculed those teachers who protested against the new curriculum. The portal used quotation marks when it called them “rebels” and when calling Albert Wass, one of the antisemitic writers and condemned perpetrator of WWII who was included in the curriculum, a “fascist.”²⁶¹

The normalization of war criminals by ignoring their historical role in the Holocaust and by putting them in the national educational curriculum, contributes to the deepening of the parallel natures of the “local” and “global” remembrance of the Holocaust.

2.3.4. Conclusion

We distinguished two general themes representing the current public discourse regarding the Holocaust in Hungary. The first key theme was “protection.” In the pro-government sources and media, this means the protection of European culture, which is often discussed together with the protection of the Jewish-Christian or just Christian culture, the Jews in Hungary, Hungarian culture, “our” Jews and of the decent Hungarians (against Roma, prisoners, gay lobby, gender lobby, Soros network etc.), “our” families and last but not least the nation state and also specifically Israel. By incorporating (some of) the Jewish people into the category of “us” (including Israel) these pro-

256 “Gömbös és Darányi 1932-1938,” *Holokauszt Magyarországon*.

257 Balázs Ágoston, “Magyar optikájú szellemi életet!” *Magyar optikájú szellemi életet!*” *Magyar Nemzet*, June 25, 2020.

258 Sándor Joób, “Nézzük meg, mi szerepel a NAT-ban, és mi a baj vele!” *Index.hu*, February 13, 2020.

259 András Király, “Az iskola nem a gyermekek igényeit kielégítő intézmény,” *444.hu*, March 3, 2020.

260 Zsófia Varga, “PDSZ: Az új Nemzeti alaptantervvel ismét egy felháborító gyakorlatnak lehetünk tanúi,” *Mérce.hu*, January 9, 2020.

261 “Lázonganak a “demokratikus” tanárok: nem akarják Imre Kertész helyett a “fasiszta” Wass Albertet tanítani,” *Kuruc.info*, February 5, 2020.

government circles try to prevent the accusation of any kind of antisemitism or Holocaust distortion. In the case of the left-liberal opposition and related media outlets, it means more the protection of the Jewish community against antisemitism coming from the right-wing parties, especially in the form of Holocaust distortion or relativization.

The second theme is remembrance. Here the main narrative of the right-wing government is that we need to remember the Holocaust in order to protect the Jewish community and it is therefore connected to the first key theme. The left-liberal opposition focuses more on the prevention of Holocaust distortion when it comes to the topic of remembrance.

All the political actors use the topic of antisemitism (often related to the Holocaust) to position themselves. At the domestic level, the government positions itself in the middle by saying that the left-wing parties made a coalition with the (ex-) far-right and antisemite Jobbik; and at the international level as the force that fights against all types of antisemitism – both from the left and the right and also that which comes from extremist Islam. The left-wing parties do the same positioning but define the government as far-right, referring to the Soros campaign and to its memory politics. We even notice a type of “competition” of who can say louder and more frequently that the other is the real antisemite. There is a special dynamic in this competition: when the left-wing opposition tries to critique the memory politics of the government, in almost every case the answer from the government is that the left made a coalition with the then far-right Jobbik, so they have no right to criticise. In one case the same but opposing argument was made by the MEP of Momentum, Katalin Cseh when government politicians criticized her for taking sides “against” Israel in a vote in the European Parliament. She rejected the accusation by saying that the real antisemite is the government, which distorts the Holocaust with its problematic memory politics.

As we have seen, the two political “camps” are pretty much divided in regard to these questions: they operate with their own antisemitism definition and understanding of Holocaust memory. There were however two examples of discursive events – the Turul statue and the Breakout – when the different sides drew closer and when an alternative narrative began to emerge. How can we explain this? First and foremost, the attitudes of the relevant municipalities had a huge impact on the “success” of these two alternative narratives. Furthermore, both “stories” are connected, embedded in the local history and society. We see that it is possible for a local story to overcome country-level political tensions and locally shape the public discourse more effectively. However, these moments were temporary and they did not have a major impact on the discourse in general.

There were some similarities between the rhetoric and acts of the far-right Our Homeland and the governing parties, where the related discursive events are concerned. Commonalities include a critical stance towards the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the glorification of the Horthy regime. The only difference is that in case of Our Homeland there is an explicit antisemitic edge added to the topic almost every time, while in the case of the governing coalition it is more hidden or indirect.

Regarding the media outlets it is important that while *Magyar Nemzet* serves as a platform for governing party politicians, the left-liberal media outlets provide no such function for the opposition. In the left-liberal news sites the Holocaust is discussed many times by experts. The only left-wing journal that has some similarities to some left-wing, anti-Israel circles in Western Europe is *Mérce.hu*.

2.4. The Shifting Holocaust Memory in Germany²⁶²

2.4.1. Introduction: The evolution of Holocaust memory in Germany

With the retreat of German troops from the occupied territories of Europe and beyond, the liberation of the death camps by the Red Army, and the eventual surrender of Nazi Germany on May 8/9, 1945, Germany entered a period of transition and uncertainty. The old political and social order of National Socialism disappeared, with new arrangements yet to take shape. The ensuing process would mold the way Germans understood their role and the era of National Socialism.

In 1945 most Germans perceived the unconditional surrender of Germany as a shameful defeat. Over subsequent decades, as it gradually rebuilt itself, German collective memory focused mainly on German victimhood, not on the suffering that Germans inflicted on others. Jeffery Olick has characterized the period from the founding of the Federal Republic in 1949 to the late 1960s, as the period of “the reliable nation,” where the Nazi past “was constructed as a bounded aberration from the true course of German history” (2016, 63). The approach put forward by German politicians was defensive. They identified the root cause of the Nazi’s rise as a “faulty” constitution and instability, and their message was that this problem was addressed by the re-founding of Germany as a stable republic committed to the rule of law and to proving itself as a reliable nation through its integration into the West and reparations to Israel (*ibid.*). The German population cultivated a “consensus of silence” (Assmann 2020, 44; Funke 2019, 206) or what Dan Diner has called the “amnesia of what had just happened” (Diner 2020, 9) concerning the crimes of the recent past, trying to build a new order, without looking back.

In the context of the emerging Cold War, the Grand Alliance that held Western liberal democracy and Soviet communism together in their fight against fascism crumbled and gave way to a new polarization between the Western Free World and a block of newly established Peoples’ Republics. In 1949, this process led to the division of Germany and the founding of two distinct German states. This political divide also gave rise to a “divided memory” (Herf 1997), which held until the fall of the Berlin wall and German reunification in 1989/90 under the hegemony of Western Germany. But while the two memory cultures diverged according to the ideological frameworks of the two Germanys, both must be understood as different answers to the same challenge: how to uphold a positive sense of national identity in the face not only of a total military defeat of the nation, but also of the atrocities of the Holocaust? The memory of the Holocaust posed a threat to the desire for an honorable national legacy, as a precondition for national identification, and Jews became unwitting “troublemakers of memory” (Bergmann 2007).

262 This chapter is written by Shmuel Lederman with the help of Maximilian Hauer, who wrote the introduction, was involved in the design of the research plan and the collection of materials and wrote the pilot analysis on which the chapter is based. Ella Imgart and Aliena Stuerzer helped with the collection of materials, translation, and analysis. Claudia Globisch helped with the choice of discursive events and media outlets, and in the early stages of the analysis. The translation from German is by Ella Imgart unless stated otherwise. I thank Maximilian Hauer and Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann for their comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

One way to deal with this challenge was through crude Holocaust denial or openly antisemitic approval of Germany's deeds. However, after 1945, those on the far right who held such views were contained by the authorities and remained marginal in the institutionalized politics that soon came to be dominated by the Christian Democrats and – to a lesser extent – by the Social Democrats.²⁶³ On the other hand, former Nazis successfully integrated into democratic parties, in particular the liberal FDP. The Christian Democrats also had some prominent and influential officials that had a Nazi past and still sympathized with antidemocratic tendencies (most famously Adenauer's chief advisor and head of the chancellery Hans Globke). In mainstream political discourse, the rejection of guilt and responsibility was expressed in myths like the notion that the German people were seduced by Hitler or were subdued by the dictatorship of a small group of crooks; the myth of the "clean Wehrmacht," according to which the German army did not participate in the murder of innocent people; or the claim that ordinary Germans during the war did not know anything about the camps in the East.

While this conception of self-victimization dominated the society of Western Germany at least until the 1970s, the GDR, founded and led largely by resisters and exiled socialist and communist cadres, presented itself as an anti-fascist state, the "other Germany" (Geyer et al. 2009). The official, public commemoration of the victims of Nazism played a very important role for the regime, yet the focus was laid on the *political* victims (especially communists) rather than on ethnic and national victims, including the Jews. The GDR also tended to emphasize political resistance and martyrdom, not victimhood. By presenting itself as an anti-fascist state, the GDR externalized the legacy of Nazism to the West, which was portrayed as continuing German imperialism in a new, democratic disguise. Furthermore, the authorities directed the empathy of the population towards the fate of the Soviet Union that suffered so much under the German occupation but finally won the war against Nazism, and this victory was interpreted as a triumph of the higher principle of socialism against the old powers of imperialism and the dawn of a new, glorious era. In this narrative of progress, there was little space for grief and a proper understanding of the irrational violence of the Holocaust (Herf 2003; Diner 2020, 32).

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the trial against members of *Einsatzgruppen* in Ulm (1958-9), the Eichmann-trial in Jerusalem (1961) and the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt (from 1963 onwards) afforded the Holocaust a continuous presence in the German post-war public discourse. The trials in Germany were particularly difficult for the public: while the Eichmann trial dealt with a high-profile criminal abroad, in the Ulm and Frankfurt trials the repressed history "returned, as it were, into one's own house" (Funke 2019, 218) and it was addressed in a German court. Furthermore, the trials

263 The taboo on public expressions of antisemitism and Holocaust denial meant that such attitudes were pushed to the domain of what Theodor Adorno famously called the "non-public opinion" (Adorno 2003, 558). Critical researchers still observe a gap between official and public discourses on the one hand and family memories on the other when it comes to the Nazi era. Family memories tend to emphasize the hardships endured by Germans during the war and to invent resistance legacies on a family level, while Jewish victims and members of other persecuted groups hardly appear in these narratives. It could be argued that this gap between different realms of memory calls into question Germany's self-stylization as a nation that has grappled with its own past (Salzborn & Kurth 2020, 28).

convicted members of the medium and lower ranks of the Nazi death machinery, which brought the whole issue even closer to ordinary German families. The “prevailing basic narrative of the early Federal Republic had [thereby] come under threat,” which caused massive defensive reactions (ibid). Despite their impact, the trials did not yet prompt a decisive correction of the national narrative.

A certain shift began in 1966, when under the leadership of the social-democratic party the Nazi past was re-interpreted as an essential part of German history, whose structural and cultural features had not yet been fully expunged from German society. The symbol of this period, which Olick (2016) dubs “the moral nation,” is Chancellor Willy Brandt kneeling spontaneously at the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial in December 1970, expressing humility and guilt in face of the victims of Nazism, self-distancing from the denials of the past and demonstrating a new sense of responsibility.²⁶⁴ The generation of the “1968ers,” namely the mass of student protestors in the late 1960s that brought about important cultural changes in Germany, played an important role in this process. In contrast to other Western European countries, in Germany the generational conflict of the 1960s and 1970s was highly charged with references to the era of WWII (Funke 2019, 222). The left-leaning political and cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s were sustained by a generation born around the 1940s that had not played an active role in the Nazi era. Activists of this generation established a mode of national self-criticism within the German public and helped to overcome an approach to national history guided by ideas of national honor. The new generation undermined the authority of the old institutional elites in West Germany, pointing out the role many of them had played under National Socialism. They demanded a critical public discourse about these continuities and an end to the consensus of silence. This appeal for an open discussion of the past paved the way to an “internalization” of the crimes of the Holocaust into the national narrative, a process that gained traction in the 1980s (Assmann 2020, 51).

Notably, the Holocaust was not at the centre of this process of coming to terms with the past. The specificity of the Holocaust, as well as the central role antisemitism played in German society were not properly acknowledged within the overly general framework of “imperialism”, “fascism” and “authoritarianism” (Wolfrum 2003, 194). Within this framework, the protest generation engaged in an identification with the resistance against Nazism, or even with the victims of the Nazi era (Jureit 2012; Schneider 2012). In that way, Germans could also interpret their own struggles in similar ways (Assmann 2020, 50). Furthermore, many applied the semantics of “fascism” to various contemporary phenomena, for example US war crimes in Vietnam that gave rise to the slogan “SS-SA-USA.” In this way, the framework of the “68ers” allowed for new dynamics of externalization, sometimes in the form of an aggressive anti-Zionism (Haury 1992).

A turning point in the German memory of the Holocaust occurred in the late 1970s with the screening of the American mini-series *Holocaust* in 1978/79 (Brandt 2003). Public reception of *Holocaust* showed a new emotional empathy for the victims within German society. This reorientation towards the Jewish victims and the voices of survivors marks a paradigm shift in comparison to the “internal”

264 At the time, however, more than 50 % of German society still thought that this gesture was an exaggeration.

generational conflict that dominated German society around 1968 (Assmann 2020, 52). In the 1980s, a grassroots movement emerged that researched and preserved traces of the Holocaust and Jewish life on a local and regional level. Discussions with survivors became an important pedagogy in Holocaust education. The “*Stolpersteine*” (stumbling stones) project, which started in 1992, is a well-known example of this approach. Many institutions of German “memory culture” (*Erinnerungskultur*), which became well-established and state-funded in the 1990s, had their roots in such grassroots initiatives in the 1980s.

The 1980s were also a decade that saw an upsurge in academic scholarship on the Holocaust and related topics like antisemitism. On a state official level, President Richard von Weizsäcker helped to establish the new paradigm of the German “culture of memory” with his speech on May 8, 1985.²⁶⁵ While Helmut Kohl, the German Chancellor from 1982 to 1998, still tried to engage in politics of normalization and wanted to leave the German past behind, President von Weizsäcker offered a new narrative and a new attitude towards the past. He did not refer to May 8 any longer as the day of national defeat and surrender, but reframed it as a “day of liberation.” While earlier generations had seen oblivion as the only way forward, Weizsäcker considered it an act of pathological suppression that would give rise to new suffering. The past had to be remembered and preserved and only on the basis of a critical reappraisal of the Nazi era could the German nation find a way to a new moral foundation and a positive identity (Czollek 2018, 20-24). Remembrance became an ethical imperative closely linked to the project of a moral reconstruction of Germany (Assmann 2020, 66).

However, this new paradigm was contested for many years. The 1980s and 1990s were decades of fierce academic and public debates about memory practices, the status of the Holocaust as a historical event and the role of National Socialism in the broader context of the twentieth century. Among these debates famous examples are the “historians’ dispute” (*Historikerstreit*) from 1986 onwards on the interaction between Bolshevism and Nazism and the singularity of the Holocaust; the “Wehrmacht exhibition” (1995), which exposed the participation of the German army in mass atrocities during WWII; Daniel Goldhagen’s book *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (1996), which argued for a unique, “eliminationist” German antisemitism that explains the Holocaust; and Martin Walser’s acceptance speech at the Frankfurt Book Fair Peace Prize in October 1998 at the Frankfurt St. Paul’s church, in which he lamented the “exploitation” of German guilt feelings about the Holocaust for present political purposes. In these debates, conservative intellectuals born in the 1920s like Hermann Lübbe, Ernst Nolte and Martin Walser tried to defend elements of the dominant narrative in West Germany of the post-war era.

In the 1990s, German reunification set many in the field of memory politics in motion again, although opposing tendencies were discernible. Nationalist voices multiplied, calling for a return to the old “self-confidence” and “normality” after the end of division and occupation. This discourse was accompanied by a massive rise in racist attacks and killings by neo-Nazi organizations. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite states brought about a renaissance

265 [Speech by Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker at the ceremony commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the End of War in Europe and of National-Socialist Tyranny on May 8, 1985 in the Bundestag, Bonn.](#)

in the theory of totalitarianism, with certain relativizing elements in the comparison between Nazi Germany and Stalinist Communism. Yet these developments ultimately did not redirect the new status that the Holocaust had gained as the negative founding event of Germany. Unlike other post-socialist countries, the socialist era is not so much remembered in the mode of national self-victimization, but rather in keeping with the guilt-centred perpetrator identity that had developed due to the legacy of National Socialism (Diner 2020, 50-58; Assmann 2020, 147-165).

At the end of the 1990s, it became clear that the new paradigm had successfully been established. The election victory of the centre-left bloc in 1998, after 16 years of a conservative-liberal government under Helmut Kohl, marked a change in the social climate. The new government included numerous representatives of the West German protest generation born in the 1940s. With the 1999 decision to build the Holocaust Memorial in symbolic proximity to the Reichstag and the Brandenburg Gate in the centre of Berlin, “it became clear that the commitment to the uniqueness of this crime and to historical responsibility belongs to the core of Germany’s state self-image” (Funke 2019, 236). If the consensus of silence permitted the integration of Western Germany into the transatlantic coalition in the Cold War, the explicit reference to the Holocaust now served as an argument for a more powerful international role of the re-unified Germany. This power is exerted in the name of universal human rights in a new global order after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Bauerkämper 2017, 36). Due to the liberalization of the centre-right under chancellor Angela Merkel (2005-2021), nationalist attitudes that used to be mainstream are now pushed to the right edge of the political spectrum, where they have found a new safe-haven in the AfD since its formation in 2013.

As we shall see in the following analysis, the challenge that the AfD poses to the dominant memory culture that developed since the early 2000s is significant and appears throughout the discursive events discussed in this chapter, yet the AfD’s stances on issues related to Holocaust memory are consistently rejected by all other parties in Germany. A different challenge to the hegemonic memory culture in Germany that emerged in recent years is the call for a much deeper reckoning with German colonial legacy and the kinds of continuities with this legacy that manifest in Germany’s treatment of immigrants and refugees, particularly from Muslim countries. This approach is pursued mainly by critics from the left. For many of these critics, the reassessment of Germany’s colonial past has to involve a re-thinking of the place and meaning of the Holocaust in German history and memory culture. This is termed by memory scholars “*Historikerstreit 2.0*” or “memory wars 2.0.”

Finally, we shall see that also quite closely linked to these debates are controversies around the meaning of antisemitism and German’s relations with Israel. A unique feature of the public discourse around the Holocaust in Germany is the intensive involvement of academics, whether because they offer interventions into these debates or because they are invited by newspapers to comment on them. The analysis that follows accordingly pays significant attention to their perspectives.

2.4.2. Sources and methodology

We chose discursive events for that shed particularly interesting light on German memory culture: Holocaust Remembrance Days 2019-2021; the shooting attack in the synagogue in Halle in October, 2019; the debate over the recognition of the so-called “a-socials” and “professional criminals” who

were persecuted by the Nazi regime in February 2019; the BDS resolution of May 2019, in which the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement against Israel was condemned by the Bundestag; the “Mbembe affair,” in which the historian and political theorist Achille Mbembe was accused of anti-Zionist antisemitism by Felix Klein, the Federal Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Antisemitism; and what came to be called *Historikerstreit* 2.0, in which intellectuals and academics debated the status of Holocaust memory in Germany and its relation to German colonialism, treatment of immigrants, racism and relations with Israel.

We examined the following newspapers between January 2019 and June 2021, to capture a broad spectrum of opinions from the far left to the far right:

- *Die Zeit*: Centrist; liberal; left-liberal, progressive, with an intellectual orientation.
- *taz*, *Die Tageszeitung (taz)*: Moderate left.
- *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ)*: Centre-left, liberal, social-liberal, social-democrat.
- *Die Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)*: Centre-right, conservative-liberal.
- *Junge Welt*: Published in Berlin; far left with a Marxist orientation.
- *Junge Freiheit*: Right-wing, nationalist-conservative.

For each individual archive the term “Holocaust” was searched for the time range covered in the study and an articles list was gathered. The archives were then searched again with the key word “Holocaust” + terms from groups categorized beforehand. We did not expect all keywords from each group to appear in every individual article. Rather, several rounds of searches were performed, with various terms from each group added each time. For example:

First browse: Holocaust+ Jüdisches Leben + Antisemitismus was searched, and the articles found added to the data sheet under Group 2.

In a re-run: Holocaust+ Jüdisches Leben+ Terror was searched and the list compared with the articles stored, additions added were now added to the sheet.

Group 1: and WWII or memory or denial or revision or narrative or [terms which connote Holocaust denial]: Holocaust / Erinnerung/ Völkermord / Juden / Jüdisch / Weltkrieg / Zweiter Weltkrieg / Gedenken/ Rechtsextremismus

Group 2: and Jewish Life [reference to reality of Jewish life / threats to]: Halle/Terror/ Jüdisches Leben / Attacke / Attentat/ Antisemitismus

Group 3: Israel [when referred to in any derogatory fashion (e.g. Israeli imperialism, Zionist Racism, etc.)]: Israel / Palästina / Zionistischer Rassismus / Faschismus / Imperialismus / Staatsterrorismus/ Besatzung / Apartheid / Ethnostaat/ BDS

Group 4: and Education or commemoration or memory or teaching or responsibility: Erziehung / Unterricht / Bildung / Verantwortung/ Gedenken / Aufarbeitung / Erinnerung/ Feuilleton/ Literatur/ Shoahliteratur / Zeitzeugen

Group 5: And Conspiracy or Media or (Alternative) Truth or Freedom of Speech: Ungeimpft/ Gelber Stern / Meinungsfreiheit / Media / Hildmann / QANON/ Corona/

Group 6: and Islam, Islamic threat, ([derogatory term+] Jews/Jewish, [antisemitic comment or discourse] : Islam / Moslem / Islamophobie / muslimischer Antisemitismus / islamistischer Antisemitismus / islamischer Antisemitismus

Group 7: and Migration/ Multidirektional / Postkolonialismus / Kolonialismus / Opferkonkurrenz / multiple Narratives / vergessen Opfergruppen

Table 2: Number of articles on Holocaust and related words in German newspapers, by venue and group

Paper	Articles	Group	Articles
taz	263	1	173
SZ	252	2	186
ZEIT	202	3	167
Junge Welt	103	4	488
FAZ	93	5	79
Junge Freiheit	83	6	32
Total	996	7	107

2.4.3. Findings and Analysis

Holocaust Remembrance Days

In 2005 the General Assembly of the United Nations introduced international Holocaust commemoration on January 27 as the “International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust.” In Germany, former German president Roman Herzog had introduced the “Day of Remembrance of the Victims of National Socialism” in 1996, to commemorate the millions of people who were disenfranchised, persecuted, and murdered under Nazi rule. January 27 is not the only date significant for Holocaust remembrance in Germany. In memory of the *Kristallnacht* in 1938, November 9 is seen as the day to commemorate antisemitic persecution in particular.²⁶⁶ Anniversaries such as the 75th anniversary of liberation receive considerable attention in the German media as well. The annual memorial service on January 27 in the Bundestag, however, is the central recurring discursive event for Holocaust remembrance in Germany. The ceremony is opened by the president of the Bundestag. After the president’s address, guest speakers take the floor: in 2019 the Israeli historian and Holocaust survivor Saul Friedländer; in 2020, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Israeli President Reuven Rivlin; in 2021 president of the Jewish Community of Munich and Upper Bavaria Charlotte Knobloch and the activist and former politician Marina Weisband, who represented the generation born after the Holocaust.

²⁶⁶ November 9 has a particular resonance for Germany national identity. The anniversaries of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the November pogroms in 1938, Hitler’s Munich putsch in 1923 and the proclamation of the republic in Germany in 1918 all fell on November 9, sometimes called German “Schicksalstag” (fate day).

The key theme throughout speeches at HMDs is responsibility. The memory of the Holocaust is expressed in terms of the affirmation of German identity and as a call for a fundamental responsibility that arises from German guilt. This responsibility has several, inter-related meanings: the responsibility to protect democracy, the responsibility to remember the Holocaust, the responsibility to stand by the State of Israel and the responsibility to protect Jewish life in Germany. The degree to which Germany succeeds in fulfilling these responsibilities is seen as a crucial indicator of its success as a democratic nation and its reconciliation efforts. In this way Holocaust remembrance in Germany consists not only of commemoration of those who perished and honouring survivors; it presents an affirmation of German national identity and its democratic character.

Protecting Democracy

A recurring theme in each of the examined HMDs, is the long time it took Germans to face their past, and at the same time the celebration of current German democracy. In his speech in 2019, Friedländer spoke of Germany as a country that has completely changed and now “has become one of the strongest bulwarks” against antisemitism, xenophobia, authoritarianism, and nationalism: “We all hope that you have the moral steadfastness to continue fighting for tolerance and inclusiveness, humanity and freedom, in short, for true democracy.”²⁶⁷ Schäuble stated in his own speech that the term “Holocaust” cannot be found in the constitution,

but the crime against humanity committed by Germans is echoed unmistakably in this constitution: in the fundamental rights that protect the individual from arbitrary state power, and in the legal foundation of a ‘defensive democracy’ – so as not to allow democratic freedoms to be abused once again for the destruction of liberal democracy.

Schäuble stressed the obligation “[t]o honour the people who lost their lives, to give them back their dignity. For our own sake.”²⁶⁸

The relation of the Holocaust to the German constitution and Germany’s democratic character is stressed by Steinmeier in 2020 as well: “[...] the first sentence of our constitution tells everyone who can read it and wants to read it what happened in Auschwitz. The liberal democratic state under the rule of law is the reversal of the *Völkisch* way of thinking. It places the human dignity of each individual at the centre.” To Steinmeier, denying this part of history would mean denying Germany’s own identity: “For the Shoah is part of German history and identity. My predecessors have always been able to refer to this democratic consensus in this place.”²⁶⁹ Steinmeier reiterated the need to protect democracy in Yad Vashem and in the Bundestag in 2020: “So whoever wants to remember,

267 [Speech by Saul Friedländer at the Holocaust memorial service in the Bundestag](#), January 31, 2019.

268 [Speech by Wolfgang Schäuble at the Holocaust memorial service in the Bundestag](#), 2019.

269 [Speech by President Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the Holocaust memorial service in the Bundestag](#), 2020.

whoever wants to honour the memory of the victims, must protect democracy and the rule of law wherever they are called into question!”²⁷⁰

To Schäuble and Steinmeier, a threat to the memory of the Holocaust is perceived as a threat to German identity and democracy. Schäuble made this point clear in his opening speech in 2020, where he stated that talking about Auschwitz and about the responsibility that resulted from the past are linked to democratic values: “It is part of our basic social consensus to accept this historical responsibility. It is constitutive for the self-image of our country. Anyone who shakes this foundation will fail.”²⁷¹ In Yad Vashem, Steinmeier declared: “This Germany will only do itself justice if it lives up to its historical responsibility: We fight antisemitism! We defy the poison of nationalism! We protect Jewish life! We stand by Israel’s side!”²⁷² In his speech at the Holocaust Memorial Service in 2021, he explained that German *Erinnerungskultur* (memory culture) concerns not only civil society but is also a task of the state. Referring to AfD’s the attempts to gain influence on commemorative institutions, he warned: “anyone who wants to change something about that is laying a hand on the foundations of this republic.”²⁷³

The stress on the need to protect democracy is accompanied by a sense of the fragility of democracy, particularly in the light of recent anti-democratic and antisemitic trends. In her speech in 2021, Knobloch stated: “We can be proud of our Federal Republic, ladies and gentlemen! But we must defend it vigorously!” She warned against forgetting the fragility of the past achievements. She also noted the rise of antisemitism in connection to left wing and Muslim extremism, but identifies the main threat as coming from the right. She directly addresses members of the AfD: “You will continue to fight for your Germany. And we will continue to fight for our Germany. I’m telling you: you lost your fight 76 years ago!”²⁷⁴ During Knobloch’s speech, the AfD members left the room.

The *SZ*, *FAZ*, *Die Zeit* and *taz* support this narrative of protecting democracy, and voice criticism of the AfD. On HMD 2019, the centrist-liberal *SZ* published a column entitled “Never again? Again! Still,” which also touched on the ceremony at the Bavarian state parliament. The *SZ* wrote: “The AfD has changed the country in an unpleasant way.” Yet the *SZ* acknowledged that “it has made visible what was already there before – racism and antisemitism.”²⁷⁵ The right-wing *JF*, in contrast, supported many of the AfD’s claims. In January 2019, the *JF* published an article vehemently attacking Charlotte Knobloch after she had condemned the revisionist tendencies within the AfD in the Bavarian state

270 Ibid.

271 [Speech by Wolfgang Schäuble at the memorial service for the victims of National Socialism at the Bundestag](#), January 29, 2020.

272 [Speech by Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the World Holocaust Forum](#) “Remembering the Holocaust: Fighting Antisemitism” at Yad Vashem, January 23, 2020.

273 [Speech by Wolfgang Schäuble at Bundestag Holocaust memorial service](#), January 27, 2021; The ceremony can be watched on the YouTube channel of the Bundestag. Bundestag: [Gedenkstunde für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus](#)

274 [Speech by Charlotte Knobloch at the Holocaust memorial service in the Bundestag](#), January 27, 2021.

275 Heribert Prantl, “[Nie wieder? Schon wieder! Immer noch](#),” *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, January 27, 2019.

parliament. The *JF* accused Knobloch of “defamation” and “instrumentalizing the memory of the victims of National Socialism in a disturbing way.” It stated that the AfD is a legitimately elected member of the democratic state parliament of Bavaria.

Similarly, the *JF* called Friedländer’s call to defend democracy “theatrical,” and described German mainstream memorial culture as based on a “cognitive dissonance.”²⁷⁶ The *JF* rejected the idea of German collective guilt and responded to Steinmeier’s critique of the AfD by claiming it constituted an abuse of his office and an “abuse of an international commemoration and of the defenceless dead for domestic and party-political purposes.”²⁷⁷ The *JF* also noted the AfD’s statement from January 2020 that it “commemorates ‘all people who were murdered by the criminal Nazi regime’” and is committed to “resolutely defend civilisational achievements, such as the rule of law and a free democracy, against all enemies,”²⁷⁸ as a refutation of the accusations against the AfD.

Standing by Israel

The obligation to stand by Israel is seen by all speakers as a responsibility that arose from the Holocaust. Steinmeier stressed this in 2020 in parliament: “And it is also linked to our historical responsibility for Israel’s existence and security, for nurturing the special German-Israeli relations, for consolidating this extraordinary friendship, which always remains aware of the historical background and at the same time is directed toward the future.” Steinmeier called the Israeli president’s presence in parliament a “sign of solidarity – solidarity between our two countries, between Germany and Israel.” Steinmeier is grateful for this but also sees it as an “obligation to prove ourselves worthy of the hand that Israel has extended to us, because I know: reconciliation is a grace that we Germans could not hope for or even expect. But we want to live up to it! President Rivlin: We will not forget! And we stand by the side of Israel!” He further stated: “Mr. President Rivlin, we want to show Israel and the world that our country lives up to the newly given trust. That is our task, the task that memory gives us. So that what may happen, will not happen.”²⁷⁹ In his speech at Yad Vashem he spoke on his sense of “grace” and a “gift” to be able to speak there.²⁸⁰

In reference to his personal experience of emigration, Friedländer stressed in his speech the right of Israel to exist as a “basic moral obligation,” especially in the face of rising antisemitism. Friedländer also expressed concern about rising nationalism around the world. The speech was met with standing ovations from all factions in parliament. The *taz* and *SZ* called Friedländer’s account of his personal history deeply moving. They also pointed to the absurdity of AfD members joining the

276 Thorsten Hinz, “[Die Erinnerungskultur muß sich verändern](#),” *Junge Freiheit*, February 1, 2019.

277 Thorsten Hinz, “[Billig und Böseartig](#),” *Junge Freiheit*, January 24, 2020.

278 “[AfD: Leid der Opfer des Holocausts nicht vergessen](#),” *Junge Freiheit*, January 26, 2020.

279 Steinmeier, Bundestag 2020.

280 Steinmeier, Yad Vashem 2020.

applause, since they are the ones Friedländer was warning about.²⁸¹ The SZ pointed to “self-evident facts that are unfortunately no longer self-evident for many”: “Germans are allowed to measure Israel against its own standards and to criticise the country’s occupation policy, for example, but the extent and force of some of the criticism speaks of the old hatred.”²⁸²

Defending German memory culture

German *Erinnerungskultur* [memory culture] is a discursive theme in its own right. The memory of the Holocaust is understood as a fundamental part of German identity, which must be defended. Two important perceived challenges appear in HMDs speeches in the period under investigation here: first, the challenges posed by the rise of nationalism, antisemitism, and anti-democratic movements. Second, the challenges to memory posed by immigration and the younger generation of Germans, for whom the history of the Holocaust seems far away.

Steinmeier acknowledges in his speech in the Bundestag in 2020 that anti-democratic movements “present their *Völkisch*, their authoritarian thinking as a vision, virtually as the better answer to the questions of our time.” This challenge is a test that Germans must pass: “We owe it to our responsibility before history, to the victims and also to the survivors!” Steinmeier worries that by now Germans understand the past better than the present and admits the shortcomings of German memory culture: “We agreed on the lessons of the past and a culture of remembrance that must be cultivated together in this country. But I fear: our self-assurance was deceptive.”²⁸³ The president made similar remarks in his speech at Yad Vashem.²⁸⁴ Schäuble also acknowledged in 2021: “Our culture of remembrance does not protect us from an audacious reinterpretation or even denial of history. Nor does it protect against new forms of racism and antisemitism as they spread in schoolyards, on internet forums or in conspiracy theories.”²⁸⁵

Schäuble, Steinmeier and Knobloch agree that antisemitism can be found in different parts of society. Steinmeier stressed the importance of remembrance to combat present threats, but similarly to Schäuble, he did not name anyone directly:

Of course: our time is not the same time. It is not the same words. It is not same perpetrators. But it is the same evil. And there remains one answer: Never again! That is why there must be no end to remembering. This responsibility has been inscribed in the Federal Republic of Germany from day one. But it tests us – here and today!²⁸⁶

281 Ulrich Schulte, “[Holocaust-Gedenkstunde im Bundestag: 'Eine moralische Verpflichtung'](#),” *taz*, January 31, 2019; “[Fremdenhass und Nationalismus weltweit auf dem Vormarsch](#),” *SZ*, January 31, 2019.

282 Joachim Kämpner, “[Ein Bollwerk](#),” *SZ*, January 31, 2019.

283 Steinmeier, Bundestag 2020.

284 Schäuble, Bundestag 2021.

285 Schäuble, Bundestag 2021.

286 Steinmeier, Yad Vashem 2020.

Steinmeier referred to this evil also on his visit in Auschwitz in 2020, and added: “that’s why we don’t just talk about the past here in Auschwitz, but understand it as an enduring responsibility to nip these things in the bud, also in our country.”²⁸⁷

The AfD’s stance on the current memory culture is rejected by *Die Zeit*, *taz*, *SZ* and *FAZ*. The *taz* praised Weisband and Knobloch in 2021 as “two strong, fierce speeches by two strong, fierce women.”²⁸⁸ The position of the newspapers associated with the AfD is naturally different. A good illustration of this is the right-wing *Junge Freiheit*’s response to a speech given by the historian Götz Aly in the parliament of the State of Thuringia on January 25, 2019. In his speech, Aly underlined the vast support the Nazis received from the German population:

In May 1945, many tens of millions of Germans had to be forced to end their work of hatred, destruction, and self-destruction with harsh military force. They had voted for Hitler, cheered or tolerated him and fought for him [...] The vast majority of the *Landser* (soldiers) considered themselves *Herrenmenschen* (the master race), especially in Eastern Europe. They were driven by Nazi conviction, a patriotic sense of duty, national arrogance, and thirst for adventure or indifference.

After 1945, Aly added, most Germans did not show any regret, but rather “remained silent [...] destroyed documents and fled into oblivion.” In his speech he also directly criticized the AfD, and then thanked foreign soldiers for liberating Germans from themselves.²⁸⁹

The *Junge Freiheit* responded:

The AfD should take Aly’s attack as a challenge to counter the taboo and sacralization of the Nazi era in political discourse with historicization where necessary and to understand the Holocaust as a gruesome climax in the history of violence and horror of the 20th century set in motion by Germans – not *the* Germans – which neither began with the National Socialists nor ended with them.

Yet the *JF* is concerned not only with German memory culture, but also with its supposed inconsistency, considering Germany’s “welcome policy” of Muslim refugees: the abovementioned article quotes approvingly the late fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld’s criticism of the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s immigration policy: “You cannot kill millions of Jews and then take in millions of their worst enemies afterwards.”²⁹⁰

287 Speech by Frank-Walter Steinmeier in Auschwitz 2020, “[Wir müssen wissen, dass es wieder geschehen kann](#),” *Der Spiegel*, 27 January 2020.

288 Sabine am Orde, “[Gedenken an den Holocaust: 'Passen Sie auf unser Land'](#),” *taz*, January 27, 2021.

289 [Speech by Dr. Götz Aly at the memorial service for the 74th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, at the parliament of the Free State of Thuringia](#), January 27, 2019, the translation is by Maximilian Hauer.

290 Thorsten Hinz, “[Die Erinnerungskultur muß sich verändern, Junge Freiheit](#),” *Junge Freiheit*, February 1, 2019.

However, it is not only the far-right that stresses the present and potential problem of having a large population of migrants, particularly Muslims. While threats from the right are met by the HMD speakers with an emphasis on continuity, migration is discussed with an awareness of the need for change. Steinmeier put it in 2020 as follows:

Today we will have to find new forms of remembrance for a young generation that asks: What does this past have to do with me, with my life? We will have to give new answers for young Germans whose parents and grandparents came to us from other countries. “You have your history, we have ours” cannot and must not be the answer. No, the lessons of our history can and must be part of the self-image of all Germans, because we all bear responsibility in the here and now.²⁹¹

This mention of the Germans who are descendent of immigrants and the need to include them in German memory culture is a new theme in conservative leaders’ speeches on HMD. Schäuble similarly stated in 2021: “We must renew the forms of remembrance. Our collective responsibility remains. It also includes subsequent generations and Germans whose families came to Germany only after National Socialism. Let us be aware: the self-image of our country is at stake!”²⁹²

Yet as mentioned, the focus is often on the antisemitism of these immigrants. On HMD in 2020, for example, Philipp Amthor, the young, conservative member of the CDU, singled out the antisemitism of Muslim immigrants in an interview with the German news channel n-tv. Amthor argued that “it must not be forgotten that antisemitism is particularly strong in cultures shaped by Islam.” The concerns of the Jewish population regarding migration of recent years should not be neglected. Amthor stressed: “it must be clear to us that if we rightly expect migrants to conform to our culture here, then it is also part of this that there is no room for antisemitism among us.” To reiterate, conforming to German culture here should be understood also as conforming to German *memory* culture, which rejects any kind of antisemitism. This perception of Germany as relatively “clean” of antisemitism except in the case of Muslim immigrants is arguably also what led Amthor, when asked about the role of neo-Nazi networks in the German military and police forces, to claim that these institutions should be appreciated as brave guardians of German democracy, while still taking seriously these aberrations as isolated cases.²⁹³ The *JF* argued in support of Amthor and repeatedly claimed that the antisemitic threat from Muslim migrants is neglected.²⁹⁴ Additionally, the *JF* accused Knobloch of dismissing the threat of Islamic antisemitism for reasons of political correctness.²⁹⁵

291 Speech by Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the memorial service for the victims of National Socialism in the Bundestag, January 29, 2020.

292 Schäuble, Bundestag 2021.

293 “[Kritik an Antisemitismus in ‘muslimischen Kreisen’](#),” Interview with Philipp Amthor, N-TV, January 27, 2020. translation by Maximilian Hauer.

294 Hinz, “Erinnerungskultur”; Boris T. Kaiser, “[Gedenkkultur trifft auf Realität](#),” *Junge Freiheit*, January 29, 2020.

295 “[AfD: Knobloch mißbraucht Andenken der NS-Opfer](#),” *JF Online*, January 23, 2019.

It is worthwhile to mention in this context the response of the German-Jewish activist and public intellectual Max Czollek to Steinmeier and Amthor in his comments to the *Deutschlandfunk*. He noted that Steinmeier's speech marks an improvement in comparison to earlier versions of official memory culture in Germany. However,

[o]n a certain level, he continued to write a narrative, which has become a state-sponsored narrative in Germany since the Weizsäcker speech in 1985, namely that memory always also means reconciliation [...] I would say that from a Jewish perspective, this remembrance is not necessarily reconciliation, but first of all the remembrance of the dead.

Furthermore, Czollek rejected the idea that public remembrance would somehow testify for "the Germans becoming good again" and a new German normalcy. He explained: "I do not see this normalcy in Germany. I rather think we should perhaps simply distance ourselves from this need, from this desire for everything to be normal again." Regarding the argument that antisemitism in Germany mainly comes from Muslim immigrants, Czollek wrote:

I consider it a truly outrageous impertinence to state, on the Day of Remembrance of one of the most horrendous crimes against humanity ever committed, by Germans, explicitly by Germans, that antisemitism is above all a problem of Muslim culture [...] And that, frankly, worries me, because a kind of exclusion is being produced here through the utilization of memory, through the use of the symbolic Jews, of whom it is said, well, you are now the ones that we protect. And because we are the ones protecting you, everyone has to orientate themselves to the dominant German culture.²⁹⁶

As we shall see, the themes of reconciliation and rising antisemitism in German society are indeed recurring in the public discourse around the Holocaust, and they are entangled with the question of what it means to be human and to act humanly – during the Holocaust and in contemporary Germany.

Reconciliation and humanity

Calls to act humanly [menschlich] are recurring in the speeches. Schäuble highlighted the importance of humanity at the end of his speech in 2019: "Remaining a fellow human being – that's what matters today too!" Similarly, Friedländer pointed to humanity in his closing words, quoting Hans von Dohnanyi, who was executed for helping Jews flee and explained his actions with the following words: "It was just the inevitable walk of a decent human being."²⁹⁷ Remembering victims of the Holocaust not just as numbers but as human beings is at the forefront of the memorial service in the Bundestag through the invitation of survivors to share their stories and by naming those who perished and telling their stories. President Steinmeier spoke of the "gift" of an Israeli accompanying

296 "[Warum muss die Pointe des Erinnerns immer Versöhnung sein?](#)" Interview with Max Czollek, *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, January 29, 2020. Translation by Maximilian Hauer.

297 Friedländer, Bundestag, 2019.

him, a German, to Auschwitz and to his speech in the Bundestag, filling him with “deep humility.”²⁹⁸ He asked how he can claim that Germans have understood in the face of the current antisemitic trends.

Humanity is a central theme also in Steinmeier’s speech in Yad Vashem. He stressed the humanity of the victims, but also noted that the German perpetrators were humans as well.²⁹⁹ Steinmeier’s emphasis on humanity implies both agency and fragility: “Every peace remains fragile. And as human beings, we remain seducible.” This is also stressed by Schäuble in 2020: “Auschwitz reminds us how seducible we humans are, how fragile our civilization is, how quickly our humanistic substance is damaged; how vulnerable its ethical foundation remains if we do not defend it.”³⁰⁰

Taking responsibility allows for the “miracle of reconciliation,” as Steinmeier put it. Reconciliation is a key aspect in Germany’s dealing with the past. It marks the aspiration to reconcile with Nazism’s victims, not only the Jews but also the French, the Poles and others. These efforts are seen in Germany as “best-practices” of overcoming divisions of the past and as a model for moderating other inter-state conflicts. Steinmeier explained:

Seventy-five years after the liberation of Auschwitz, I stand before you all as the German President, burdened with great historical guilt. But at the same time, I am filled with gratitude: for the outstretched hand of the survivors, for the new trust of people in Israel and throughout the world, for the renewed blooming of Jewish life in Germany. I am filled with the spirit of reconciliation that has shown Germany and Israel, Germany, Europe and the countries of the world a new, peaceful path.³⁰¹

Weisband and Knobloch, however, partly challenged this “humanist” and universalist framework and stressed the particular Jewish perspective in their speeches in 2021: “To just be human is the privilege of those who have nothing to fear due to their birth,” said Weisband. She described feeling welcomed in Germany but also the struggle of identity and the reality of needing police protection: “To be Jewish in Germany means to carry within oneself, by one’s very existence, the memories of the Shoah and modern antisemitism, of guilt and reconciliation.” She described Jewish life in Germany as “ambivalent, full of community and solidarity, full of fear and frustration.” Weisband hinted at the need for a bigger societal change: “We are the ones who must build a new society under the portraits of our grandparents and great-grandparents. One in which perhaps, someday, a Jewish culture can be lived and treated as a simple matter of course. And then, indeed, we can just be people.”³⁰²

298 Steinmeier, Bundestag 2020.

299 Steinmeier, Yad Vashem 2020.

300 Schäuble, Bundestag 2020.

301 Steinmeier, Yad Vashem 2020.

302 [Speech by Marina Weisband on Holocaust Remembrance Day in the Bundestag](#), 2021.

Knobloch started her speech by stating that she was a proud German, just like her family, which did not protect them from persecution and deportation. She talked about her youth and the exclusion and separation from her family. Unlike other speakers, when remembering deportations from Munich she spoke not simply of Jews but of “Jewish Munich residents.” She then added that “it is not just a matter of protecting Jewish people. Because where antisemitism has a place, every form of hatred can spread. Racism, homophobia, misogyny, contempt for humanity of every stripe. The fight against it is a fight for human dignity, for democracy, for unity, for justice and justice and freedom.”³⁰³

For Weisband and Knobloch, it seems, humanity and reconciliation are goals to be achieved rather than an existing reality in relations between Jews and Germany. Their achievement depends on creating a society where not only Jews feel safe, but their presence and participation as Jews in German society is perceived as a natural part of German life; where the fight against antisemitism is perceived as a fight for Germany rather than for Jews; and is part of a broader and “intersectional” struggle against group-hatred and for equality and freedom.

The particular Jewish experience and the universal human experience are thus hard to separate, particularly in light of the historical significance of the Holocaust. In his speech in 2021 Schäuble stated: “we commit ourselves to protect Jewish life in Germany from attack; to pass on the memory of the *Zivilisationsbruch* (civilizational breach) of the Shoah.” Schäuble further stressed the desire to have Jews express their Jewishness safely in Germany “as a natural part of our common diverse country.”³⁰⁴ The idea of civilizational breach speaks to the unprecedentedness of the Holocaust, as an event that shuttered the norms and moral imperatives that had been accepted as part of Western civilization, and in fact human civilization as a whole. Yet how can one reconcile reconciliation and taking Jewish life in Germany as “natural” while at the same time keeping this monumental event and its meaning alive in German memory? Such questions were only exacerbated with the violent attacks against Jewish communities that took place in Germany in recent years, of which we chose to focus on the shooting attack in Halle.

Halle synagogue shooting

On October 9, 2019, a heavily armed man drove up to the synagogue in Halle and opened fire on the door of the synagogue. Around 50 people were inside, marking the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur. After the shooter failed to enter the synagogue, he killed a woman passing by and drove away, then opened fire on a kebab shop and killed a customer. He attempted to flee, shot and injured two more people and finally collided with a truck. The attacker was then arrested by the police. The attacker streamed the attack on the streaming platform twitch. In the livestream, the attacker denied the Holocaust and blamed Jews for feminism and for mass immigration into Germany. Before the attack he uploaded an antisemitic manifesto in English, in which he called on other white men to kill Jews.

303 [Speech delivered by Dr \(h.c.\) Charlotte Knobloch at the German Bundestag](#) on 27 January 2021.

304 Schäuble, Bundestag 2021.

The livestream and the manifesto resembled the form of online games.³⁰⁵ The attacker had become radicalized on online platforms, where he was in contact with what he called other “discontented white men.”

Eight days later, the Bundestag held a planned debate. Thirteen Bundestag members from all parties gave speeches.³⁰⁶ The discussion revolved around the necessity of new laws, security issues and prevention measures, as well as the AfD’s role in the rise of antisemitism in Germany.

Breach of promise

During the debate in the Bundestag, all speakers tried to demonstrate their efforts to take action. Minister of Justice, Christine Lambrecht (SPD), Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (CDU) and Thorsten Frei (CDU) stressed the efforts that had been made thus far in fighting antisemitism. Speaking for the opposition, the Linke, the Grüne and AfD blamed the governing parties for their inactivity in past years. FDP Secretary General Linda Teuteberg condemned the competition about who did or said what in the past, stressing the need to take responsibility for Jewish life now.³⁰⁷

The phrase “never again” was repeated several times in the Bundestag debate: Christoph Bernstiel (CDU) said: “It’s for all of us to show now how serious we are when we say ‘never again’”.³⁰⁸ Seehofer stated: “I will do everything – and the entire federal government – to ensure that Jews can live in our country without threat and without fear. That is what is behind the phrase ‘Never Again’.”³⁰⁹ Petra Sitte from the Linke party added: “German history has shown what comes after silence and therefore I tell you clearly: never again fascism.”³¹⁰ Thorsten Frei (CDU) talked about the pride and happiness Germans should feel that Jewish life in Germany is possible after the Holocaust. Karamba Diaby (SPD) pointed to practices of commemoration in his hometown Halle: Jewish life is closely connected to the active community of the town, which will not change by an attack. “We will continue to participate in the March of the Living together with the Jewish community and commemorate the pogrom crimes of 1938. We will continue to take care of the *Stolpersteine* on our streets every year and in the upcoming week we will celebrate the Jewish culture days [*Kulturtage*].”³¹¹

305 Within the antifascist memory culture in Germany, it is an emerging trend to avoid publishing the name of the perpetrators of such attacks, because they themselves try to become celebrities by committing these crimes, that is to “make a name for themselves,” thereby becoming visible models for others who follow in their footsteps. The livestreaming underlines this goal. For them to become memes in the public discourse is part of their terrorist strategy [M.H.].

306 “[Vereinbarte Debatte aus Anlass des Anschlags auf die Synagoge in Halle](#),” *Deutscher Bundestag*, 2019. The Bundestag published the recording of the debate as well as the stenographic report on their website.

307 [Deutscher Bundestag, Stenografischer Bericht 118](#), Sitzung Berlin, Donnerstag, October 17, 2019, 14410.

308 Ibid., 14416.

309 Ibid., 14406.

310 Ibid., 14412.

311 Ibid.

As one can see, the different speakers immediately linked the antisemitic attack to the memory of the Holocaust and to Germany's obligation to protect Jewish life in Germany. "Never again," for German public figures, means not only preventing another genocide, but preventing any kind of attack against the Jews in Germany. The failure to prevent such attacks is perceived not only as a failure to employ sufficient security measures, but as a break of Germany's promise to its Jewish citizens and to Jews around the world, and as a failure of German memory culture itself. Accordingly, the measures proposed in the parliamentary discussion are not primarily public safety measures, but educational and commemorative ones. Nadine Schön (CDU), for example, argued that it was particularly important to invest in education and in getting better insight into right-wing extremism. Karamba Diaby (SPD) similarly demanded the strengthening of political and media education,³¹² and so did other speakers. Petra Sitte (Linke) noted succinctly: "It is not a security policy issue, it is not a domestic policy issue. It is a socio-political issue."³¹³

In the same spirit, the *SZ* called the Halle attack a "breach of a state promise," the promise of safety made to Jews who stayed in Germany or came back to Germany after the Shoah.³¹⁴ Norbert Frei wrote a guest column in the *SZ* that the assassination effectively "calls into question the foundations of our democracy that has grown for 70 years." The *Taz* agreed with Frei, claiming that the calm only a few weeks after the attack "shows how much the claim that is being repeated like a mantra that Germany has come to terms with National Socialism and the Shoah is the Federal Republic's biggest lifelong lie."³¹⁵ CDU Secretary General Paul Ziemiak wrote in a guest column for the *FAZ*: "After the end of National Socialist barbarism, the 'Never again!' has been burned into the collective memory, has become part of our Federal German state narrative."³¹⁶ Most newspapers also stressed the importance of better education in the prevention of such antisemitic and racist violence.³¹⁷

The troubling contribution of the internet and particularly social media platforms to radicalization was also an important theme in the newspapers under examination. The *FAZ* even spoke of the "murder from the meme-machinery"³¹⁸: "The net provides the 'lone wolves' among the terrorists with everything they need to transform themselves into killing machines,"³¹⁹ and "terror becomes digital." This is the real challenge to democracy and "all representatives of the political spectrum are required to change something in this dangerous discourse situation and not just the party of

312 Ibid., 14418.

313 Ibid., 14412.

314 Matthias Drobinski, "[Der Bruch eines staatlichen Versprechens](#)," *SZ*, October 10, 2019.

315 Samuel Salzborn, "[War da was?](#)" *taz*, December 5, 2019.

316 Paul Ziemiak, "[Wir müssen unser Land verteidigen](#)," *FAZ*, October 12, 2019.

317 Salzborn, "War da was?"; Norbert Frei, "[Nach Halle](#)," *SZ*, November 7, 2019.

318 Konstantin van Lijnden, "[Mörder aus der Meme-Maschinerie](#)," *FAZ*, October 10, 2019.

319 Berthold Kohler, "[Die Grenze ist Durchbrochen](#)," *FAZ*, October 10, 2019.

the New Right.”³²⁰ *Die Zeit* also stressed these “dark corners of the Internet” as “the habitat of [the shooter] Balliet,” against which the police are overwhelmed and helpless.³²¹

The AfD and antisemitism

Several speakers pointed to the AfD as being partly responsible for this attack because of their nationalist and racist positions. The immediate trigger for the attack on the AfD was an incident involving Stephan Brandner from the AfD, who served as a chairman of the Bundestag’s Legal Affairs Committee. Brandner had shared a tweet asking why politicians were “hanging around with candles in mosques and synagogues” after the attack, despite the fact that the two fatalities had been Germans – thus suggesting being Jewish or Muslim and being German are mutually exclusive. Brandner argued in his defence that the dissemination of a tweet was not the same as supporting it. In the debate, Schäuble called Brandner’s behaviour “intolerable.” Those who try to “further test the limits of decency” by spreading such tweets are placing themselves “outside the basic consensus on which our democratic order is based.” Schäuble added: “That applies all the more to members of this House.” Seehofer addressed the AfD parliamentary group leader directly: “Dear Mr. Gauland, I simply ask you to distance yourself from such statements.”³²²

The AfD defended itself against this criticism and pointed to antisemitism coming from Muslims and the liberal media instead. Gauland condemned the attacks but rejected the accusations that the AfD contributed to a climate in which such attacks can happen: “As long as a member of the federal government can say that the AfD is the political arm of right-wing terrorism, I won’t apologize for anything here.” Gauland was referring to a statement by Michael Roth (SPD), Minister of State at the Foreign Office, who had said, “The political arm of right-wing terrorism sits in the German Bundestag and in the state parliaments. And it is the AfD.”³²³ Gauland stated in response that the “welcome culture” of 2015 and the acceptance of foreign people into the country has led to massive radicalisation and division in society. He also criticized “selective commemoration” and asked where the vigil has been for the Jews attacked by Muslims: “the selective consternation gives the impression that the vigils are not for Jewish victims, but rather for the appropriate perpetrators, if they fit the political interest to bring them up against us.”³²⁴ Referring to the attack on the *Breitscheidplatz* in 2016, when a Muslim asylum seeker drove a truck into a Christmas market in Berlin, killing and injuring dozens of people, Gauland added: “If we are supposed to be the political arm of right-wing terrorism in Parliament, as one Minister of State said, then you would be the political arm of Islamist terror in this country.”³²⁵

320 Hannah Bethke, “[In der Mitte wird es eng](#),” *FAZ*, October 11, 2019.

321 Paul Middelhoff und Martin Nejezchleba, “[Spielen und töten](#),” *Die Zeit*, December 17, 2019.

322 Bundestag Bericht 118, 14406.

323 See Politiker Roth, “[AfD ist Arm des Rechtsterrorismus](#),” *SZ*, February 10, 2020.

324 Bundestag Bericht 118, 14407-14408.

325 *Ibid.*, 14408.

Beatrix von Storch of the AfD rejected any political instrumentalization of the victims and stated that the “established” parties failed in preventing the formation of terrorist groups. She mentioned the 1970 murders in Munich and the hijacking of the *Landshut* (Lufthansa Flight 181 that was hijacked in October 1977 by members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), and argued that antisemitism in Germany mainly comes from the liberal left: “You’re pointing with one finger to the AfD but three fingers are pointing back to you.”³²⁶ The *JF* similarly stated that other sights of terror such as the *Breitscheidplatz* were not immediately visited by the chancellor and other victims did not receive condolences. According to *JF* the representatives from CDU, SPD, Grünen and Linke were using the attack for “tactical party defamation,” of which they usually accuse the AfD.³²⁷

We see in this discussion what is probably an inevitable result of German memory culture and the understanding of antisemitism as a threat not only to Jews but to German identity and democracy itself: accusing rival parties of encouraging or contributing to the rise in antisemitism is a prominent part of the political struggle in Germany. This is not to say that it serves only as a political tool: there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of the speakers that they share a genuine concern about the rise in antisemitism; yet they are particularly invested in emphasizing the way the politics of their rivals promotes antisemitism. This has become particularly apparent since the growth of the AfD’s political power and public visibility, on the one hand, and the refugee crisis of the last decade, on the other. These developments are of course tightly connected: the AfD largely built its power on its criticism of Merkel’s refugee policy. As we have already seen, these two developments are also seen as the two primary challenges to the dominant memory culture, and therefore to Germany’s very identity.

A similar debate took place in the newspapers under investigation here. The liberal *Die Zeit* argued that the attacker was not alone and pointed to the danger of the spread of racist and antisemitic ideology through the AfD: “It is the direct juxtaposition of his antisemitism with ideas that are now widespread among AfD supporters.” Moreover, it acknowledged that it appeared in all sectors of society: “Antisemitism, like racism, exists in many. It is not a matter of keeping quiet about it, but of asking ourselves where its poison works in us.”³²⁸ The rightist *JF*, in contrast, described the shooter an “obviously crazy fanatic.”³²⁹ The leftist *Junge Welt* saw the attack as part of a broader intensification of “fascist violence” in Germany³³⁰ and declared capitalism to be the main reason for this:

[Hostility to humanity] characterizes the profit system, in which the elbow counts more and more and empathy less and less. And here – as bitter as it is – lies the link between the murderous crime and the dull everyday racism that afflicts so many. The latter does not come of its own accord but is the result of permanent mass manipulation.³³¹

326 Ibid., 14416.

327 Michael Paulwitz, “[Stunde der Scheinheiligen](#),” *Junge Freiheit*, October 10, 2019.

328 Christian Bangel, “[Zeit Er ist nicht allein](#),” *Die Zeit*, October 10, 2019.

329 Paulwitz, “Stunde der Scheinheiligen.”

330 Ulla Jelpke, “[Der nächste »Einzelfall«](#),” *Junge Welt*, October 11, 2019.

331 Ellen Brombacher, “[Gift des Hasses](#),” *Junge Welt*, October 14, 2019.

The *JW* also published an article on antisemitism on the left concluding: “The left made mistakes (which it must work through with today’s level of knowledge); the right is the mistake.”³³² This is a succinct expression of the way each side on the political spectrum contrasts the antisemitism within its own political camp with the others: the kind of antisemitism that exists on “our” side is a mistake committed by individuals; the antisemitism that exists on “their” side is pervasive and built into the very core of their ideology.

Resolution on “Recognition of so-called ‘a-socials’ and ‘professional criminals’ as victims of the Nazi regime”³³³

From 1933 to 1945, tens of thousands of people were defined by the Nazi regime as “a-social” (*Asozial*) and “professional criminals” (*Berufsverbrecher*) and were subsequently excluded from German society, forcibly sterilized, incarcerated in concentration camps and murdered. In the camps, the prisoners were marked with black and green triangles. Their persecution was based on Nazi racial doctrines, yet they never received official recognition as victims of the Nazi regime. In post-war German society, these victims and their descendants often faced further ongoing stigmatization and were faced with accusations of having been “rightfully imprisoned” in the concentration camps. In recent decades, their marginalization has been challenged by activists, researchers and by particular memorial institutions, such as the concentration camp *Gedenkstätte Flossenbürg* Memorial (Bavaria) and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (Berlin).³³⁴

Against this backdrop, the German parliament held a third and final plenary debate and vote on four resolutions to fully recognize the so-called “a-socials” and “professional criminals” as victims of the Nazi regime on February 13, 2020.³³⁵ All four resolutions, presented by different parliamentary factions, shared the basic understanding that the notion of anyone having been “rightfully imprisoned in a concentration camp” is untenable and unacceptable in a modern, democratic Germany facing its past. The resolutions all called for the rehabilitation of the formerly marginalized victims and the installment of reparation payments for those few still alive today. Furthermore, the resolutions stated the need to increase public awareness and to better represent those persecuted as “a-socials” and “professional criminals” in Germany’s culture of remembrance. Those goals are to be achieved through additional funding of scholarly research, exhibitions, and educational resources on the topic.

The debate concluded with a vote on the resolutions. The resolution presented by the governing coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and the Social Democrats (SPD) was adopted with the votes of all parties, except for the AfD, who generally abstained from voting on the issue and did not present an alternative resolution. The resolutions individually drafted by the opposition Green

332 Kai Köhler, “[Fehler machen – oder sein](#),” *Junge Welt*, October 14, 2020.

333 “[‘Asoziale’ und ‘Berufsverbrecher’ sollen als NS-Opfer anerkannt werden](#),” *Deutscher Bundestag*, 2020. Translations in this section are by Aliena Stuerzer.

334 See Hörath 2017; Lieske 2016.

335 First parliamentary readings and a consultative hearing of experts was held on April 19, 2019; April 24, 2019, and November 6, 2019, respectively.

Party, Die Linke and the Liberal Democrats (FDP) did not gain a parliamentary majority. However, this should not be understood as an expression of disagreement on the subject but rather as a reflection of general discord in current German legislative practice: due to considerations of voter opinion and power relations in the state parliament of Thuringia, the governing conservative CDU opposed any cooperation with Die Linke in the federal legislative process and abstained from voting favorably on any resolution presented by the left. Throughout the discussion of February 13, the opposition thus criticized the CDU for what they perceived to be a blocking of a comprehensive parliamentary consensus. As this discursive event provides a particularly interesting perspective on the ongoing development of German memory culture, we present it and the positions taken by the different speakers in some detail.

The first speaker in the debate was Melanie Bernstein of the governing CDU/CSU, member of the parliamentary Committee on Culture and Media. She began her speech with two remarks on the first resolution on the issue presented by the Green party in 2018. Bernstein rejected the Green party's claim that "74 years after the liberation of Auschwitz the suffering of the victims is not known in public," and referred to the extensive research done on marginalized victim groups of National Socialism in the last decade. Secondly, Bernstein stressed the CDU's "fundamental difference in the understanding of the mechanism of memorial culture in Germany," insofar as the CDU emphasizes the freedom of memorial museums in choosing their focus of research and exhibitions. Bernstein then stated that there was no doubt within the CDU that those persecuted as so-called "a-socials" and "professional criminals" deserve recognition as victims of the Nazi regime. She stressed the need to increase public knowledge on the fate of these victim groups, to fully recognize the victims and for parliamentary action to promote both historical research and educational programs.

Bernstein also stressed the unity of the different parties except for the AfD on the issue. Directly turning to the AfD members, she criticized the AfD's position that "professional criminals" should not be recognized as victims as the SS had often appointed them as *Kapos* in the concentration camps. She noted the arbitrariness of the Nazi category of "a-socials" and stressed that those determined to be "professional criminals" by the Nazis were incarcerated in the camps without any legal basis. Furthermore, she referred to the inclusion of the victim groups in the Nazi's exterminatory policy of an "annihilation through work" (*Vernichtung durch Arbeit*). On the same basis she rejected the AfD's insistence on the need for a case-by-case decision on reparation for "a-social" victims.

The AfD's speaker Marc Jongen, who is seen by many as the "party philosopher" or "thought leader" responded, first, by recognizing the fact that "professional criminals" were murdered in the concentration camps. However, he stated:

It is completely out of the question, that anyone – without exception anyone, who got into the barbaric penal- and extermination system of the National Socialists received justice. The question is a different one here: Are all concentration camp inmates really to be placed on the same level? Or does a morally sensible judgment **require** a differentiation here?

Jongen argued that the “professional criminals” were often assigned as *Kapos* in the camps and therefore became complicit with the perpetrators of the SS. He then quoted the testimony of a Holocaust survivor that recounted the violence exerted by such *Kapos*. Jongen partly admitted the arbitrariness of the Nazi category of “a-socials” and noted that he saw them as different from the “professional criminals.” In the case of the latter, he argued that a case-by-case decision on their recognition as victims is necessary. Therefore, the AfD opposes a “general recognition [of them] as a victim group,” and certainly objected placing them on the same level as Jews or political prisoners. He then went on to accuse the other parties of falsely comparing the AfD to the Nazis: “You are thereby not only insulting us, but you are also downplaying the Nazis and ridicule their victims with your lunatic comparisons, and you are instrumentalizing the victims for your current party politics.”

Marinne Schieder of the governing Social Democrats (SPD) began her speech with her personal experience attending the inauguration of *Stolpersteine* for Nazi victims persecuted as “a-socials” close to *Alexanderplatz* earlier that day. She stressed the arbitrariness of Nazi categories and the unlawful practice of “protective custody,” and then turned to the AfD members: “Enlightened democrats recognize all people tortured and murdered in the concentration camps as victim of the Nazi state of injustice. [...] The AfD does not belong to these enlightened democrats. They demonstrated this once more today, otherwise such statements as presented here today by Mr. Jongen would not have been made.” Schieder also referred to the efforts made by the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe to commemorate these victims and spoke about the need for a travelling exhibition on the issue discussed – a proposal featured in the resolution of the SPD/CDU/CSU – as best suited to raise public awareness of the marginalized victim groups. This suggestion seems to build on the success of the Wehrmacht travelling exhibition in the early 1990s that sparked a nation-wide discussion on the Wehrmacht’s participation in mass atrocities during WWII. At the same time, Schieder noted that contrary to the claims of the AfD, the proposed resolution would not place the reparations for these victim groups under the same status as the reparations for victims of the Holocaust. Schieder concluded by quoting Dachau survivor Max Mannheimer’s words that the current generation of Germans “is not responsible for what happened, but responsible that it never happens again,” and stated that part of accomplishing this is to ensure that no single group of victims shall be forgotten.

Hartmut Ebbing spoke for the liberal FDP. Like many of the written resolutions, he took Auschwitz as a point of reference. He argued that the resolutions show how the past is still an unresolved issue that shapes current action and stated that the obligation ‘never again!’ “needs to be reflected in our daily acts!” He presented himself as “speaking from deep shame” that while the inclusion of further victim groups into Germany’s official culture of remembrance is “self-evident” and restitution is necessary, this recognition comes too late and the crimes committed are so enormous that “no appropriate restitution” is possible anyway. He stated that the recognition of the marginalized victims is too important to stubbornly stick to party directives, openly attacking the CDU here. Lastly, Ebbing turned vehemently against all “sceptics and those with historical amnesia” (*Geschichtsvergessene*), referring to the AfD. He concluded that there could be no closure on the Nazi past, referring to decade-long attempts, especially from the right, to call for such a closure on dealing with the Nazi past and to get Germany out of the “politics of shame.” He then called for extended funding for historical research and commemorative institutions.

Petra Pau of Die Linke, Vice President of parliament who is known to be very active on matters of memory politics, spoke next. Connecting the current debate to Holocaust Remembrance Day marked two weeks before, Pau stated that remembrance is not only important for its own sake but for making sure that “such barbarity is never to repeat itself.” Pau took a broader view of the crimes of the Nazi regime and stressed that all social strata were affected by the terror of the regime, yet she distinguished the Holocaust and the genocide against the Roma people as the worst crimes the Nazi regime committed. She then stated that the recognition of marginalized victim groups is necessary and overdue, stressing the neglect of those victims in both the remembrance culture of former West Germany and the GDR. Pau also stressed the need to raise awareness of the persisting tendencies to racism toward certain social groups, social Darwinist thinking and preventive criminal prosecution in Germany today. Die Linke’s draft of the resolution also stressed these continuities. Pau then drew a sharp line between the “democratic parties” and the AfD, stating: “We are resisting the attempts of the AfD to create concentration camp victims of first and second order. That is preposterous.” Pau concluded by stressing the immediate need for action: “that’s what we owe to the victims of the Nazi’s, but also to ourselves.”

Erhard Grundl of the Green party noted that sexually and socially deviant women in particular, were singled-out and considered “a-social” by the Nazis – a point his party also stressed in their resolution proposal. Grundl referred to the underlying ideological pillars of the Nazi regime, including exclusionary folk community thinking (*Volksgemeinschaftsdenken*) and social racism. He also stressed the cooperation of the local German population and the state institutions in such ideological thinking and the persecution of the so called “a-socials.” He then argued that a shared resolution would pay tribute to the victims and their descendants, “as a clear sign against hatred and group-focused enmity. Back then as well as today. As a sign against anyone calling for a final closure on the coming to terms with National Socialism.” Grundl was the only speaker who made a direct reference to the increase in violence against minorities today. He concluded with a statement made also by other speakers, that “no one was rightfully in the concentration camp,” and criticized the AfD for their call for a case-by-case analysis as evidence that the AfD’s mindset is closer to the logic of the perpetrators than to the victims’.

The last speaker in the debate, Dr. Volker Ulrich of the CDU/CSU, stressed that this debate was important to reinstate a voice and face to those victims of the Nazi regime who have been neglected and stigmatized. At the same time, he stressed the absolute singularity of the Holocaust: “There must be no relativization of the absolute guilt of the Holocaust. Of the genocide of the Jewesses and Jews and the Sinti and Roma people. And each victim group deserves its own distinct consideration.” He argued that victims should not be “played out against each other” as the AfD attempt to do, and called the AfD hypocrites for their connection to the extreme right wing, Thuringian party head Björn Höcke, who had called for a “remembrance political U-turn” (*“erinnerungspolitische Wende”*). He stated that most German citizens want to work through the past and emphasized the importance of further funding for commemorative institutions and civil society organizations who contribute to this effort. He concluded with a classical conservative reference: the resolution discussed here is important to pay respect to Germany’s constitution, which developed out of the experiences of the Nazi past.

We see in this discussion how German memory culture is being expanded to include more victim groups. The official recognition of those the Nazis defined as “a-socials” and “professional criminals” and the commitment to their commemoration and to paying reparations is particularly remarkable because it points to the way German memory culture is increasingly recognizing victims of the Nazis that have been marginalized and stigmatized until very recently. Yet this expansion of German memory culture is happening without diminishing the unique status the Holocaust has in German public discourse and identity, but rather through building on this memory to extend recognition to other victim groups. Here too, we also see how the AfD, on the one hand, accepts the general framework of Nazi criminality and the need to grant recognition to its victims, and at the same time attempts to minimize this recognition – and through it the expansion of German memory culture – through its reservations. It is also remarkable that the AfD does this by manipulating Holocaust memory: namely by claiming that collective recognition and reparations means relativization of the Holocaust and the diminishing of its unique status.

Yet the challenge to this expansion of German memory culture does not come only from the AfD. Surprisingly almost none of the national newspapers examined in this study covered this parliamentary discussion. Only the leftist *taz* published one article a day before it took place, in which the author strongly supported the decision to recognize the formerly marginalized victim group and criticized the reservations by the AfD and some voices in the CDU.³³⁶ Further articles during that week consisted of broader essays on German memorial culture – without explicitly taking up the recognition of the “a-socials” – and some follow-up articles on Holocaust Memorial Day and the discussion around the Jewish Museum in Berlin. It could be that the parliamentary debate was overshadowed by debates over the anniversary of the bombing of Dresden. Be that as it may, it seems to indicate that the recognition of these marginalized victim groups still attracts much less attention among the German public.

The BDS debate

On May 17, 2019, the Bundestag accepted a joint motion by CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, and the Green party entitled “resolutely oppose the BDS movement – fight antisemitism.” BDS stands for “Boycott, Disinvestment, Sanctions” and calls for a boycott of Israeli goods and a cessation of investments in Israel. The BDS movement demands an end to the occupation of the West Bank, the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem, full equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and a right of return to Israel for Palestinian refugees and their descendants.

The Bundestag resolution states: “The German Bundestag condemns all antisemitic statements and attacks, which are formulated as supposed criticism of the policy of the State of Israel, but are in fact expressions of hatred towards Jewish people and their religion, and will resolutely oppose them.” The resolution condemns the BDS campaign and the call for boycott of Israeli goods, companies, scientists, artists and athletes; and declares that no events by organizations that express antisemitic views or questions Israel’s right to exist are to be held in facilities under federal administration,

336 Kevin Culina, “[Nicht länger 'asozial'](#),” *taz*, December 2, 2020.

and no organization that question Israel's right to exist should be financially supported, nor should projects that call for a boycott of Israel or that actively support the BDS movement. States, cities, and municipalities are called upon to join this stance.³³⁷ As parliament's scientific services made clear in 2020, the resolution provides no legal basis for restrictions. The motion was criticised in advance. A letter by 240 Jewish and Israeli academics opposing the resolution received considerable attention.

Die Linke and AfD each submitted an alternative motion. "Condemn BDS Movement – Protect the Existence of the State of Israel," submitted by the AfD proposed a ban on the BDS movement in Germany and the cessation of all federal funds to groups that are part of the movement. This was to apply particularly to financial support for BDS-related NGOs by party-affiliated foundations. Die Linke's motion, "Reject BDS Movement – Promote Peaceful Solution in the Middle East," rejects the BDS movement, but aims to promote voices of the Israeli left and civil society that argue for a two-state solution. The motions of the AfD and Die Linke were only supported by their own parliamentary groups. The AfD abstained in the vote on the joint proposal of the other parties. Most Die Linke members rejected the majority motion, and some members chose abstention. The majority of the Grüne party voted in favor, some abstained, and some voted against. Before the vote, a discussion was held in parliament.³³⁸

Several speakers referred to the historic responsibility that arose from the Holocaust to show solidarity with Israel. Sebastian Brehm (CDU) stated that "Germany bears a historical responsibility that is part of Germany's justification as a state [*Staatsräson*]." Bijan Djir-Sarai (FDP) noted that not accepting antisemitism was both "a question of Germany's historical responsibility" and "a question of dignity and decency."³³⁹ Axel Müller (CDU) spoke of the "infinite responsibility resulting from our history," which "requires us to refrain from and prevent anything that is antisemitic or even gives the impression that it could become antisemitic."³⁴⁰ Djir-Sarai also emphasized that "Israel is the only state in the Middle East that upholds democracy,"³⁴¹ and Omid Nouripour (Grünen) similarly stated: "We are on the side of democrats everywhere and, of course, also on the side of those in Israel."³⁴² Some Bundestag members also drew parallels between the BDS movement and Nazi actions toward Jews. Christian Lange (SPD) said the "Boycott Israel" signs held by BDS activists outside department stores are "indeed reminiscent of Germany's darkest times."³⁴³ Djir-Sarai likewise stated that some

337 [Deutscher Bundestag: Drucksache 19/10191 – Antrag: Antrag der Fraktionen CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP und BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN: Der BDS-Bewegung entschlossen entgegentreten – Antisemitismus bekämpfen – May 15, 2019, 2.](#)

338 Debate on the "Boycott Divestment Sanctions"-Movement (BDS) at the German Bundestag, May 17, 2019, [Bundestag Plenary protocol 19/102.](#)

339 Ibid., 12485.

340 Ibid., 12482.

341 Ibid., 12485.

342 Ibid., 12487.

343 Ibid., 12484.

of the BDS campaigns “are reminiscent of the darkest times in our history.”³⁴⁴ The AfD was more explicit by citing Henrik M. Broder, a well-known commentator and author who made a drastic shift from the left to the right during his career: “BDS supporters are preparing the Final Solution to the Jewish Question – this time in the Middle East.”³⁴⁵

A particular object of concern was the BDS movement’s boycott of the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC), which was held in the same week. Moreover, BDS activists changed the emblem of the competition, adding barbed wire and SS symbols dividing the heart in the middle. Referring to this action, Djir-Sarai stated: “We cannot and must not accept such clear signs of antisemitism in Germany.”³⁴⁶ Nouripour argued that boycotting an event of international understanding speaks volumes about the character of the BDS movement. About the SS symbols he added: “This kind of equating of Israeli politics with the crimes that existed under the Nazis against Jews [...] goes well beyond [legitimate] criticism of the Israeli government. That is simply cynical and inhuman.”³⁴⁷ Braun said the BDS movement uses words for the ESC boycott that are “fatally reminiscent of the Third Reich. This is pure leftist hostility to Jews.”³⁴⁸

Here too, we see how closely linked the discourse on antisemitism is with the discourse on the Holocaust. Not only do speakers from across the political spectrum see a unique German obligation that emanates from the Holocaust to fight any form of contemporary antisemitism, but some also draw parallels between the BDS movement and the Nazis. The AfD’s particular bluntness in drawing these parallels serves to support their emphasis on left wing and Islamic forms of antisemitism and to position themselves as friends of Israel and thus distance themselves from accusations of antisemitism. As Jürgen Braun (AfD) put it, the AfD is “the party of the friends of Israel in this parliament,”³⁴⁹ and “antisemitism today comes from the left, and it comes from Islam.”³⁵⁰ Braun also argued that the German Federal Government “still votes in the UN with the Jew-haters of this world against Israel.”³⁵¹ However, Heike Hänsel (Linke) cited the President of the Central Council of Jews: “One does not need false friends like that.”³⁵² Nouripour (Greens) similarly claimed that “it is more than transparent that with this motion and with this rhetoric you are actually only trying to blur the shabby way in which you deal with the darkest times of our history.”³⁵³

344 Ibid., 12485.

345 Ibid., 12483.

346 Ibid., 12485.

347 Ibid., 12486-87.

348 Ibid., 12483.

349 Ibid.

350 Ibid.

351 Ibid., 12483.

352 Ibid., 12485-12486.

353 Ibid., 12487.

Opinions in the analyzed media about the resolution differed from the positions taken by the Bundestag members. Overall, the resolution was judged as counterproductive. The *taz* stated that discussions about the conflict in the Middle East are made harder by the resolution and that it might allow supporters of the Israeli right to put pressure on German aid organisations abroad.³⁵⁴ Furthermore, the “panic” around the BDS movement distracts from the real antisemitic threat: neo-Nazis.³⁵⁵ The *taz* published an article about the criticism of 240 Jewish and Israeli academics of the Bundestag resolution. This article became a subject of a controversy related to the Jewish Museum Berlin (JMB). Without the director’s knowledge, the museum’s press office recommended reading the *taz* article under the hashtag #mustread. The tweet quoted from the letter but without the quotation marks: “The parliamentarians’ decision does not help in the fight against antisemitism.” In this way, the tweet was understood as an inappropriate expression of the museum’s view. The tweet was criticized by the Israeli ambassadors to Germany and the U.S., as well as the Central Council of Jews in Germany. The Council stated in a tweet that the Jewish Museum seemed to be “completely out of control” and asked whether the designation “Jewish” was still appropriate for the museum.³⁵⁶ In June 2019, the director of the museum, Peter Schäfer, resigned.

The *FAZ* considered the resolution to be ineffective: a report written in December 2020 noted that through the disinvitation of members of various Israeli-Palestinian dialogue groups to an event organized by the Bavarian branch of the Protestant Academy, “and other intimidation, disinvitations and slurs, the fight against BDS has brought about a much more effective boycott against Jews than BDS itself could ever have done.”³⁵⁷ The *FAZ* was concerned that the parliament gave the AfD the opportunity to present itself as the party of “saviours of Jews.”³⁵⁸ Yet the *FAZ* also published an article by Anna Prizkau, who welcomed action being taken against antisemitism instead of ritualised repetition of phrases, and stated that the criticism is coming from places in the world where antisemitism is not as strong a threat for Jews as it is in Germany.³⁵⁹

The *SZ* published different perspectives but overall seemed to welcome the resolution: “The Bundestag’s decision will not silence the calls for a boycott. No one expects it to. The decisive factor is that the red line remains visible.”³⁶⁰ It also published an interview with the German Jewish historian Oren Osterer, in which he pointed to the fact that the effects of BDS are felt differently in Germany and stated that the line is drawn when the existence of the state of Israel is questioned.³⁶¹ Another *SZ* author stated: “Whoever wants to win [immigrants] over to Germany’s special responsibility for

354 Stefan Reinecke, “[Die Erstaunlichkeit des Diskurses](#),” *taz*, May 17, 2019.

355 Barry Trachtenberg, “[Künstliches Fieber, echter Hass](#),” *taz*, October 20, 2019.

356 Thorsten Schmitz, “[Das Jüdische Museum scheint gänzlich außer Kontrolle geraten zu sein](#),” *SZ*, June 14, 2019.

357 Hanno Lowey, “[Boykott gegen Boykott](#),” *FAZ*, October 21, 2019.

358 Livia Gerster, “[Das nützt der AfD, Frankfurter Allgemeine SonntagsZeitung](#),” *FAZ* (20), May 19, 2019, 8.

359 Anna Prizkau, “[‘Nie wieder’ BDS und Chaos](#),” *Frankfurter Allgemeine SonntagsZeitung*, June 30, 2019, 38.

360 Daniel Brössler, “[Die rote Linie](#),” *SZ*, May 17, 2019.

361 Joachim Käppner and Ronen Steinke, “[Das ist pures Ressentiment](#),” *SZ*, June 2, 2019.

Israel must remain open to the pain of everyone.”³⁶² The *SZ* took particular interest in the *Initiative GG 5.3 Weltoffenheit*. This initiative by public cultural and scientific institutions in Germany spoke out for the freedom of art and science, research and teaching, referencing the corresponding article No. 5.3 of the German constitution. It opposed the BDS movement as well as the possibility of political abuse of the accusations of antisemitism, which they identified in the Bundestag resolution on BDS. The *SZ* interviewed Thomas Oberender, Artistic Director of the Berliner art festival and supporter of the *Initiative GG 5.3 Weltoffenheit*. About the Jewish Museum Berlin, the *SZ* wrote: “No one should control and discipline museum directors.”³⁶³

The *Die Zeit* judged the BDS resolution to be counter-productive in the fight against antisemitism. It accused the resolution of creating “a climate of legal uncertainty,” leading to institutions having to think less about “the quality of a project, but rather about the political stance of those involved in the Middle East conflict.” Finally, “we should take the will of the institutions united in this initiative seriously to keep the spaces open for a democratic and also self-critical debate.” *Die Zeit* also argued: “It is worse to call someone an antisemite than to be one.”³⁶⁴ Yet *Die Zeit* also published an interview with Berlin’s Senator of the Interior Andreas Geisel, who called the BDS movement antisemitic.³⁶⁵ The leftist *Junge Welt* published a number of calls protesting the BDS resolution. This included the “Bielefeld Initiative against the erosion of democratic rights,”³⁶⁶ as well as the “Ecumenical Declaration” supported by groups such as the Jewish Palestinian dialogue group Munich,³⁶⁷ and by *Initiative GG 5.3 Weltoffenheit*.³⁶⁸ Moreover, in 2020 the *JW* published an interview with the activist Aitak Barani, in which the demand for a “free Palestine from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea” was defended.³⁶⁹ Similarly, it published an interview with Wieland Hoban about “the defamation of solidarity with Palestine.”³⁷⁰ The rightist *Junge Freiheit* published mainly articles against BDS, for example a column on the Dutch BDS activist Wilhelm van Norren, accusing him of “consistent hypocrisy rather than consistent boycott,”³⁷¹ and a critique of Merkel’s defence of the Muslim-American politician Ilhan Omar, who supports BDS and was attacked by Donald Trump.³⁷² In July 2020, the *JF* published an article on the German historian Wolfgang Benz

362 Sonja Zekri, “[Öffnung zur Welt](#),” *SZ*, December 18, 2020.

363 Kia Vahland, “[Kulturinstitutionen vertragen keine Einmischung](#),” *SZ*, June 24, 2019.

364 Josef Joffe, “[Was würde Freud dazu sagen?](#)” *Die Zeit*, December 24, 2020.

365 Holger Stark, interview with Andreas Geisel, “[Sie stellen das Existenzrecht Israels in Frage](#),” *Die Zeit*, September 25, 2019.

366 “[Leichtfertiger Vorwurf](#),” *Junge Welt*, August 03, 2019.

367 “[Geschichtsfälschung](#),” *Junge Welt*, June 7, 2019.

368 “[Kultureinrichtungen: Antisemitismusvorwurf nicht missbrauchen](#),” *Junge Welt*, February 19, 2019.

369 John Lütten, Interview with Aitak Barani, “[Verharmlosung des realen Antisemitismus](#),” *Junge Welt*, November 11, 2020.

370 Emre Sahin, “[Sie unterstellen auch jüdischen Menschen Antisemitismus](#),” *Junge Welt*, June 3, 2021.

371 Thorsten Brückner, “[Mit israelischem Antrieb für die Freiheit Palästinas](#),” *Junge Freiheit*, February 19, 2019.

372 Patriotismus-Debatte, “[Merkel unterstützt Trump-Gegnerinnen](#),” *JF-Online*, July 19, 2019.

– one of the most influential scholars of antisemitism in Germany – and his support for the protest letter to Angela Merkel on this issue, which he expressed in a radio interview with DLF.³⁷³ Here, it seems, the right-wing *JF* welcomed the opportunity to criticize Merkel and the German government.

When examining the public discourse around HMDs and the Halle shooting attack, we found a broad consensus on the main pillars of German memory culture: the obligation to remember and to take responsibility for the crimes of the Nazis; to preserve and strengthen German constitutional democracy; to protect Jewish life in Germany and to stand by Israel. When it comes to the BDS resolution, this consensus seems to have somewhat cracked: while there was broad agreement among representatives of the different parties that BDS should be condemned, there was more hesitance as to criminalizing the movement or to dub it unequivocally antisemitic. Media outlets expressed even more reservations about the resolution as counter-productive and as faulty on grounds of freedom of speech. The tension we find here can be seen as twofold: while antisemitism on the right is perceived as more straightforward, the precise line where positions critical of the State of Israel become antisemitic is less clear to speakers and writers. The broader tension is between the two pillars of German memory culture: on the one hand the obligation to protect Jewish life and to stand by Israel, on the other hand the commitment to constitutional democracy. The responses to the BDS resolution indicate that for the centre-liberal and leftist camps, in particular, BDS might be morally wrong and should be fought against in the name of the German obligation to Jews and to Israel, but taking legal measures against it possibly harms this very commitment and moreover, is at loggerheads with the democratic commitment to freedom of speech. This tension was further exacerbated in what became a kind of a follow-up to the debate over the BDS resolution: the Mbembe affair.

The Mbembe affair

Achille Mbembe is a historian, philosopher, and an important theorist of postcolonialism. In August 2020, Mbembe was invited to speak at the *Ruhrtriennale* art festival. Eventually, the festival was cancelled due to the Covid pandemic. Among others, the federal antisemitism commissioner, Felix Klein criticised the invitation in light of what he claimed to be relativization of the Holocaust and antisemitism in Mbembe's harsh statements against Israel in his writings and his alleged support for the BDS movement.³⁷⁴ Klein's accusations were met with much protest in Germany and abroad. In an open letter to the Interior minister, Jewish scholars and artists from Israel and elsewhere called on Seehofer to replace Klein "following his shameful attack on Prof. Achille Mbembe."³⁷⁵ In July 2020, more than 60 Israeli and German academics signed an open letter addressed to the Chancellor,

373 "[Legitime Israelkritik: Historiker Benz verteidigt offenen Brief an Merkel](#)," *Junge Freiheit*, July 30, 2020.

374 For example see: "[Schwere Vorwürfe und Streit um einige Textpassagen](#)," René Aguigah interviewing Felix Klein and Andrea Gerk, April 21, 2020, *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*.

375 Gadi Algazi et al., "[Aufruf Felix Klein als Beauftragten der Bundesregierung für den Kampf gegen Antisemitismus zu ersetzen](#)," April 30, 2020.

which condemned “the inflationary, factually unfounded and legally unsubstantiated use of the term antisemitism, which is aimed at suppressing legitimate criticism of the Israeli government policy.”³⁷⁶

This controversy took place mainly in the media outlets. The *SZ* did not see a problem with Mbembe’s texts and his relation to BDS. In his *SZ* article, “Brilliant thinker antagonized now,” Jörg Häntzschel describes Stefanie Carp, the director of the *Ruhrtriennale* as the main target of criticism, as she was accused before of inviting BDS supporters. Häntzschel stressed that Mbembe questioned neither Israel’s right to exist nor the singularity of the Holocaust.³⁷⁷ Furthermore, the *SZ* pointed to problems concerning the IHRA definition of antisemitism adopted by the German government and described the leftist intellectuals as being under attack: “All we see is that the Bundestag resolution is being used in a way that is questionable, even from a legal point of view, to further the processes of exclusion, to publicly reprimand leftist and postcolonial intellectuals, and to suppress accounts of Israel’s history that deviate from the official narrative.”³⁷⁸ *Taz* columnist Dominic Johnson also defended Mbembe. “His train of thought is universalistic,” he argued against the accusations of Holocaust relativization, “he constantly compares everything with everything.” Johnson further argued that the “the fight against antisemitism is misused to eliminate a globally recognised anti-colonial voice from Africa.”³⁷⁹

The Berlin based Israeli writer Ze’ev Avrahami argued in the *taz* to the contrary, that Mbembe did support BDS and claimed that discussing the definition of antisemitism is absurd in times of rising antisemitism. Similarly, according to *FAZ* columnist Jürgen Kaube, there were “a few too many BDS sympathizers in his footnotes” to believe Mbembe’s statement that he had no relation to the BDS movement. Kaube identified at least antisemitic undertones in Mbembe’s publications and argued that some cultural institutions do not check who they are declaring to be a “great figure” or even “moral authority.”³⁸⁰ In the *FAZ*, Patrick Bahrens also pointed to the contradictions between Mbembe’s official rejection of BDS in the German media and the statements he made in his writings. *Die Zeit* columnist Ijoma Mangold criticised Mbembe’s “rhetoric of moral maximalism” and argued there was a clear connection to the BDS movement: “Yet Mbembe, in his relentless anti-liberalism, is representative of an entire political-academic milieu in which, not coincidentally, the BDS movement enjoys great popularity.” Mangold remained optimistic that the debate around Mbembe “will sharpen arguments and contexts and sort out phrases without fundamentally questioning Mbembe’s great contribution to the history of racism.”³⁸¹

376 Katjun Amirpur et al., “[Offener Brief an Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel](#),” July 24, 2020.

377 Jörg Häntzschel Brillianter, “[Denker gerade angefeindet](#),” *SZ*, April 28, 2020.

378 Joseph Croitoru, “[Was ist Antisemitismus](#),” *SZ*, July 20, 2020.

379 Dominc Johnson, “[Zum Schweigen gebracht](#),” *taz*, May 3, 2020.

380 Jürgen Kaube, “[Alles in einem Topf](#),” *FAZ*, April 20, 2020.

381 Ijoma Mangold, “[Wie rassistisch ist der Westen?](#)” *Die Zeit*, April 29, 2020.

In April 2020, *Die Zeit* published Mbembe's reply to his critics. In his article, "Fixing the world," Mbembe stated that the accusations against him and others are not helping the fight against antisemitism.³⁸² The *taz* also published a "Letter to the Germans" by Mbembe in which he explained his ideas. In a guest article for the *taz*, the author Daniel Bax voiced his concern that "Germany's cultural life is in danger of being impoverished by the anti-BDS hysteria. Local intellectuals and artists should finally take a clear stand against it."³⁸³

The far right and far left were the harshest in their interventions. The leftist *Junge Welt* called Felix Klein "an ignorant fool" and, in line with the *Junge Welt's* critique of the state, explained that Klein's lack of decency, reason and knowledge was precisely what the German state needed to achieve its goals.³⁸⁴ It also expressed its support for Palestinians in the name of German responsibility for the Holocaust: "Our responsibility for the Holocaust extends to the present, not only to the state in which the survivors found refuge, but also to the Palestinians who gave way to that refuge."³⁸⁵ The *Junge Freiheit*, in sharp contrast, accused: "What does Mbembe have to offer Europeans in the name of Africa besides population explosion, corruption, lack of statehood, hostility to whites as in the 'rainbow nation' of South Africa?"³⁸⁶

Here we already see the additional complication the Mbembe affair posed to German memory culture: as a prominent voice for a post-colonial perspective that seeks recognition of the racist legacy that underpinned European colonialism, accusing Mbembe of antisemitism touched a sensitive nerve for many. For some, it was a justified response to a concerning tendency of postcolonial studies. Felix Klein explained his perspective in *Die Zeit*:

I have touched on a complex of topics that have been talked about too little in recent years, and too little internationally. Namely, the question of the relationship of postcolonial studies to antisemitism. Obviously, some of these theories collide with our culture of memory, which I consider an achievement. It may be that people in other countries are less sensitive to this, but something that is wrong from a German perspective does not become right just because it comes from outside. And I should be allowed to raise this issue.³⁸⁷

For others, it was an overreach of German dominant memory culture, to a point where it exposed its own blind spots and even racism. Ralf Michaels, for example, argued in a guest column in the *FAZ*: "If our German identity makes it impossible for us to engage in dialogue with postcolonial theory, we must ask ourselves whether we have really learned the lesson of the Holocaust." He explained

382 Achille Mbembe, "[Die Welt reparieren](#)," *De Zeit*, April 25, 2020.

383 Daniel Bax, "[Die Logik des Verdachts](#)," May 18, 2020.

384 Arnold Schölzel, "[Der Fall Felix Klein](#)," *Junge Welt*, May 9, 2020.

385 Norman Paech, "[Boykott und Erinnerung](#)," *Junge Welt*, June 24, 2020.

386 Thorsten Hinz, "[Widersprüche und Fallstricke](#)," *Junge Freiheit*, May 19, 2020.

387 Interview with Felix Klein by Adam Soboczynski, "[Für eine Entschuldigung sehe ich keinen Anlass](#)," *Die Zeit*, May 19, 2020.

further: “The criticism starts with the specific responsibility of the Germans for the Holocaust and postulates a resulting specific German view, a German narrative, a German identity, and a German responsibility. It ignores the particular origin of this view and makes a universalism out of it.” Michaels concluded that “one should not just talk about Mbembe, but with him (and others), instead of tying his participation to preconditions of discourse that already presuppose what is to be proven.”³⁸⁸ Sonja Zerki wrote in the *SZ* in the same spirit and quoted from Mbembe a sentence that she understands to “go to the heart of the German controversy”: “I respect German taboos, but they are not the taboos of everyone else in the world. And the same is true of German guilt.” Irit Dekel stated in *Die Zeit*: “who in Germany is even recognized as entitled to speak publicly about Germany’s colonial, racist and antisemitic heritage?” She argued that the white, male, and Christian majority in Germany claims “interpretive sovereignty” over the definition of antisemitism. Dekel claimed further that the accusation of antisemitism has become “an instrument to silence leftist and marginalized positions.”³⁸⁹ As one can see, the Mbembe affair indeed struck at the heart of German memory culture. The extent to which it did that, however, was fully revealed only with what came to be known as *Historikerstreit 2.0*.

Historikerstreit 2.0?

In hindsight, the BDS debate and the Mbembe affair were but the beginning of a series of debates about the memory of the Holocaust and its relation to various themes crucial to German identity. It brought many to define these debates as *Historikerstreit 2.0*, in reference to the 1986 *Historikerstreit*, when prominent intellectuals and historians debated the call to “historicize” the Holocaust and Ernst Nolte’s relativization of the Holocaust. However, while the current discussion also concerns the question of the uniqueness of the Holocaust and its implications for German identity, the issues at stake are remarkably different: Germany’s colonial legacy, its attitude towards Israel, antisemitism and the limits of critique of Israel, and Germany’s treatment of non-white citizens, particularly Muslims of immigrant background.³⁹⁰

In March 2021, Michael Rothberg’s book, *Multidirectional Memory*, was published in German for the first time. Although the translation appeared twelve years after it was originally published (2009), it sparked a significant controversy. In his book, Rothberg argues that collective memory is not a zero-sum game, where the articulation of the collective memory of one group in the public sphere must come at the expense of the memory of another. Instead, collective memory should be understood as multi-directional, namely as “subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing and borrowing” (2009, 2). Much of what he focuses on is the way memories of colonialism and slavery, rather than competing with the memory of the Holocaust for presence in the public sphere, have been thought of together with the Holocaust by intellectuals and activists who have shed light on the links and commonalities between them, as well as used the widespread recognition the Holocaust

388 Ralf Michaels, “[Deutschstunde für alle Welt](#),” *FAZ*, June 7, 2020.

389 Irit Dekel, “[Perfides Ablenkungsmanöver](#),” *Die Zeit*, October 7, 2020.

390 The many mentions of the relations between the Holocaust and colonialism on social media, as detailed in the chapter on Holocaust memory on social media in this report, testify to the impact it had on the German public.

has received as a platform to invoke and demand recognition for their own historical and present victimhood. While Rothberg does not question the singular aspects of the Holocaust in his book, his arguments were seen by many in Germany as relativizing the Holocaust and equating it with crimes like colonialism and slavery, and as a continuation of the historian Jürgen Zimmerer's book, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz?*, which argues that the genocide the Germans perpetrated against the Herero and the Nama in Namibia in the early twentieth century – and more broadly German colonialism – has important links to the Holocaust.

The debate intensified significantly when A. Dirk Moses, an Australian historian and a genocide scholar, published an article entitled “The German Catechism” in the online magazine *Geschichte der Gegenwart* in May 2021.³⁹¹ Moses begins his essay with the Mbembe affair and the controversies around Rothberg's and Zimmerer's books, and points out that the kind of relations they draw between the Holocaust and German or European colonialism more generally, have been explored by scholars for several decades now, and that in that sense the arguments against Rothberg and Zimmerer go against the grain of quite extensive scholarship. Since the arguments are anything but new, argues Moses, what explains the vehemence with which Rothberg and Zimmerer were attacked is the fact that they were perceived as a kind of heresy against a well established “German Catechism,” which consists of five main elements. First, the uniqueness of the Holocaust as distinct from any other genocide, supposedly because it was the only time in history where an entire people was persecuted and exterminated purely based on ideological grounds, whereas other genocides were carried out in ultimately a limited way and due to pragmatic concerns. Second, the Holocaust was a civilizational rupture, a total break with what came before, and as such the obligations incurred from it are the moral foundations of the new German nation. Third, Germany therefore has a special obligation to protect the Jews in Germany as well as Israel. Fourth, antisemitism is a unique prejudice, it is unlike other forms of racism. Fifth, anti-Zionism is antisemitism.

The result, argues Moses, is that in Germany the Holocaust has been sacralized to the point where there is no space for recognition of other genocides, first and foremost victims of colonial genocides perpetrated by Germany itself. Furthermore, the obligation to protect Israel manifests in the adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism, and the condemnation of the Palestinian BDS movement and its Jewish supporters as antisemitic and even as a form of “new” Nazism, as well as failing to draw the right “lessons” from the Holocaust or to remember it “correctly”; and extreme right wing movements and parties like AfD accommodating themselves to the “catechism” to make themselves acceptable to the German public by rejecting antisemitism, supporting Israel and accusing Muslim immigrants as exporters of antisemitism to Germany. In short, what was a more limited set of issues and concerns in each of the previous public controversies around Mbembe, Rothberg, Zimmerer, and the BDS movement, became in Moses' essay different aspects of the same hegemonic memory culture in Germany, which is based on a specific – and according to Moses flawed – understanding of the Holocaust and constitutes the very heart of post-war German national identity. Naturally, it added much fuel to an already heated debate.

391 A. Dirk Moses, “[The German Catechism](#),” *Geschichte der Gegenwart*, May 23, 2021.

For many writers, the conflict in the Middle East is at the heart of the debate, and Moses, Rothberg and Mbembe were ultimately aiming to change the discourse about the Holocaust in a way that allows harsh criticism of Israel without being accused of antisemitism. In a guest column for the *FAZ*, the finance minister of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Mathias Brodtkorb argued that the denial of the singularity of the Holocaust presents a weapon in a conflict about politics and the power of interpretation, and that Moses and his colleagues were working towards an end of the stigmatization of boycott calls against Israel.³⁹² The *taz* columnist Jan Feddersen similarly contended that Rothberg's and Zimmerer's call for a change in memory culture "is also about the permission to finally criticize Israel and its policies [...] without being considered anti-Jewish."³⁹³ The *taz* columnist Peter Ullrich also claimed the Middle East to be the actual subject of the conflict, yet "its [the conflict's] interpretation, is far too ambivalent to permit simple positioning."³⁹⁴

Some writers criticized specific aspects of Moses' claims. *Die Zeit* columnist Thomas Schmidt, for example, disagreed with Moses that the dominant Holocaust memory was a top-down state project: "Remembering is supported by the population and is by no means indoctrinated."³⁹⁵ For others, the entire affair again raised concerns about the inclinations of postcolonial studies.³⁹⁶ An article in the *taz*, for example, argued that postcolonial theorists were "mixing everything with everything and thus relativising" the Holocaust. Furthermore, the author argued, "Multidirectional, non-competitive remembering would also be possible with the recognition of the unprecedented nature of the Shoah – without lapsing into victim competitions, mythologizing [...] or abstractions."³⁹⁷ Maxim Biller wondered in *Die Zeit*: "Could it perhaps be [...] that the unquestioned protégés of Moses & Co., that the damned and persecuted of this earth, who are, after all, everything but Jews, would prefer a Holocaust without Jews [...] just like their post-colonial and thoroughly white patrons or, earlier, the Eastern Bloc communists?" And if they were successful with that, "would they at least then finally stop constantly running it through their comparison machine?"³⁹⁸

The historian Norbert Frei argued in *SZ* that the usage of the term "*Historikerstreit* 2.0" targets the question of the "significance of the Holocaust in history and for the future of this country." He stated that the attention the Holocaust receives gets in the way of those studying colonial genocides after the Second World War. This attention "is now to be relativised [...] in order to make room for things that have received too little attention so far." Here Frei sees "the reverse parallel" to the first *Historikerstreit*.³⁹⁹

392 Mathias Brodtkorb, "[Wiederauflage eines erfundenen Konflikts](#)," *FAZ*, December 14, 2021.

393 Jan Feddersen, "[Das große Poltern](#)," *taz*, April 2, 2021.

394 Peter Ullrich, "[Suche nach Eindeutigkeit](#)," *taz*, May 5, 2020.

395 Thomas Schmidt, "[Ist der Rassismus etwa unüberwindbar?](#)" *Die Zeit*, July 22, 2021.

396 Thomas Thiel, "[Rollentausch in der Opferpyramide](#)," *FAZ*, August 31, 2021.

397 Tania Martini, "[Diffuse Erinnerung](#)," *taz*, March 5, 2021.

398 Maxim Biller, "[Die neuen Relativierer](#)," *Die Zeit*, September 4, 2021.

399 Norbert Frei, "[Was sie stört](#)," *SZ*, June 17, 2021.

In their response to their critics, Zimmerer and Rothberg pointed out that they do not deny the singular elements of the Holocaust, but that they also do not believe these singular aspects prevent comparative approaches to the history and memory of the Holocaust: “On the contrary, comparative perspectives that highlight similarities and differences offer the best chance of understanding what was singular about the Holocaust. And thus they offer the best chances for preventing genocides.”⁴⁰⁰ They further argued that the prohibition of any comparison detaches the Holocaust from history, prevents the study of important roots of the National Socialist crimes and diminishes the meaning of “never again,” because singular events cannot be repeated. In a guest article for *Die Zeit*, Rothberg stressed his belief that the memory of the Holocaust and colonialism are intertwined and there is a need to write more intertwined histories of memory instead of assuming their separateness. He further called for a rethinking of the relationship between memory and identity.⁴⁰¹ Moses explained in *Die Zeit* that he wanted to include the memory of other mass crimes in the German and European process of coming to terms with the past.⁴⁰²

The *FAZ*, *Die Zeit* and *taz* published several articles in support of this approach. Writing for the *FAZ*, Ulrike Jureit called it “completely absurd to taboo historical comparison as a method.” While it is important to recognise the difference between the Holocaust and colonial genocides, this does not mean that other crimes against humanity should be “played down or ignored.”⁴⁰³ The *taz* stressed the necessity of investigating the relations between Nazi and colonial crimes and their effects on societies in the present. Rejecting “the long-term interconnections and aftermath effects of antisemitism, anti-Roma, anti-Muslim racism and colonialism” as presented by Rothberg is inappropriate for the contemporary situation.⁴⁰⁴ The *taz* columnist Hanno Lowey reiterated Jürgen Habermas’ intervention: “Memory culture must evolve and include perspectives of people who came into our society. These perspectives include Germany’s relationship to Israel and need to be discussed in a universal context.”⁴⁰⁵ *Die Zeit* published an essay by Fabian Wolff, in which he argued:

Only if the Shoah is not understood as a hermetically sealed fact outside of any history, but as the most radical consequence of a violent segregation and subjugation, as part of historical processes that did not begin in 1933 and did not end in 1945 and which are not only about Jews and Germans, can the memory of it be the basis for Auschwitz never happening again. No matter for whom.⁴⁰⁶

400 Jürgen Zimmerer and Michael Rothberg, “[Enttabuisiert den Vergleich!](#)” *Die Zeit*, April 4, 2021.

401 Michael Rothberg, “[Der neue Historikerstreit bedarf einer anderen Richtung,](#)” *Die Zeit*, July 24, 2021.

402 A. Dirk Moses, “[Gedenkt endlich auch der Opfer kolonialer Gräueltaten!](#)” *Die Zeit*, July 17, 2021.

403 Ulrike Jureit, “[Vereinfacher am Werk,](#)” *FAZ*, July 12, 2021.

404 Regina Römhild, “[Imperiale Nostalgie,](#)” *taz*, October 9, 2021.

405 Hanno Lowey, “[Verstörende Erinnerungskultur,](#)” *taz*, October 17, 2021.

406 Fabian Wolff, “[Nur in Deutschland,](#)” *Die Zeit*, May 2, 2021.

Whatever position one takes on Moses' intervention, it portrays an interesting picture of "memory camps" that exist in Germany today, largely divided along the lines of right-centre-left of the political map, in which Holocaust memory is entangled with questions of immigration, Islam, national and civilizational identity, colonial legacy, racism, and attitudes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The responses to Moses' article seem to confirm this interpretation. One may go as far as to say that Holocaust memory in Germany today functions as a "cultural code" (Volkov 1978), namely one's view of how the Holocaust should be remembered tends to be a reflection of one's belonging to a specific camp on the political spectrum and its broader worldview. Holocaust memory in Germany, in other words, is becoming more diversified and conflictual. This speaks to broader transformations in Germany society, to which we turn in the conclusion.

2.4.4. Conclusion

In a way, the "*Historikerstreit* 2.0" debate comes full circle to present a significant challenge to the dominant memory culture in Germany. As we have seen in the analysis of the HMDs, the Halle shooting attack and the debate over the recognition of "a-socials" and "professional criminals," politicians from most parties and journalists from most newspapers commit themselves fully to several key aspects of Holocaust memory as it came to be understood in Germany in the last several decades: the responsibility to preserve and foster democracy and the rule of law; to stand by Israel and to protect Jewish life in Germany; to fight against antisemitism in all its forms and to promote human rights domestically and internationally; and, finally, to continue the "working through the past" and the acknowledgement of guilt and responsibility not only with regard to the Holocaust, but also concerning other mass atrocities committed by Nazi Germany.

Indeed, what we find in the analysis above is the *expansion* of this memory culture to include, first, the Roma and Sinti and then others. This is a process that has been taking place for a few decades now and is reflected in the way representatives of the parties in parliamentary debates treat the Nazi genocide against the Roma as unique among Nazi crimes, alongside the Holocaust.⁴⁰⁷ Second, the official recognition of those the Nazis defined as "a-socials" and "professional criminals" and the commitment to their commemoration and to paying reparations is another important expansion of German memory culture to be more inclusive and to recognize more victim groups that have been marginalized and stigmatized until very recently. This expansion of German memory culture is happening, as stressed above, without diminishing the unique status the Holocaust has in German public discourse and identity, but rather through building on this memory to extend recognition to other victim groups. We find here an attempt by German policy makers to strengthen contemporary German national identity and the idea that contemporary Germany is built on a solid moral foundation, with the obligation to make amends for Nazi crimes (to the extent that this is possible) at its core. The responses to the shooting attack in Halle, which were perceived across the board

407 Although not mentioned in the parliamentary discussions analyzed here, a similar process of gradual recognition took place regarding forced laborers as well as homosexuals and deserters from the Wehrmacht, two groups that were persecuted and killed by the NS state but were only officially rehabilitated in 2002. See: "[Genugtuung für verurteilte Wehrmachtsdeserteure](#)," Deutscher Bundestag, 2012.

as a “breach” of a fundamental promise – not just the promise to protect Jews in Germany, but the promise Germany *itself* constitutes – is another expression of this commitment.

Granted, the rise of the AfD poses a challenge to this memory culture, and one can see in our analysis how this challenge has to do not only with the rejection of the “politics of shame” which, according to the AfD, is promoted by mainstream parties in relation to the Holocaust, but also when it comes to its expansion to other victim groups, and similarly regarding taking responsibility for rhetoric and positions that might influence individuals to act violently against Jews and others. However, what emerges from our analysis is not only the complete rejection of the AfD positions by the other parties in Germany, but also that the AfD’s statements constantly provide *opportunities* for public figures – whether politicians or journalists – to distance themselves from such positions, to reiterate their commitment to the dominant memory culture and the values it represents, to position themselves as defenders of this memory culture and to expand it in the face of opposition from the AfD.

Yet once we recognize the strength of this commitment to “working through the past” in Germany when it comes to the Nazis, the question immediately arises: why it has been and remains significantly different when it comes to the recognition of German colonial legacy? One seemingly obvious answer that seems to be confirmed by virtually all sides of the “*Historikerstreit 2.0*” debate, is that it is not the colonial legacy as such, but rather the way arguments such as Zimmerer’s, Rothberg’s, Moses’ and others challenge the uniqueness/ singularity/ unprecedentedness of the Holocaust, whether by arguing for important continuities between German colonialism and the Holocaust or by explicitly claiming that the very notion of uniqueness should be dropped as a-historical and as diminishing the suffering of others.

Yet another, perhaps complementary explanation presents itself quite naturally from our analysis: German memory culture is focused on working through the *Nazi* past. Even when the position of far-right movements like the AfD that the Nazi era was but one episode of German history is completely rejected, it is rejected in the name of the abnormality of the Nazi era in German history, namely the recognition that Nazi Germany was so completely evil and criminal that one has to admit such crimes, to make amends to the victims and to distance oneself as much as possible from it. The German colonial legacy, in contrast, is part of the “normal” German history (as it is of other European states). It cannot be relegated to a specific period in which ideological fanatics managed to come to power in Germany, and then to gain the support of most Germans due to their successes in foreign and domestic policy against the background of an enormous economic crisis, a humiliating military defeat in WWI and a new and unstable political constellation. Instead, it happened during the high tide of German cultural and national pride.

Finally, and no less importantly, the kind of racism against people of colour as well as against “Slavic” populations that underpinned German colonial aspirations both in Africa and in Eastern Europe arguably persists in different and more subtle forms in current attitudes in Germany towards immigrants, particularly those of colour. These attitudes, one may argue, *include* treating German citizens of immigrant background as if they had to take on the memory culture that was already

created before them rather than as equal participators in shaping this very memory culture. They also arguably include treating these same groups as if they were the main source of antisemitism in Germany today.⁴⁰⁸

In other words, the “*Historikerstreit 2.0*” debate seems to pose a potentially much more fundamental challenge to German national identity, its memory culture, and its pride of coming to terms with the past, than either far-right movements and parties like the AfD or the natural challenge of passing on the contemporary memory culture to the next generations. It also seems to divide public figures and intellectuals much more, to speak to the younger generation’s sensibilities more powerfully, and to reflect the gradual transition of German society into a more multicultural one. For all these reasons, it can be expected to become an increasingly important feature of the public-political discourse about the Holocaust in Germany and a persisting “site of tension” in the shifting Holocaust memory in Germany.

408 On antisemitism in Muslim communities in Germany see, for example, Feldman 2018.

2.5. The Shifting Holocaust Memory in England⁴⁰⁹

2.5.1. Introduction: the evolution of Holocaust memory in Britain

The development of the memory of the Holocaust in Britain after 1945 was complex and irregular (Kushner 2017) and can be divided into four phases: silencing (1945–late 1907s); awareness (1970s–1990s); recognition (1990s–2000s with 1997 as a turning point); and domestication (2000s onwards).

Silence

Before the late 1970s any official memory of the Holocaust was very much silenced (Lawson 2017) or evaded (Stone 1999). For decades after WWII the memories of Nazi persecution and mass murder were kept alive by memory from below (Cesarani 2000), “vernacular memory” to use Bodnar’s term (1992). Holocaust commemoration and education were conducted mainly in the private domain and carried out by small groups of mostly Jewish activists and survivors (Kushner 2004). Despite the abundance of memoirs, historical research, films, and other mass media created and produced after the war (Cesarani and Sundquist 2011; Kushner 2004), the lack of interest – both public and governmental – during the immediate post-war period was related to British “reluctance” to designate the Holocaust to Jewish victims (Bloxham 2002, 46). British cultural engagement with the Holocaust was therefore impacted by changing political considerations of post-war Britain (Pearce 2019a), grounded in political considerations of issues related to the persecution of Jews, displaced persons, and justice.

Awareness

From the 1970s to the 1990s, greater interest in the Holocaust developed, stemming from domestic motivation towards multiculturalism and anti-racism (Kushner 2004). While the campaign to prosecute Nazi war criminals in the 1980s promoted awareness (Lawson 2017), the first significant instance of government action was the creation of the Holocaust Memorial Garden in Hyde Park in 1983, a culmination of efforts from within the Anglo-Jewish community (Cooke 1999). Additional events from 1983 onwards also demonstrate an increase in Holocaust activities. For instance, the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) helped organise an exhibition about the Holocaust and produced supplementary teaching materials for visiting school groups in 1983 (Pearce 2008) and in 1985 produced videos to help teachers with classroom discussions about the Holocaust (Russell 2005). British historians such as Martin Gilbert (1981, 1986), Tom Bower (1981), and Ian Kershaw (1985, 1987) produced significant monographs, contributing to the expanding engagement with the Holocaust. Additionally, the Imperial War Museum (IWM) displayed two temporary exhibitions during this time which diverged from previous perspectives of addressing Nazi actions (Bardgett 2004): *Resistance* (1984) and *Towards a New Europe* (1985). Finally, many television documentaries and commercial programmes about the Holocaust were aired (*Escape from Sobibor* is one example), and lively debates over controversial literary publications took place within British literary circles

409 This chapter is written by Tracy Adams.

(Pearce 2008). The realisation by the British Parliament and media in 1986 that war criminals might be living in Britain, triggered a vigorous debate and further broadened the public's interest, also deepening divergence in attitudes towards Thatcher's government. Finally, the establishment of the Holocaust Educational Trust (HET) in 1988 contributed to the more comprehensive engagement of British society with the Holocaust.

Recognition

In the 1990s heightened awareness of the Holocaust brought about significant developments in international Holocaust memory. In 1991, the Imperial War Museum (IWM) added *Belsen 1945* to the permanent exhibition on WWII, concentrating on the British liberation of the concentration camp (Kushner 2002). Also in 1991, the Holocaust became a mandatory subject in English schools (Pearce 2008) and the War Crimes Act was published, conferring jurisdiction on British courts to try people for war crimes committed in Nazi Germany or German-occupied territory. The 50th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising (1993) boosted further engagement with the memory of the Holocaust. Marking this occasion, the IWM displayed the first exhibition portraying the *Jewish* perspective of the Holocaust (Kushner 1994; Pearce 2008). *Schindler's List*, released in 1994, and viewed by over a quarter of the British population (Pearce 2008) largely contributed to the development of British Holocaust memory while, at the same time, substantially consigning Holocaust memory a universal status (Levy & Sznajder 2002). Notably, in 1995 Britain's first Holocaust memorial education centre was opened: Beth Shalom at Laxton in Nottinghamshire. Coming as a response to the vague Holocaust remembrance until that time, Beth Shalom's non-Jewish and non-governmental status emphasized universal educational objectives (Pearce 2008). 1995 also saw a revised national curriculum that named the Holocaust as one of the critical events of contemporary history, and in 1996, the then conservative government opened an investigation regarding allegations of British knowledge of Swiss collaboration with Nazi Germany (Pearce 2008).

1997 is a turning point in British Holocaust memory (Levene 2006; Pearce 2008, 2019b). Internally, the victory of New Labour created a political environment within which Holocaust memory could further develop, in line with its promise to pursue an "ethical" foreign policy (Levene 2006, 29). Externally, Holocaust memory was revitalised in light of the events in the Balkans and the Rwandan genocide, the larger context of the end of the Cold War and German reunification, alongside the establishment of the European Union. Britain assumed an increasingly dominant role in global memorialization efforts. This can be discerned from its role in the international Nazi Gold Conference (1997) held in London and as a founding member of the 1998 Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF) – since 2013 the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). Internationally, then, Britain assumed the status of an exemplar (Pearce 2008). This role was further enhanced in the Washington Conference on Holocaust-era Assets (1998), in which the British delegation proposed the creation of Holocaust Memorial Days (HMD) (Eizenstat 1999; Pearce 2008, 2019b).

Domestication

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Britain's Holocaust memory culture can be characterized by domestication.⁴¹⁰ Education and commemoration receive substantial resources, with the government working alongside and in partnership with NGOs such as the HET, the Anne Frank Educational Trust, Beth Shalom, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, and the Wiener Library (Cesarani 2000).

With the New Labour government's encouragement, Holocaust education was contextualized and linked to anti-racism, and used to reject discrimination and combat social injustice (Fox 1989; Pearce 2019a, 2019b; Pearce & Chapman 2017). The government's financial commitment to the Lessons from Auschwitz Project (LFA), with its flagship one-day visit to Auschwitz – in 2005 and then again in 2008 – massively enlarged the outreach of the program so that thousands of 16-18 year old students could take part in this experience (Pearce 2019a).⁴¹¹

In the field of commemoration, two enterprises – the Holocaust Memorial Day and the Imperial War Museum exhibition – serve to demonstrate the Labour government's "enthusiasm" for utilizing Holocaust memory for political exigencies (Pearce 2019a, 127). The HMD launched in the early 2000s was to be a national day to learn about and remember the Holocaust.⁴¹² Its objective was to "schematize social memory" of the Holocaust in Britain and this was reinforced through the establishment of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) in 2005. The HMDT constructed the Holocaust as "the exemplary case study of crimes against humanity" (Yuval-Davis & Silverman 2002, 114), performed to achieve "conformity and consensus" (Pearce 2019a, 126) and concurrently aligned around universal relevance (Cesarani 2002; Yuval-Davis & Silverman 2002). Almost simultaneously, the opening of the IWM Holocaust Exhibition reflected the changed status of Holocaust memory in Britain (Pearce 2019a). On the one hand, telling the story of the Nazi persecution of Jews undeniably contributed to public awareness (Pearce 2019a). Yet on the other hand, the exhibition primarily focused on representations of Britain and Britishness (Lawson 2003; Holtschneider 2020); thus, according to some, marginalizing and even objectifying Jews within the European experience (e.g., Kushner 2002).

In the 2010s, Britain's Holocaust memory culture took another turn. First, only weeks after the then Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition entered into government, it established the position of the United Kingdom Envoy for Post-Holocaust Issues. According to the terms of reference, the

410 The term "domestication" builds on Critchell's conceptualization according to which "this self-image, drawn from the domesticated narrative of the past and of Britain's perceived role within history, encourages a particular sense of entitlement to international leadership, particularly with regards to issues with moral or humanitarian implications" (2016, 16). Domestication also features in Lawson and Pearce's edited volume according to which "the history of Britain and the Holocaust is really a history that crosses borders; a history of refugees, migrants and transmigrants but it is a history that is often domesticated to fit extant national concerns" (2020, 26).

411 For a discussion on the structure and aims of Lessons from Auschwitz projects, see Richardson 2021.

412 The United Kingdom, House of Commons, [Holocaust Remembrance Day Bill, Sessional Papers 1998-99](#), Internet Publications.

envoy's role was to continue Britain's approach to international Holocaust politics established over the previous fifteen years, yet drive "a more coherent and strategic approach to HMG's efforts."⁴¹³ Second, in 2013, the British Association for Holocaust Studies (BAHS) was founded "in an effort to further the knowledge and teaching of the Holocaust in the United Kingdom."⁴¹⁴ Also, in 2013 the new national curriculum was published,⁴¹⁵ specifying the Holocaust as the only mandatory event to be learned within "challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world, 1901 to the present day," WWI, WWII, and the inter-war years were offered as possible examples (non-statutory). Third, the creation and launching of the Holocaust Commission in 2014 (first announced in 2013 at the HET's twenty-fifth-anniversary dinner by Prime Minister David Cameron) emphasizing the "sacred task" of commemoration,⁴¹⁶ to "make sure that here in Britain no one ever forgets what happened" (Cameron 2014). The decision to establish a new national memorial and learning centre, through public and private funding, in Westminster, next to Parliament, is also telling in terms of the prominence of the Holocaust in British consciousness and its linkage to British national identity (Critchell 2016; Pearce 2019a). This has since become a publicly contested issue (and planning permission has been denied), with criticism of the UKHMF's project mostly centred on the proposed location, the memorial's design, and how the government has handled the project at large (Pearce 2019a, 2020). Finally, in 2018 the Holocaust Exhibition and Learning Centre, based in Huddersfield, was opened and the Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre in Nottinghamshire also received further government funding. 2019 brought with it the IWM announcement of its plans to renew and greatly expand the existing Holocaust exhibition following a £5m grant from the Pears Foundation. In sum, from 2015 onwards Britain is at the forefront of Holocaust commemoration and education in terms of the prevalence of widespread education,⁴¹⁷ Holocaust museums and exhibitions, artistic and literary engagement, and academic research and debates (Kushner 2017).

2.5.2. Sources and methodology

This chapter examines the contemporary national-political public discourse in England regarding the Holocaust in relation to social and political issues, including, but not restricted to antisemitic discourses and criticism and delegitimization of the State of Israel. Four main discursive events were chosen as the framework through which to explore transformations in Holocaust memory: Holocaust Memorial Day; the public debate on the National Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre; public discussion regarding the rise in antisemitic incidents in England; and the heated debate over antisemitism in the Labour party. These discursive events are presented in conjunction with the ongoing debate on the adoption (or lack thereof) of the International Holocaust Remembrance

413 United Kingdom Envoy For Post-Holocaust Issues: [Terms of Reference](#).

414 Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Holocaust Memorial Days: An Overview of Remembrance and Education in the OSCE Region, 2020.

415 [National Curriculum in England: History Programmes of Study](#). Gov.UK. September 11, 2013.

416 For an extended discussion on the sacrality of the memorial, see Tollerton 2017.

417 For an extended discussion on teaching and learning about the Holocaust in the UK, see Foster 2020.

Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism (specifically by universities), British attitudes to minorities and migration, and Covid.

Three main sources comprise the data set: official speeches delivered on Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD), parliamentary debates, and several media outlets. These were chosen to give a comprehensive overview of public and political discussion, including both official and public debates and perspectives regarding the Holocaust, broadening the scope through which to understand how it is presented, constructed and used in various contexts.

All speeches and parliamentary debates made between 2019 and 2021 during Holocaust Memorial Day are included within the data set. This consists of seven HMD speeches given by various speakers in different contexts and three general debates that took place in the House of Commons. Data retrieval is based on the *GOV.UK* website, the official website that provides a single point of access to all government departments and other agencies and public bodies, and the UK Parliament website, the official website that provides access to all parliamentary debates.

In the context of parliamentary debates, the following pairs of keywords were used to narrow the scope of relevant texts and make sure that the included speeches relate to the specific themes at the centre of the research: Holocaust and memorial; Holocaust and education; Holocaust and antisemitism; Holocaust and Muslim; Holocaust and Islamophobia; Holocaust and immigration; Holocaust and migrant. This method resulted in a total of 51 parliamentary debates, from both the Houses of Lords and Commons, encompassing a wide range of topics and issues that in some way or another address the Holocaust.

Five media outlets were chosen for this research, covering a range of political views in British society: *The Daily Mail*, Britain's most right-wing mainstream paper; *The Sun*, one of Britain's most read tabloids and right wing; *The Times*, centrist with a rightist bent, although its audience sits at the middle of the left-right spectrum; *The Independent*, broadly centrist, albeit with a leftist bent; *The Guardian*, the most left-wing newspaper in the research's sample.

The *LexisNexis* Academic database was the primary source for retrieval for all media outlets. The one exception is *The Sun*, which could not be accessed through LexisNexis and whose data retrieval relied on its digital website. For all media outlets a keyword search was conducted using the same pairs as used in the parliamentary debates search: Holocaust and memorial; Holocaust and education; Holocaust and antisemitism; Holocaust and Muslim; Holocaust and Islamophobia; Holocaust and immigration; Holocaust and migrant. Since this search yielded a relatively limited number of texts, a second search was conducted using the following additional pairs of keywords: Holocaust and Israel; Holocaust and Palestine; Holocaust and Covid; Holocaust and "never again." Using this method, a total of 462 articles were retrieved with 144 articles from *The Guardian*, 69 from *The Independent*, 119 from *The Times*, 67 from *The Sun*, and 63 from *The Daily Mail*.

Qualitative discourse analysis was conducted on a total of 523 texts (see Table 3).

Table 3: Sample Composition: 2019-2021 texts

	HMD speeches and PD	Parliamentary Debates	Media articles	Total
Number of texts	10	51	462	523

2.5.3. Findings and analysis

Holocaust Memorial Day

Holocaust Memorial Days are the first discursive event examined and analysed in this research. During 2019-2021, seven speeches were delivered by various speakers (the British Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, the Secretary of State for the Home Department, the English Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Prince of Wales) and in different contexts (e.g., International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Yad Vashem, the OSCE Permanent Council) and three parliamentary debates took place (in 2019, 2020, and 2021). During this time frame, a total of forty articles appeared in the various media outlets.

As a national commemoration day, official speeches and parliamentary debates that take place on HMD constitute a testimonial to the official memory of the Holocaust – “state-sponsored memory,” in Olick’s terms (2016, 22). Perhaps expectedly, in the official speeches and the parliamentary debates, similar themes can be discerned, most prominent among them are the lessons that should be learned from the Holocaust and the British legacy of the Holocaust.⁴¹⁸

Uniqueness/Universality of the Holocaust and Lessons to be Learned

In the official HMD speeches, the Holocaust is presented as the most unique genocide in nature and scope, yet, at the same time, a genocide from which universal lessons can be learned. An example of this duality can be found in the 2020 HRH Prince of Wales Commemorates Lives Lost in Shoah speech, in which he says: “The scale of the evil was so great, the impact so profound, that it threatens to obscure the countless individual human stories of tragedy, loss and suffering of which it was

418 Interesting to note, although not prevalent in any way, are the two references made in HMD parliamentary debates to Muslim people who helped save Jews during the Holocaust. [The first reference is made during the 2019 HMD debate, by Conservative MP, Theresa Villiers](#): “The example that I want us to remember today is Albania. Following the German occupation, the Albanian population, in an extraordinary act of courage, refused to comply with Nazi orders to hand over a list of Jewish people living in their country. Albanian Government agencies provided many Jewish families with fake documentation to enable them to hide in the wider population [...] Albania, the only country in Europe with a Muslim majority, succeeded where others failed, and at the end of the war its Jewish population was larger than it had been at the start.” [The second reference was made by Labour MP, Charlotte Nicholas](#), in 2021: “I spoke in my speech last year of the incredible story of the Sarajevo Haggadah and Dervis Korkut, a Muslim man who is recognised by the Yad Vashem world Holocaust memorial centre as a righteous gentile to whom the Jewish people owe a huge debt.”

comprised.” Yet, at the same time, he states: “The Holocaust was an appalling Jewish tragedy, but it was also a universal human tragedy, and one which we compound if we do not heed its lessons.”⁴¹⁹

In several of the parliamentary debates, the recognition of the uniqueness of the Holocaust is accompanied by the inclusion of the suffering of other people besides the Jews. Consider the following statement made by Conservative MP Bob Stewart, in the 2019 HMD parliamentary debate: “The Holocaust is what happened to the Jews of Europe, but we should recall that the genocide that the Nazis inflicted on Europe took a great number of other people.”⁴²⁰

Occasionally the victimization of other groups is included as part of the Holocaust itself, for example in the following statement made by Conservative MP Daniel Kawczynski in 2020. Referring to MP Fabian Hamilton’s speech in parliament, he said the following: “He has referenced Poland on several occasions. I hope he will join me in remembering the millions of Poles who were killed during the Holocaust, many of whom, like a member of my family, Jan Kawczynski, were shot by the Germans for hiding their Jewish friends and neighbours.”⁴²¹

In HMD official speeches, the legacy of the Holocaust is the lesson of “never again,” which is then linked to the more recent genocides that took place since the end of WWII. In the speech given by the Secretary of State the Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP at the UK Commemorative Ceremony for Holocaust Memorial Day 2019, he said the following:

[...] as we honour the millions of victims of the Shoah today, we remember [...] A legacy that requires that we say “never again” we really mean it. Sadly, this is a lesson that we are still learning [...] 40 years ago, the Khmer Rouge claimed the lives of one quarter of the population through mass murder and starvation. 25 years ago, almost one million Rwandans were murdered in 100 days. And horror returned to our continent as we witnessed the murder of over 8,000 mostly Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica.⁴²²

Here, the lessons to be learned have yet to be achieved. This can be discerned through the list of more recent genocides that have taken place since the end of WWII (the Cambodian Genocide in 1975-1979, the Rwandan Genocide in 1994, and the Srebrenica massacre in 1995), all of which entailed systematic persecution and killing of targeted groups in society. Similarly, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, in his speech at the 2020 Holocaust Memorial Day service, discussed the imperative to learn from the lessons of the past in the face of recent genocides, saying the following: “As we resolutely proclaim ‘never again,’ it is right that we should also ask what happened to our resolve in the genocides that followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.”⁴²³

419 [“HRH Prince of Wales Commemorates Lives Lost in Shoah: Speech,”](#) Gov.UK, January 23, 2020.

420 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 653: Debated on January 24, 2019, Hansard.

421 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 670: Debated on January 23, 2020, Hansard.

422 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Gov.UK, January 28, 2019.

423 [PM Speech at the UK Commemorative Ceremony for Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s Speech at the Holocaust Memorial Day Service, Gov.UK, January 27, 2020.

In the parliamentary debates, HMD is also linked to present-day genocides. One such example is the following statement by Conservative MP, Sir Peter Bottomley, in 2019: “When we consider Holocausts that have taken place, not on the same intended scale as Mr. Hitler’s, but those involving Muslims in the former Yugoslavia, or what is now going on in some countries where oppressive regimes bully and beat people to death, we should reflect on how we can enforce a duty to protect on Governments, so that they cannot with impunity slay their own people and bully them, especially if people are picked out on grounds of race, colour or religion.”⁴²⁴

In this case, the Holocaust is discussed as one of the “Holocausts that have taken place,” substituted for “genocide.” It reflects a more general tendency in the parliamentary debates taking place during HMD to bring up the Holocaust in order to criticize current, present-day atrocities and to suggest updated government policy vis-à-vis these genocides. Thus, the agreed-on universality of the Holocaust is presented and discussed through its relation to the concerns of the present. Accordingly, in 2020 and 2021, the Uyghurs of China and the Rohingyas of Myanmar were brought into this mode of discourse. Consider the statement made by Dame Margaret Hodge, Labour, in the 2021 parliamentary debate on HMD: “[...] the Holocaust is not an isolated genocide. Today, Uyghurs and Rohingyas are living through the nightmare of persecution, segregation, imprisonment and murder.”⁴²⁵

To this extent, the debates that took place on HMD in parliament opened up the issue of the applicability of the lessons of the Holocaust in light of more current genocides, presenting a more complex picture of the legacy of Holocaust memory in England. In this context, some MPs explicitly point out the Muslim people that were targeted in such genocides, primarily referencing Srebrenica, but also the Rohingya Muslim group in Burma. For instance, in the 2021 HMD parliamentary debate, Conservative Robert Jenrick, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, made the following statement: “We remember [...] the millions of victims of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia; [...] the 8,000 Muslim men and boys who were murdered in Srebrenica.”⁴²⁶

This linkage between the lessons of the past and current present-day genocides and atrocities in different places in the world also exists in the media outlets, primarily through the Srebrenica massacre, and the ongoing Chinese repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Across all media outlets, albeit at varying frequency,⁴²⁷ the Holocaust is brought up as a reference point through which to discuss the atrocities committed against Muslim minorities. The Holocaust is brought up as an analogy when discussing Srebrenica in the following articles: “75 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, it’s

424 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 653: Debated on January 24, 2019, Hansard.

425 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 688: Debated on January, 28 2021, Hansard.

426 Ibid.

427 For instance, on the China Uighur crisis, *The Times* and *The Sun* each published three articles using the Holocaust as analogy, whereas *The Independent* published twice as much. *The Guardian* published two articles and *The Daily Mail* one article.

terrifying how urgent the fight against global atrocities has become"⁴²⁸; "We all have a responsibility to tell the truth about genocide"⁴²⁹; "'Never forget': Survivors of Holocaust mark 75th Auschwitz anniversary"⁴³⁰; "Could History Repeat Itself in Europe's Bloodiest Killing Fields?"⁴³¹ "War Crime."⁴³²

When discussing China's repression of the Uighurs, the Holocaust is frequently used as a reference point. For example, the article "We should boycott China's Winter Olympics" states the following: "Leave aside the question of whether it is appropriate to use the Nazi attempt to wipe the Jewish people from the face of the earth as an analogy for any other mass atrocities. It is indisputable that the Chinese are guilty of crimes against humanity in their repression of the Uighurs, a Muslim community concentrated in the province of Xinjiang."⁴³³

A similar analogical use of Holocaust memory in reference to the China Uighur crisis is made in multiple articles, such as: "China is a menace at home – and abroad,"⁴³⁴ "Meet the Orthodox Jew standing up for China's Uighur Muslims,"⁴³⁵ "The persecution of Uighur Muslims in China shows we have not learned from past genocides,"⁴³⁶ "From India to China, the world's Muslims are being put into concentration camps,"⁴³⁷ "China carrying out 'most intense attack ever' on global human rights, warns group,"⁴³⁸ "'It's a place where they try to destroy you': Why concentration camps are still with us,"⁴³⁹ "Faith Leaders Tell China to End Muslim Genocide," "Despicable China covered up

428 Khan Rabina, "[75 Years After the Liberation of Auschwitz, it's Terrifying How Urgent the Fight Against Global Atrocities has Become](#)," *The Independent*, January 27, 2020.

429 Robert Fisk, "[We all have a Responsibility to Tell the Truth about Genocide](#)," *The Independent*, July 16, 2020.

430 Mohdin Aamna, "['Never Forget': Survivors of Holocaust Mark 75th Auschwitz Anniversary](#)," *The Guardian*, January 27, 2020.

431 David Jones, "[Could History Repeat Itself in Europe's Bloodiest Killing Fields?](#)" *The Daily Mail*, July 16, 2020.

432 Alison Maloney, "[War Crime: 'I was Shot and Heard Cries of Dying Men as I Lay in a Mass Grave in Srebrenica Massacre that Killed 8,000'](#)," *The Sun*, July 11, 2020.

433 Melanie Phillips, "[We Should Boycott China's Winter Olympics](#)," *The Times*, January 26, 2021.

434 Edward Lucas, "[China is a Menace at Home – and Abroad](#)," *The Times*, May 13, 2019.

435 Evie Breese, "[Meet the British Orthodox Jew Standing up for China's Uighur](#)," *The Independent*, January 17, 2020.

436 Olivia Marks-Waldman, "[The Persecution of Uighur Muslims in China Shows We Have not Learned from Past Genocides](#)," *The Independent*, July 21, 2020.

437 Ranjona Banerji, "[From India to China, the World's Muslims are Being Put into Concentration Camps](#)," *The Independent*, September 11, 2019.

438 Vincent Wood, "[China Carrying out 'most Intense Attack Ever' on Global Human Rights, Warns Group](#)," *The Independent*, January 16, 2020.

439 Daniel Trilling, "['It's a Place Where they Try to Destroy You': Why Concentration Camps are Still With Us](#)," *The Guardian*, April 2, 2020.

Covid to save \$1trillion deal,”⁴⁴⁰ “Survivor’s Hell,”⁴⁴¹ “Horror Haul.”⁴⁴² A number of articles also reference the Holocaust in a more critical manner, suggesting British policy towards China should be more forceful, as can be seen in the following articles: “Tory rebels could block post-Brexit trade deal with China by backing Labour’s ‘genocide clause’,”⁴⁴³ “‘All words, no action’: Disappointment at Raab for lack of sanctions on China over Uighurs,”⁴⁴⁴ “UK free to make trade deals with genocidal regimes after Commons vote.”⁴⁴⁵ Additional crises that are linked to Holocaust memory are the Armenian Genocide (three articles in *The Independent* suggest the Armenian genocide should be termed Armenian Holocaust), and the crimes against Rohingya Muslims in Burma (“The Times view on Aung San Suu Kyi and crimes against the Rohingya: Fallen Star”).⁴⁴⁶

The “never again” theme that is presented during public discourse delivered during HMD is also linked to the fight against current and ongoing antisemitism. This is the case across all three public discourse platforms (official speeches, parliamentary debates and media outlets). The following statement was made by Secretary of State Brokenshire at the UK Commemorative Ceremony for Holocaust Memorial Day 2019: “And yet today – 74 years since the Nazi death camps were liberated – antisemitism is on the rise, here and abroad. And Jewish communities are once again living in fear.”⁴⁴⁷ Another example can be found in the Holocaust Memorial Day 2020: Foreign Secretary’s speech, by the Rt Hon Dominic Raab: “[...] antisemitism is not simply a problem of the past. And today, we look no further than the headlines to see antisemitic sentiment is still with us today, in our politics and if we’re willing to be honest about it, in our society.”⁴⁴⁸ Notably, Raab also points to the problem of antisemitism in British politics, alluding to the issue of antisemitism in the Labour party.

In the HMD parliamentary debates “never again” is also linked to the rise in antisemitism. Notably, the discussions that take place during the parliamentary debates are extended to discuss online antisemitism as a particular threat that must be attended to. Numerous references are also made by the MPs to the various bodies that exist for combatting extremism, such as the Centre for Countering

440 Iain Duncan Smith, “[Despicable China Covered Up Covid to Save \\$1Trillion Deal](#),” *The Sun*, January 17, 2021.

441 Sophie Jane Evans, “[Survivor’s Hell: I was Shacked, Beaten & Given Mystery Injection inside China’s Uighur Camps – then Sterilised so I can’t Have More Kids](#),” *The Sun*, July 28, 2020.

442 Claudia Aoraha, “[Horror Haul: &800K of Human Hair from ‘Shaved Chinese Prisoners’ Seized in New York in Chilling Echos of Holocaust](#),” *The Sun*, July 3, 2020.

443 Sam Hancock, “[Tory Rebels could Block Post-Brexit Trade Deal with China by Backing Labour’s ‘Genocide Clause’](#),” *The Independent*, January 19, 2021.

444 Kim Sengupta, “[‘All Words, No Action’: Disappointment at Raab for Lack of Sanctions on China](#),” *The Independent*, January 12, 2021.

445 Patrick Wintour, “[UK Free to make Trade Deals with Genocidal Regimes after Commons Vote](#),” *The Guardian*, January 19, 2021.

446 “[The Times View on Aung San Suu Kyi and Crimes Against the Rohingya: Fallen Star](#),” *The Times*, December 12, 2019.

447 James Brokenshire, “[Speech: Holocaust Memorial Day 2019](#),” *Gov.UK*, January 28, 2019.

448 Dominic Raab, “[Speech: Holocaust Memorial Day 2020: Foreign Secretary’s Speech](#),” *Gov.UK*, January 29, 2020.

Digital Hate, and legislative changes such as the Online Harms Bill. Relatedly, The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism is mentioned as a much-needed measure to counter antisemitism, with the MPs also calling to reluctant universities to adopt the definition as soon as possible. Within this context, alongside the current rise in antisemitism a handful of references were also made to anti-Muslim attitudes and Islamophobia. As an example, consider the following statement made by MP Gerald Jones, Labour, in the 2021 HMD parliament debate: “We are fortunate here in the UK not to be at risk of genocide [...] It might be easier for some to ignore massacres that are happening halfway around the planet, but perhaps it is not so easy to turn a blind eye to events happening in our own backyard. In 2014, antisemitic incidents in the UK reached their highest ever level [...] Anti-Muslim hate tripled in London after the Paris attacks.”⁴⁴⁹ Here, a parallel is created between antisemitic incidents and anti-Muslim hate. Both are on the rise and both “continue to be a stain on our society.” Antisemitism and anti-Muslim attitudes are presented as examples of discrimination and should be battled as part of the legacy of the Holocaust.

A similar trend can be seen in the media outlets wherein the legacy of “never again” is linked to antisemitism. Holocaust commemoration and education are presented as crucial in this regard, as prominent tools in the fight to eradicate antisemitism. In *The Guardian* (left-centre), the imperative to “never forget” is demonstrated, for instance, in the articles “The Guardian view on Holocaust Memorial Day: As necessary as ever”; “The horrors of Auschwitz and other Nazi death camps will soon be lost to living memory. But the recent rise in xenophobic nationalism underlines the need never to forget”⁴⁵⁰; and “The Last Survivors review – an extraordinary memorial to children of the Holocaust; The makers of this devastating, dignified documentary spent a year recording the testimonies of survivors of Nazi persecution to ensure their stories are never forgotten.”⁴⁵¹

In *The Guardian* and *The Times* there are quite a number of articles that focus on the necessity of both commemoration and education so as to “stem the tide” of antisemitism and avoid having anything like the Holocaust happen again. This argument mostly centres on Holocaust survivors and their stories as the centrepiece for HMD. For instance, the article, “On Holocaust Memorial Day, we should remember the debt we owe to those who have experienced dreadful things on our behalf,”⁴⁵² discusses what might happen when the last of the Holocaust survivors dies. The writer contemplates the “horrific rise of antisemitism,” to “make everyone think about why Jewish people may again feel afraid.” In *The Daily Mail* (right) the article “I’ve Tried to Teach my Children About the Holocaust

449 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 688: Debated on January 28, 2021, Hansard.

450 [“The Guardian View on Holocaust Memorial Day: As Necessary as Ever,”](#) *The Guardian*, January 26, 2020.

451 Stuart Jefferies, [“The Last Survivors Review – an Extraordinary Memorial to Children of the Holocaust,”](#) *The Guardian*, January 27, 2019.

452 Suzanne Moore, [“We Should Thank Fergal Keane for Bearing Witness to Unbearable Horrors,”](#) *The Guardian*, January 27, 2020.

Says Kate,⁴⁵³ the writer also addressed how Prime Minister Johnson paid his respects saying “he felt a deep sense of shame at the resurgence of the virus of anti-Semitism” in Britain and said he would do “everything I can to stamp it out.” This theme also recurs in *The Daily Mail* article “Charles: Hatred and Intolerance Still Lurk in The Human Heart.” There the prince’s visit to Yad Vashem is discussed: “The prince [...] said: The Holocaust was an appalling Jewish tragedy, but it was also a universal human tragedy, and one which we compound if we do not heed its lessons.”⁴⁵⁴ Quoting Prince Charles’ speech in which he addresses the duality of the Holocaust between the distinctive Jewish tragedy and the universal human tragedy, this article focuses on the relevance of the “never again” legacy, linking it to current incidents of hatred and intolerance.

In the context of “never again” and antisemitism, the issue of criticism of Israel and its link to antisemitism is also raised. The heated political debate on Israel’s policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict differs between the public discourse on HMD in the official speeches and the media outlets and the parliamentary debates. Israel is not mentioned at all in the HMD official speeches, apart from the one speech of the Prince of Wales that was delivered in Yad Vashem (Jerusalem, Israel). Israel is also not mentioned in the context of HMD in the various media outlets. However, the issue of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in HMD parliamentary debates is prevalent. It seems, then, that HMD is considered by the MPs an opportune moment to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Notably, this is done mostly through the discussion of how *others* (individuals and public figures) use *Holocaust inversion*, namely portraying Israelis and Israeli government and actions as Nazis or Nazi Germany respectively. An example for this can be found in the statement made by Labour MP John Ryan in 2019 in which he makes the following allegation: “Here in the UK, on campuses, in trade unions and even, sadly [...] in the Labour party, pernicious comparisons have been drawn between Israel and Nazi Germany.”⁴⁵⁵

At other times, this issue is raised through the heated discussions on anti-Israel viewpoints, anti-Zionism and antisemitism. Anti-Israel sentiment has, in the last decade or so, veered into uncertain territory whereby certain criticisms are now seen as antisemitic (see e.g., Boyd 2022). This “Israelification of antisemitism,” as termed by Conservative MP Andrew Percy, in the 2019 HMD parliamentary debate, addresses the evolution of political discourse on antisemitism. Closely related is the issue of antisemitism in the Labour Party, typically connected to Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership since 2015. For instance, in 2021, MP Steve Reed, Labour/Co-operative, said the following: “I share her horror at having realised after 2015 that antisemites had entered the Labour party, intent on infecting our party with their poison.”⁴⁵⁶ Pinpointing the year 2015 (i.e., with the beginning of Corbyn’s leadership), MP Reed acknowledges the party’s fault in being too slow to eradicate internal

453 Stephanie Linning, “[Kate Middleton Reveals she Spoke to her Children about the Holocaust as They Marked the 75th Anniversary of The Liberation of Auschwitz – but did so in an ‘Age Appropriate’ Way](#),” *The Daily Mail*, January 28, 2020.

454 Rebecca English, “[Charles: Hatred and Intolerance still Lurk in the Human Heart](#),” *The Daily Mail*, January 24, 2020.

455 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 653: Debated on January 24, 2019, Hansard.

456 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 688: Debated on January 2, 8 2021, Hansard.

antisemitism, culminating in “aggressive antisemitic abuse” and demonization, to the point of being driven out of the party. He also acknowledges that recovery cannot be achieved until all those who were driven out “feel able to join again.”

Finally, when discussing the *lessons to be learned* during HMD official speeches, references are made to the National Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre, to be built near Parliament. The Centre is identified as one of the prominent ways in which the lessons of the past can be learned and maintained. This initiative is a discursive event in itself (to be elaborated on below), and an especially heated one at that, yet within the HMD official speeches it is unanimously and unwaveringly presented as a much-needed endeavour. For instance, PM Johnson, in his 2020 HMD speech emphasising education and commemoration, said the following: “I will make sure we build the National Holocaust Memorial and Education Centre, so that future generations can never doubt what happened, because that is the only way we can be certain that it never happens again.”⁴⁵⁷ In a similar manner, Ambassador Bush, in his 2021 HMD speech to the OSCE Permanent Council addressed the issue of the memorial, saying the following: “[...] our new memorial will allow us to continue to confront the immense human calamity caused by the destruction of Europe’s Jewish communities during the Holocaust, and to demonstrate our sincere commitment to mourn, remember and to act.”⁴⁵⁸ Notwithstanding the heated public debate that is currently taking place with regard to the memorial, its meaning, and proposed location, this statement brings to the fore the importance the memorial holds for the British government and public at large.

The debate over the British legacy of the Holocaust

The issue of the British legacy of the Holocaust is prominent in all HMD official speeches between 2019-2021. While the various speakers refer to it in slightly different ways, its salience across speakers and contexts is undeniable. In the Holocaust Memorial Day 2020, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab’s speech expresses a clear voice with regard to British leadership in Holocaust memorialization, not only in the UK, but indeed, the entire world: “The UK was one of the founding signatories of the Stockholm Declaration in 2000, through which we pledged that the terrible events of the Holocaust would remain forever seared in our collective memory [...]. We’ve continued our work to strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust education, research and remembrance worldwide.”⁴⁵⁹ PM Johnson, in his 2020 HMD speech also takes care to construct Holocaust memory as “British,” by referring to Britain’s heroic role as liberator: “Last week Mala told me her story, including the scene that awaited Ian and our British forces when they liberated Bergen Belsen almost 75 years ago.”⁴⁶⁰

Bringing forth the story of Holocaust survivor Mala Tribich, PM Johnson evokes the British collective memory of liberating Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on April 15, 1945. In a similar manner, the

457 [“PM Speech at the UK Commemorative Ceremony for Holocaust Memorial Day, Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s Speech at the Holocaust Memorial Day Service,” Gov.UK, January 27, 2020.](#)

458 Neil Bush, [“Speech: Holocaust Memorial Day: UK Statement,” Gov.UK, January 28, 2021.](#)

459 Dominic Raab, [“Speech: Holocaust Memorial Day 2020: Foreign Secretary’s Speech,”](#) January 29, 2020.

460 [“PM Speech at the UK Commemorative Ceremony for Holocaust Memorial Day,”](#) Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s Speech at the Holocaust Memorial Day Service, Gov.UK, January 27, 2020.

Prince of Wales, during his 2020 Lives Lost in Shoah Speech, referred to both Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen: The former as the ultimate symbol of the Holocaust across time and borders, and the latter as the prominent symbolic legacy of the Holocaust for the British collective (Kushner 2006), thus linking the universal memory of the Holocaust to a specific British consciousness. However, in contrast to previous HMD speeches, the Prince of Wales also manages to establish an extremely personal connection to the Holocaust, saying the following: “For my own part, I have long drawn inspiration from the selfless actions of my dear grandmother, Princess Alice of Greece, who in 1943, in Nazi-occupied Athens, saved a Jewish family by taking them into her home and hiding them.”⁴⁶¹ Referring to the personal story of his own grandmother and her role in saving a Jewish family during the war, an act for which she was bestowed with the title of Righteous Among the Nations (in 1993), the narrative of the Holocaust can be transformed into a truly British one.

In contrast to previous speakers that took care to present the British legacy of the Holocaust as beyond reproach, whether through personal stories of saving Jews, its heroic status as a liberating nation, or, as a current leader in the larger international memorialization effort, Ambassador Bush, in his 2021 Holocaust Memorial Day UK statement, delivered at the OSCE Permanent Council, addressed the more complex view of the British role during the Holocaust. Referring to the National Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre, he said: “It will explore the role of Britain’s parliament and democratic institutions – what we did and what more we could have done to tackle the persecution of the Jewish people and other groups.”⁴⁶²

Discussing the symbolic location of the memorial, “next to our Houses of Parliament,” as the ultimate commitment to remembering the Holocaust, Ambassador Bush also acknowledges the role Britain played in the Holocaust, including the more ambiguous responsibility that is part of the British legacy. This construction, however, is atypical in the official speeches.

In the HMD parliamentary debates, similar to the HMD official speeches, MPs from both sides of the political map typically refer to a British sense of righteousness and pride regarding the British role during the war, yet they do so specifically by referring to the Kindertransport and British “heroes” such as Major Frank Foley and Sir Nicholas Winton, despite their nuanced legacy. For the most part, MPs were quick to conjure some amount of pride or righteousness regarding the Kindertransport or the few British officers who were able to save Jews. Consider the following statement made by Labour MP Taiwo Owatemi in 2021: “We should rightly be proud of the role that British forces played in liberating those who were sent to die in concentration and extermination camps such as Bergen-Belsen.”⁴⁶³

Explicit mention of British shortcomings is few and far between. The following statement encompasses the more complex and nuanced understanding of the Holocaust for the British collective. Delivered by Labour MP Ian Austin in 2019: “Britain provided a haven for thousands of refugee children. Think

461 [“HRH Prince of Wales Commemorates Lives Lost in Shoah: Speech,” Gov.UK](#), January 23, 2020.

462 Neil Bush, [“Speech: Holocaust Memorial Day: UK Statement,” Gov.UK](#), January 28, 2021.

463 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 688: Debated on January 28, 2021, Hansard.

of Britain in the '30s: [...] Mosley was rejected. Imagine 1941: France invaded, Europe overrun, America not yet in the war and just one country standing for freedom and democracy, fighting not just for our liberty, but for the freedom of the whole world." However, he then continues to say:

It is true that Britain did not do enough during the Holocaust and could of course have done more, but it was British troops who liberated Bergen-Belsen, rescuing thousands of inmates from certain death. So when people say to me, "What does it mean to be British? What is special or unique about our country?" I say that it is because of who we are as a people and what we are as a country that British people stood up to the Nazis and laid down their lives for freedom. What makes you British is not what you look like, where you were born or how you worship, but the contribution you make and your belief in the timeless British values – values British people have fought and died for – of democracy, equality, freedom, fairness and tolerance.⁴⁶⁴

Austin mentions the more ambiguous side of the British legacy of the Holocaust, which has yet to be fully resolved, yet this is done more as a lip-service than an actual reckoning with the past.

As another example, consider Conservative MP Andrew Percy in 2020, raising the question of British politics in the years leading up the war: "There were people in this country in the 1930s who, as we know and as I have just referenced, gave succour to fascism and to that hateful ideology."⁴⁶⁵ Although there are limits to what may be publicly questioned, it is clear that politicians on both sides of the political map are beginning to raise their reservations regarding the role Britain played and what more could have been done.

Similar to the discourse in the HMD official speeches and parliamentary debates, the theme of the British legacy of the Holocaust is also prominent in the media outlets. This is addressed primarily through stories that memorialize exalted British "unsung heroes" who saved Jews during the Holocaust. In *The Independent* (left-centre), the prominent theme on HMD regards the need to remember those who helped save the Jews during the war, and this is achieved mainly through the publication of various personal stories about the Holocaust. One such example is the article "Holocaust Memorial Day 2019: Three unsung heroes who helped Europe's Jews escape the Nazis; Oskar Schindler and Sir Nicholas Winton's efforts to save people have been well documented but they were by no means the only ones to risk their lives to save others."⁴⁶⁶ In *The Times*, the article "From death camps to the Lakes: the survivors' story; A drama telling how 300 children were brought to Windermere from concentration camps is coming to TV,"⁴⁶⁷ discusses the Holocaust movie telling the story of 300 children who arrived in the UK at the end of the War, notably discussing not only the

⁴⁶⁴ [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 653: Debated on January 24, 2019, Hansard.

⁴⁶⁵ [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 670: Debated on January 23, 2020, Hansard.

⁴⁶⁶ Joe Sommerlad, "[Holocaust Memorial Day 2019: Three Unsung Heroes who Helped Europe's Jews Escape the Nazis](#)," *The Independent*, January 27, 2019.

⁴⁶⁷ Tim Lewis, "[From Nazi Camps to the Lake District: The Story of the Windermere Children](#)," *The Guardian*, January 5, 2020.

British role in authorizing the evacuation of the children from Theresienstadt and organizing military aircraft to fly them to Britain, but also highlighting the contribution made by private donations that subsidized the children's accommodation and education.

The public debate on the National Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre

The heated public and political discussion around the national Holocaust memorial, whose proposed location was at Victoria Tower Garden, is the second discursive event that is analysed in this research. The memorial and learning centre was proposed by PM David Cameron in 2014 and was supposed to be built in Westminster next to the Houses of Parliament. Two years later, the UK government announced that the site would be a "striking and prominent national memorial" that "will stand beside Parliament as a permanent statement of our British values."⁴⁶⁸ The proposal became a contentious issue, for which planning permission has since been denied, also because of the suggested location. The debate on this initiative revealed a range of thorny issues including how to memorialize the Holocaust in Britain, the role and significance of the memorial to the British public, issues concerning racism in general and antisemitism in particular and the position of the Jewish community in Britain. More than anything else, this contested discussion illuminates the ambiguity in British Holocaust memory, specifically, in terms of the role Britain played during the war and its aftermath and the meaning attributed to the memory of the Holocaust in current times.

While the project received support from all five living prime ministers, 174 MPs and peers, and many local rabbis, numerous objections both public and political were raised. The main opposition to the Holocaust memorial was related to the proposed location – in terms of environmental concerns, security issues, cost, and the expected utility of the centre. Local residents, the Royal Parks, Historic England and UNESCO's adviser on world heritage, all raised opposition to the plans, contending that the centre would compromise the heritage and landscape.

In PM Johnson's 2020 speech at the Holocaust Memorial Day service, he connected the need to build the national Holocaust memorial and education centre to what he referred to as the "resurgence of the virus of antisemitism."⁴⁶⁹ Taking upon himself the responsibility to "stamp" out present-day antisemitism in the UK, Johnson created a link between the past and the present. However, such a link did not feature in the 2021 Holocaust Memorial Day speeches. Speaking at the OSCE Permanent Council, Ambassador Neil Bush contended that the memorial and learning centre would be "a powerful symbol of the UK's commitment to remembering the Holocaust,"⁴⁷⁰ due to its proposed location, thereby underlining the importance of the suggested location. According to him, building the memorial near Parliament is a symbolic undertaking that would underline the British

468 ["Press Release: PM, Holocaust Memorial Will Stand Beside Parliament as Permanent Statement of our British Values," Gov.UK](#), January 27, 2016.

469 ["PM Speech at the UK Commemorative Ceremony for Holocaust Memorial Day. Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Speech at the Holocaust Memorial Day Service," Gov.UK](#), January 27, 2020.

470 Neil Bush, ["Speech: Holocaust Memorial Day: UK Statement," Gov.UK](#), January 28, 2021.

commitment – past and present – to Europe’s Jewish communities. The memorial, in other words, would serve as a beacon of the UK’s “sincere commitment” to learn from the lessons of the past.

The issue of the National Holocaust Memorial in the parliamentary debates is significantly more contested. Discussion about the Centre arises in a number of different contexts, among them debates related to the Holocaust, genocide prevention, religious persecution, and antisemitism. One of the more prominent arguments is the significance of the memorial in ongoing fights against antisemitism. In the following excerpt, delivered during the *Antisemitism in Modern Society* debate (February 20, 2019), Conservative MP James Brokenshire, then Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, discussed the chosen location of the memorial to say: “At its heart, this is racism. That is why it is so intolerable and unacceptable [...] It is why we have chosen next door to Parliament as the site for our new National Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre, which commands cross-party support.”⁴⁷¹

Establishing antisemitism as racism and as an “insidious threat,” MP Brokenshire also refers to the need for strong, cross-party leadership, highlighting the importance of building the memorial next to Parliament. Conservative MP Scott Benton reflected these sentiments during the *Holocaust Memorial Debate*, January 23, 2020, saying the following: “Education is a vital tool in the fight against antisemitism [...] The new National Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre [...] will both act as a lasting tribute to the victims and help to challenge antisemitism.”⁴⁷²

Although in the parliamentary debates the link between the usefulness of the Centre in fighting against antisemitism is fairly uncontested, the discussion in the media outlets presents a more complex picture. Indeed, the issue of antisemitism in this context is used as a double-edged sword. There are articles in which antisemitism is raised as a reason to support the building of the memorial, whose role is emphasised in light of the notable rise in antisemitism in Britain. As such, the National Memorial should be built “as a lasting legacy so that future generations will understand why it’s important to learn from the Holocaust and stand up against prejudice” (Mala Tribich, a Holocaust survivor).⁴⁷³ Prominent politicians deem the location of the memorial critical since “antisemitism and hate did not end in 1945. Unfortunately, today some of this poison is back from the political fringe to parts of the political mainstream [...]. So we can show what happens when racism and prejudice go unchecked” (Tony Blair).⁴⁷⁴ Theresa May was also quoted: “In the face of despicable Holocaust denial, this memorial will stand to preserve the truth forever. And this education centre will ensure that every generation understands the responsibility that we all share – to fight against hatred and prejudice in all its forms wherever it is found.” Also, according to the Secretary of State

471 [Antisemitism in Modern Society](#), Vol. 654: Debated on February 20, 2019, Hansard.

472 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 670: Debated on January 23, 2020, Hansard.

473 Harriet Sherwood, “[Westminster Council Opposes Plan to Build Holocaust Memorial](#),” *The Guardian*, February 11, 2020.

474 Heather Stewart, “[Theresa May backs Building of Holocaust Centre Near Parliament](#),” *The Guardian*, May 6, 2019; Claire Ellicott, “[All Five Living UK Prime Ministers Back New Holocaust Memorial in London as They Issue Veiled Rebuke to Jeremy Corbyn over the ‘Poison’ of Anti-Semitism](#),” *The Daily Mail*, May 6, 2019.

for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick (who incidentally received threats over his role in the proposal and involvement with regard to the planning application), building the memorial is “of exceptional national significance” given the “gravity” of the rise in antisemitism.⁴⁷⁵ The memorial and education centre is portrayed as necessary in light of the rise in antisemitism in the British government and specifically in the Labour party: “We have seen how one of our great political parties very nearly came to be taken over by an antisemitic clique. A visible memorial is our first line of defence against the Holocaust deniers.”⁴⁷⁶ Notably, Jeremy Corbyn, former Leader of the Labour Party and Leader of the Opposition, was quoted as saying the following:

Remembering the horrors of the Holocaust is a vital way of saying to all generations that such devastating tragedy, racist cruelty and loss must never be repeated. That is why I strongly support permanent commemoration, including a national memorial, alongside extra investment in educational programmes. Only by understanding history can we all play a role in preventing future genocides and combating the return of this poisonous threat. Racism and prejudice must never go unchallenged.⁴⁷⁷

The same line of argument was also pursued by prominent Jewish figures, questioning any objections made to the project. The memorial is termed “a sacred mission” (The Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis),⁴⁷⁸ and is considered vital for society. “At a time when antisemitic incidents are at an all-time high, rejecting this vital memorial to Holocaust victims would send entirely the wrong signal to society. We urge anyone thinking of objecting to this project of huge significance to our country, our community and the victims of the evil, Nazi genocide to think again” (Marie van der Zyl, president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews).⁴⁷⁹

On the other hand, objections raised against the National Holocaust Memorial and Education Centre also use antisemitism as an argument, contending that building a memorial is ineffective in combating antisemitism, and that the funds should rather be directed towards education. Powerfully captured by Rabbi Jonathan Romain, of Maidenhead synagogue, “Monuments do not combat antisemitism.”⁴⁸⁰ Critics of the Memorial use the recent upsurge in antisemitism in Europe, where there are numerous memorials and commemorative sites, to underline this argument. Trudy Gold, historian and Holocaust educator, questions the project at large, saying:

475 Melanie Phillips, “[We’d Rather Champion Dead Jews than Live Ones](#),” *The Times*, August 27, 2019.

476 “[Times Letters: Long-Term Approach to Living with Covid](#),” *The Times*, October 10, 2020

477 Claire Ellicott, “[All Five Living UK Prime Ministers Back New Holocaust Memorial in London as They Issue Veiled Rebuke to Jeremy Corbyn over the ‘Poison’ of Anti-Semitism](#),” *The Daily Mail*, May 6, 2019.

478 Melanie Phillips, “[We’d Rather Champion Dead Jews than Live Ones](#),” *The Times*, August 27, 2019.

479 Alex Matthew, “[Monument Misery: Plans for £25million Holocaust Memorial outside Parliament set to be Rejected by Planners Following Complaints it could Spoil the View](#),” *The Sun*, August 9, 2019.

480 Harriet Sherwood, “[Use Holocaust Memorial Funds to Educate Instead, Rabbi Says](#),” *The Guardian*, October 7, 2020.

The problem is this: another museum, however excellent, is merely a sticking plaster on a gaping wound. There are over 300 Holocaust museums and learning centres worldwide, and many of them are exceptional. One of the main causes of the Holocaust was antisemitism. Have these museums and learning centres reduced the level? Have they stamped out Holocaust denial? Have they helped to create more just and tolerant societies?⁴⁸¹

These critical voices claim that to fight antisemitism, more emphasis should be placed on education and teaching about the Holocaust and the Jewish history of persecution. This line of argument is evident in voices of public figures and the public that call to re-allocate Holocaust memorial funds. For instance, in *The Times*: “I felt the only worthy memorial to those millions who were murdered was to help the young to transform ‘Never again’ from a rallying cry into reality. Harnessing digital learning could make a lasting impact on future generations; another tall building in Westminster is unlikely to do so.”⁴⁸²

Another example can be found in the following excerpt: “The project is outdated because it embodies the old-fashioned top down approach. It is an analogue solution for the digital age. Instead of spending £100 million on digging up a park and hiring rock-star architects, spend that sum on education. Give some to the Holocaust Education Trust. Make a donation to the Auschwitz Museum” (Adam LeBor, Journalist).⁴⁸³

Relatedly, as stated in *The Times* “Holocaust memorializing is sometimes used as a fig leaf for present-day antisemitism. It’s easy to pay tribute to dead Jews. What seems so much more elusive is support for live ones.”⁴⁸⁴ In this respect, claims are made regarding the need to do more than memorialization of the Holocaust: “If you remember on 27th January then you forget on the 28th” (Holocaust survivor, Lasker-Wallfisch).⁴⁸⁵ Accordingly, efforts should be made to remember not only on specific memorial days, and this remembrance cannot be achieved through another memorial building.

The matter of the *proposed location* of the Holocaust Memorial and Education Centre is prominent in the discussions that take place in the parliamentary debates and the media outlets. In the parliamentary debates, the arguments are centred around two recurrent themes. First, the matter of location, next to Parliament and in the centre of London, is presented as *the* commitment to remember the past and learn from the lessons of the past. Such a central and public location is an undeniably powerful statement, and thus deemed appropriate for demonstrating the unwavering and cross-party commitment of British government and public to the memory of the Holocaust.

481 Trudy Gold, “[A more Fitting Memorial to the Holocaust](#),” *The Guardian*, February 20, 2020.

482 “[Times Letters: The PM Deserves More Help in the Kitchen](#),” *The Times*, October 9, 2020.

483 Adam Lebor, “[We don’t need a Building to Mark the Holocaust](#),” *The Times*, January 22, 2020.

484 Melanie Phillips, “[We’d Rather Champion Dead Jews than Live Ones](#),” *The Times*, August 27, 2019.

485 Rowan Moore, “[Holocaust Survivor Anita Lasker-Wallfisch: ‘No Memorial Can Come Anywhere Near What Happened’](#),” *The Guardian*, December 27, 2020.

MP Heather Wheeler, The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, said the following during the 2019 UK *Parliament Holocaust Memorial Day* debate: “There can be no more powerful symbol of our commitment to remember the men, women and children who were murdered in the Holocaust [...] It will stand as a memorial, yes, but equally it will stand as a warning – a warning of where hatred can lead and a warning that when we say, ‘Never again,’ we have to mean it.”⁴⁸⁶

Framing the building of the memorial as a “historic task,” MP Wheeler underlines the cross-party support, establishing this undertaking as a “powerful symbol,” of British commitment to remember the victims of Nazi persecution. Similarly, Conservative MP James Brokenshire, Secretary of State for Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, said the following in the 2019 *Antisemitism in Modern Society* debate: “I believe there can be no more fitting place, no more powerful symbol of our commitment to remembering the men, women and children murdered in the Holocaust [...] than placing the memorial in Victoria Tower gardens, literally in the shadow of our Parliament.”⁴⁸⁷

Brokenshire’s argument is closely related to the second prominent theme that is raised in parliamentary debates regarding the proposed location of the Centre, namely, how its proximity to the symbolic core of British democracy, serves to highlight the heroic role Britain played in response to the Jewish catastrophe. Consider the following statement made by Labour MP Ian Austin during the 2019 UK Parliament *Holocaust Memorial Day* debate:

I wish to [...] say how pleased I am that we will soon have the new National Holocaust Memorial and Learning centre next to Parliament, at the very centre of our democracy and national life. It will enable future generations to remember the victims of the Holocaust, and learn the lessons of history [...] We must remind ourselves that what makes us the people we are, and Britain the country it is, is the unique response to the Holocaust and the Nazis. Let us use this debate to rededicate ourselves to the timeless values of democracy, equality, freedom, fairness and tolerance.⁴⁸⁸

Parliament, as “the very centre of our democracy and national life,” is thus considered a fitting location for the Centre since it links to the need for the British people to “remind ourselves” of our “unique response” during the war. The memorial, through its location, will serve to reinforce the broadly accepted British values of democracy, human rights and justice, also reconstructing the British notion of why it fought in the war.

This notion of the British legacy of the Holocaust is also raised in the media outlets. For instance, Steven A. Ludsin, child of a Holocaust survivor and a charter member of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council wrote in favour of the proposed location near parliament: “[T]he moral vacuum created by not locating the Holocaust memorial near the pulse and heart of government defeats our goal to

486 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 653: Debated on January 24, 2019, Hansard.

487 [Antisemitism in Modern Society](#), Vol. 654: Debated on February 20, 2019, Hansard.

488 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 653: Debated on January 24, 2019, Hansard.

maintain civilization. Remembrance of the Nazis' crimes against humanity should not be hidden from maximum public view."⁴⁸⁹

The memorial, in this regard, is a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to ensure that victims of the Nazis were permanently honoured, and it was fitting that it be located in a position of the greatest possible prominence."⁴⁹⁰ Similarly: "A memorial close to Britain's most cherished sites of democracy and freedom would keep the flame of remembrance burning. The solemn undertaking made by Britain to its Jewish community must be fulfilled if the facts about racism and prejudice are to be understood" (Alex Brummer, Journalist and Commentator).⁴⁹¹

The location is thus key for remembrance since it represents a promise Britain made to its Jewish community. Despite the voices cited above that advocate the central London location, according to many others, the need for a memorial is debatable. "Britain was not involved in initiating the Holocaust, or assisting in it, or standing by. Quite the opposite: we were instrumental in defeating Hitler and bringing the war to an end. Unlike various European countries, Britain has no guilt to expunge, so the need for such a project is debatable" (Rabbi Jonathan Romain).⁴⁹²

This argument illuminates the ambiguous meaning that the memory of the Holocaust holds for the British public. Since the British played an important role in defeating Hitler and saving Europe, it cannot and should not be held accountable for the Holocaust and as such does not need to take any further measures to remember it. An adjacent argument is made by David Adjaye, the architect of the memorial, who said the following: "I'm excited about the site. Britain was the only one of the Allies that felt it didn't need to mark it, so you almost can't find anything about the Holocaust here [...] so we have the opportunity to activate the entire site and talk directly to parliament, hold it accountable. Disrupting the pleasure of being in a park is key to the thinking."⁴⁹³

Revealing in this regard is the statement, "Britain was the only one of the Allies that felt it didn't need to mark it." And while it is uncontested that "[t]he Holocaust is part of Britain's history,"⁴⁹⁴ the British memory of its role during the Holocaust seems to be ambiguous. Notwithstanding the fact that British forces liberated Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and that Holocaust survivors came to the UK after liberation to make Britain their home, the numerous public statements about how the memorial will express "British values," raise concerns about the attempt to mythologize the memory of Britain's role during the Holocaust. This issue is also prominent in the following

489 Steven Ludsins, "[Parliament Site is right for Holocaust Memorial](#)," *The Guardian*, February 18, 2020.

490 Harriet Sherwood, "[Use Holocaust Memorial Funds to Educate Instead, Rabbi Says](#)," *The Guardian*, October 7, 2020.

491 Alex Brummer, "[In the Name of my Aunt Rosie and Victims of the Holocaust, I'm Outraged at Bids to Block a UK Memorial](#)," *The Daily Mail*, January 26, 2021.

492 Jonathan Romain, "[We Don't Need Another Memorial to the Holocaust](#)," *The Times*, October 8, 2020.

493 Jonathan Morrison, "[If I'd Known how Difficult Architecture Would Be, I Wouldn't have Done It](#)," *The Times*, February 4, 2019.

494 "[Times Letters: A No-Deal Brexit and US Trade Agreements](#)," *The Times*, August 14, 2019.

statement made by Maya Lasker-Wallfisch, daughter of Holocaust survivors: “[...] if we are very honest, what do we mean by British values? Ten thousand children [in the Kindertransport], and then the orphans that were let in after the war. Fair enough. Very nice. But what about the parents of those children?”⁴⁹⁵

To this extent, choosing the Victoria Gardens site as a highly visible and pointed statement about the centrality of the Jewish community to Britain, is contestable when there is a lack of awareness in the public and political realms that, “[...] despite having stood alone against Hitler in 1940 and accepting 10,000 Jewish child refugees in the 1938 Kindertransport, Britain during the Holocaust barred Jews from pre-Israel Palestine. This flagrant denial of its legal undertaking to settle the Jews in the land caused untold numbers trapped in Europe to perish” (Melanie Philips, Journalist).⁴⁹⁶

Further demonstration of the ambiguous legacy of Holocaust memory in England can be found in the letter written by more than 40 Holocaust academics raising concerns that the Holocaust memorial centre would “add to the mythology of ‘Britain alone’ as the ultimate saviour of the Jews.” In a joint letter to the public inquiry, they stated: “Situating the UK Holocaust memorial next to the Houses of Parliament is likely to create a celebratory narrative of the British government’s responses to the Jewish catastrophe during the Nazi era and beyond.”⁴⁹⁷

Importantly, this narrative “negates several decades of careful scholarship and research.”⁴⁹⁸ Mary Dejevsky, writer and broadcaster, in an important contribution to this discussion, writes the following:

To advocates of the chosen site, proximity to parliament would serve as a salutary reminder to our legislators of the dangers of totalitarianism and intolerance of all kinds. Whatever comes of this inquiry, I earnestly hope that any self-congratulatory rhetoric about democracy and British values will be reined in and recognised as deeply inappropriate [...].⁴⁹⁹

Notably, in one of *The Times*’ Letters to the Editor, the following is written:

The British view about almost everything is that we were not guilty of such dreadful acts, and (as with the slave trade) we were almost uniquely virtuous. If you doubt it, the Cabinet War Rooms are close by to remind you. But when I look at the Westminster Holocaust memorial, I don’t know what I’m supposed to feel. This is what needs to be asked about genocides – why didn’t we stop them? Why did the good people in there (parliament) and out there (the

495 Moore, “Holocaust Survivor.”

496 Melanie Phillips, “[We’d Rather Champion Dead Jews than Live Ones](#),” *The Times*, August 27, 2019.

497 Harriet Sherwood, “[Robert Jenrick ‘Subject to Death Threats’ over Holocaust Memorial](#),” *The Guardian*, October 6, 2020.

498 Ibid.

499 Mary Dejevsky, “[Why is Britain’s National Holocaust Memorial Proving so Contentious?](#)” *The Independent*, December 6, 2020.

country) watch the persecution of the Jews, the Rohingya, the Tutsis unfold and fail to act?
(David Aaronovitch, Journalist).⁵⁰⁰

Two additional themes are raised in the context of the proposed Centre, both concerning the meaning and the centrality of the Holocaust as a historical event.⁵⁰¹ These themes primarily appear in *The Guardian* and *The Times* (similar to the aforementioned themes objecting to the proposed location). First, when arguing against the *need* for the memorial, the issue of other existing Holocaust memorials is raised. Claiming that there are already abundant memorial centres in London and the UK, voices question the need for another memorial centre: “We already have in London the Holocaust wing of the Imperial War Museum and the Hyde Park memorial. There might be a case for upgrading them but certainly not for rivalling them” (Jonathan Romain, director of Maidenhead Synagogue in Berkshire).⁵⁰² Since there are already a number of sites in London dedicated to the memory of the Holocaust, there are those who deem the National Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre redundant or irrelevant, especially as it comes at such a cost. The Imperial War Museum, in particular, is mentioned not only in the context of its existing Holocaust exhibition, but also as a possible location for accommodating such a memorial: “Their concern is echoed by the Imperial War Museum, which houses a well – regarded Holocaust exhibition and itself has grounds that could comfortably accommodate such a memorial” (Melanie Philips, Journalist).⁵⁰³

Second, the proposal to build a National Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre is oftentimes contemplated through a multidirectional perspective (Rothberg 2009), with claims made to also remember other genocides and past atrocities. This is not just about the question of using the memorial as “a permanent reminder not just of the extermination of six million Jews but of the appalling cost to other minorities such as Roma and homosexuals targeted by Nazism. It would also mark later genocides in Cambodia and Rwanda” (Alex Brummer, Journalist and Commentator).⁵⁰⁴ It was also suggested to build “a museum of genocide in general – certainly including the Holocaust, but also extending to Darfur, Bosnia, Rwanda and others, all of which share many similarities. More positively, how about a Museum of Tolerance that keeps alive the hopeful cry of ‘never again?’”⁵⁰⁵ Here the discussion centres on the uniqueness of the Holocaust and how its lessons and commitment to its remembrance extend to other atrocities. Relatedly, there are those who consider it problematic that although the British government has established memorials dedicated to the Holocaust and the Srebrenica massacre, it has not done the same for victims of the slave

500 David Aaronovitch, “[The Westminster Holocaust Memorial Doesn’t Hit me in my Heart](#),” *The Times*, March 1, 2019.

501 The issue of security is also raised, albeit less prominently, with claims that the memorial and learning centre could be a potential target for extremists. Specifically, some objectors contend that building such a memorial could be counter-productive and may even promote hate-crimes against the Jewish community.

502 Romain, “We Don’t Need Another Memorial.”

503 Phillips, “We’d Rather Champion Dead Jews.”

504 Brummer, “In the Name of my Aunt.”

505 Romain, “We Don’t Need Another Memorial.”

trade: “It is important to memorialise both the Holocaust and the enslavement of Africans, and they should not be in competition. In the interests of community cohesion, the government needs to fund a proper memorial to the victims of the Atlantic slave trade” (Madge Dresser, Professor of History at Bristol University).⁵⁰⁶ Similarly: “Twelve million people were taken from Africa over the course of slavery, but there’s no monument. How can it be?”⁵⁰⁷ These voices claim that the proposed Holocaust memorial will “overshadow a memorial on banning slavery.”⁵⁰⁸ Accordingly, it is claimed that the “Victoria Tower Gardens was not an appropriate location [...] and the museum would dominate the park and eclipse the existing listed memorials which are nationally important in their own right” (Darren Woodward).⁵⁰⁹

One final theme connected to the proposed location of the Memorial and Learning Centre is an environmental concern, namely how this location may have “significant harmful impacts” on Victoria Tower Gardens.⁵¹⁰ Much opposition was raised by local residents, the Royal Parks, Historic England, the Thorney Island Society, The London Historic Parks and Gardens Trust, the campaign group Save Victoria Tower Gardens, the Westminster City Council’s planning committee, and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (Icomos), which advises UNESCO on world heritage sites. Warning that the memorial would have a “massive visual impact,”⁵¹¹ debate centred around the loss of green space and trees. Moreover, the proposed location at Victoria Tower Gardens, a grade II listed park, is said to “obstruct protected views of parliament and alter the park’s character.”⁵¹² Additional objectors cite the design as inappropriate for the gardens and express concern that the many visitors would destroy one of London’s green oases. Notably, In *The Times*, the following was stated: “The world has had enough of ‘sacred missions’ and memorials. What we need is more humanity, interaction and the means to mingle in harmony. Destroying an open, peaceful green space where this can happen sends exactly the wrong message in a world now threatened with ecocide.”⁵¹³

506 Robert Booth, “UK Government Refuses to Fund Slavery Memorial Endorsed by Johnson in 2008,” *The Guardian*, December 10, 2019.

507 Haroon Siddique, Steven Morris, and Nazia Parveen, “Calls for National Museum to Document UK’s Role in Slave Trade,” *The Guardian*, June 14, 2020.

508 Moore, “Holocaust Survivor.”

509 Michael Powell, “Plans to Rip up a Historic Park next to the Houses of Parliament and Build a £50million Holocaust Museum are Branded ‘Unworkable’ by Royal Charity,” *The Daily Mail*, February 9, 2019.

510 Press Association, “Royal Parks Opposes Proposal for London Holocaust Memorial,” *The Guardian*, February 9, 2019.

511 Heather Stuart, “Theresa May Backs Building of Holocaust Centre Near Parliament,” *The Guardian*, May 6, 2019.

512 Shanti Das, “Robert Jenrick ‘Breached Planning Propriety’ over Holocaust Memorial Site,” *The Times*, June 21, 2020.

513 “Letters to the Editor,” *The Times*, August 31, 2019.

The rise in antisemitic incidents in England

The rise in antisemitism and antisemitic incidents in England is the third discursive event analysed in this research. Overall, across all three public discourse platforms it is agreed that the main cause of the Holocaust can be found in antisemitism as a form of extreme racism, prejudice and dehumanization of people. However, additional connections that are made between the Holocaust and antisemitism vary according to the type of text (i.e., official speeches, parliamentary debates, or media outlets).

Prominently, in the HMD official speeches the Holocaust is discussed in light of present-day antisemitism. “Never again” is not yet achieved since there is a rise in antisemitic incidents. This rise is demonstrated by referring to various polls (e.g., the Community Security Trust (CST) Antisemitic Incidents Report 2020). The various public speakers argue that since antisemitism is on the rise, it is clear that the British public as a whole has not learned from the lessons of the past. British Ambassador Neil Bush, at the OSCE Permanent Council, said the following: “Today, in a world where Holocaust denial, distortion and revisionism is gaining a foothold, we must remain resolute and recognise that attempts to attack the facts of the Holocaust all undermine the truth and our understanding of history.”⁵¹⁴

Linking between notions of truth and the factual understanding of the historical event of the Holocaust, Ambassador Bush urges a strong stand against the world-wide phenomenon of Holocaust denial and revisionism. He notably refers to this as a global problem. Thus, on the one hand, perhaps submerging the British challenge of learning from the past as one that is shared by many other states around the world, yet, on the other hand, strengthening the contemporary perception of the Holocaust as a cosmopolitan memory, one that is shared by all.

The link between the Holocaust and antisemitism is similarly made in the HMD parliamentary debates, namely as the main lesson that should be learned (although it has not yet been accomplished). It should be noted that there is cross-party agreement when discussing the rise in antisemitism in this context. Consider the following statement made by Labour MP John Ryan in 2019: “Tragically, the flames of racial and religious hatred continue to be fanned around the world. Antisemitism remains a scourge of the modern world. Hideous antisemitic tropes, repugnant conspiracy theories and malicious examples of Holocaust denial are all used by populists and demagogues for political ends throughout the middle east and in Europe.”⁵¹⁵

The 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps, in particular, was discussed through the framework of the importance of learning from the past in light of the present. To adequately remember and make amends with the past, one must contend with the rise in antisemitism in Europe and in England. Consider the following statement made by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Luke Hall, Conservative:

514 Neil Bush, “[Speech: Holocaust Memorial Day: UK Statement](#),” *Gov.UK*, January 28, 2021.

515 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 653: Debated on January 24, 2019, Hansard.

This debate is taking place on the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps throughout Europe, which brought an end to the murder of 6 million Jewish men, women and children by Nazi Germany. But as we know, it did not bring an end to the scourge of antisemitism. Today, sadly, we see antisemitism on the rise once more in this country and across Europe and the Americas.⁵¹⁶

According to Hall, to remember the lesson of the Holocaust, to truly “value” HMD, the “age-old hatred” must be dealt with and eradicated from society. Similarly, discussing how antisemitism weakens society, Labour MP Cat Smith contends that: “[...]recent rises in antisemitism are not just about attitudes to Jewish people but are the results of our society weakening as a whole.”⁵¹⁷

Under the larger umbrella of commemoration of the Holocaust, Smith constructs antisemitism as a problem that affects not only the Jewish community, but indeed British society and government, thus placing responsibility on both leadership and the public to “ensure that it is never allowed to fester again.” Taking the issue of responsibility one step further, Labour MP Chi Onwurah, in the 2019 HMD parliamentary debate addressed the yet-to-be-resolved issue of British responsibility in the Holocaust, to say: “We will also remember that much of the antisemitic hatred that preceded the Holocaust was directed against poor Jewish immigrants from Russia, Poland and the other countries of eastern Europe and that that hatred was present not only in Germany, but in France and here in the United Kingdom.”⁵¹⁸ Arguing that antisemitic hatred existed not only in Europe but also in England, Onwurah explains this as part of the understanding and perception that “Jews were alien and could never truly be [...] English.”

When discussing the rise of antisemitism in England during the HMD parliamentary debates, anti-Muslim attitudes are also raised. Specifically, anti-Muslim hate is referenced as yet another example of racism and discrimination. For instance, during the 2019 HMD debate, Labour MP Ian Austin, says the following:

One of the reasons I joined the Labour party as a teenager in Dudley 35 years ago was to fight racism [...] The first thing I did when I became an MP was lead a campaign to drive the British National party [...] out of the town. Since then I have stood with Muslim constituents who have been targeted by the English Defence League, but that would all be completely meaningless if I ignored antisemitism in my own party.⁵¹⁹

It is worth noting that MPs from both sides of the political map also draw a parallel between antisemitism and anti-Muslim attitudes. The following statement made by Theresa Villiers, Conservative, during the 2019 *Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) (Amendment) Bill* is one such

516 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 670: Debated on January 23, 2020, Hansard.

517 Ibid.

518 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 653: Debated on January 24, 2019, Hansard.

519 Ibid.

example: “At a time when antisemitic incidents are rising, it is more important than ever to stand up against all forms of hatred, racism and Islamophobia. This Bill is one way in which this House can do that.”⁵²⁰ An extremely revealing example can be found in the following statement made by Lyn Brown, Labour, in the *Definition of Islamophobia* parliamentary debate (2019): “The same poisonous rhetoric that has long targeted our Jewish communities is being used to incite hatred and violence by Islamophobes, racists and fascists, and the rhetoric is sometimes directed at both Jewish and Muslim communities simultaneously by the same people.”⁵²¹ Here, a parallel is created between antisemitism and anti-Muslim attitudes. Brown then goes to say the following:

These hatemongers talk about replacement [...] While the Nazi lie was that Jewish people were conspiring to control and replace white people directly, many fascists today weave antisemitism and Islamophobia together. Today’s alt-right say that so-called liberal elites, with Jewish people such as philanthropist George Soros always front and centre, support migrants and multiculturalism because we are trying to replace white people and Christian traditions with people, beliefs and practices that are both foreign and threatening. The rhetoric about the so-called great replacement is as horrific as it is false. Chillingly, it echoes some of the propaganda that the Nazis used to prepare for the utter horror of the holocaust. Here and now, it is inciting acts of Islamophobic and antisemitic terror.⁵²²

Citing replacement conspiracy as the basis for present-day antisemitic and anti-Muslim rhetoric and incidents, Brown evokes the Holocaust, thus creating a link between the past and the present. Antisemitism and the Holocaust are thus brought into the discussion on Islamophobia and its definition as a useful reference with which to understand Islamophobia and as a warning of what may happen if it is not adequately dealt with.

In all the media outlets, yet more so in *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, a similar connection is made between Holocaust denial, antisemitism and anti-Muslim attitudes. For instance, in *The Times*, there are articles that discuss how neo-Nazis hijacked gaming applications to encourage acts of terrorism against Muslims,⁵²³ how Holocaust denial and anti-Muslim hate are similar forms of online hate speech,⁵²⁴ and how Muslim and Jewish organizations stand together against Holocaust denial⁵²⁵; *The Guardian* articles discuss the rise in antisemitism and Holocaust

520 [Holocaust \(Return of Cultural Objects\) \(Amendment\) Bill](#), Vol. 654: Debated on February 8, 2019.

521 [Definition of Islamophobia](#), Vol. 660: Debated on May 16, 2019, Hansard.

522 Ibid.

523 John Simpson, “[Neo-Nazis Hijack Gaming Groups to Spread Hate Against Muslims](#),” *The Times*, March 23, 2019.

524 Tom Knowles and Charlie Parker, “[Facebook Clampdown Failing to Remove Groups Spreading Hate](#),” *The Times*, July 1, 2020.

525 Mark McLaughlin, “[Hate Crime Bill: Concessions 'Give Bigots a Get-out-of-jail-free Card'](#),” *The Times*, November 11, 2020.

denial alongside the rising levels of anti-Muslim prejudice and discourse in British society,⁵²⁶ online hatred against Jews and Muslims⁵²⁷ – also in football⁵²⁸ – and how racist political figures are both antisemitic and anti-Muslim.⁵²⁹ One article contemplates the hierarchy of racist attitudes, stating the following: “With unprecedented attention being given to antisemitism in these elections, anti-racists have asked why there has been a dominant tendency to treat this form of racism as so much more severe than that facing black people, Muslims, Roma people, migrants and asylum seekers.”⁵³⁰

The Guardian also dedicates articles to discuss how antisemitism and Islamophobia are currently infecting the UK Independence Party (a populist Eurosceptic political party that advocated for Britain’s separation from the European Union)⁵³¹ and Britain’s two biggest political parties.⁵³² One such article stated:

The only way out of this impasse is to recast anti-racist solidarity so that it is completely decoupled from political solidarity. Anti-racism must become unconditional, absolute, and not requiring reciprocity. Anti-racism must be explicitly understood as fighting for the right of minorities to pursue their own political agendas, even if they are abhorrent to you. Anti-racism requires being scrupulous in how one talks or acts around those one might politically despise. This isn’t just an issue that applies to Jews and antisemitism. We are beginning to see the strains in other forms of anti-racism too, when minorities start becoming politically awkward. The opposition from some British Muslim groups to teaching LGBT issues in school is one example of this. Yet opposition to Islamophobia is as vital as opposition to homophobia and one must not be sacrificed on the altar of the other.⁵³³

In *The Independent*, there are similar articles that create a parallel between antisemitism and Holocaust denial and anti-Muslim attitudes and Islamophobia, for instance “UN chief urges global

526 Frances Perraudin, “[Third of Britons Believe Islam Threatens British Way of Life, Says Report](#),” *The Guardian*, February 17, 2019.

527 Jeff Sparrow, “[The 'Internet SS': How the Halle Murders Follow a Template Established in Christchurch](#),” *The Guardian*, October 15, 2019; Julie Carrie Wong, “[Facebook to Ban Two White Nationalist Groups after Guardian Report](#),” *The Guardian*, November 26, 2019; Alex Hern, “[TikTok Expands Hate Speech Ban](#),” *The Guardian*, October 21, 2020.

528 Jacob Steinberg, “[From Parks to Premier League: The Shocking Scale of Racism in English Football](#),” *The Guardian*, April 12, 2019.

529 Rajeev Syal, “[Tory Councillors Accused of Racist Posts on Social Media](#),” *The Guardian*, June 10, 2020.

530 Alana Lentin, “[All the Talk of Racism in this Election Reveals how Poorly we Understand it](#),” *The Guardian*, December 10, 2019.

531 Peter Walker and Josh Halliday, “[Revealed: Ukip Membership Surge Shifts Party to Far Right](#),” *The Guardian*, March 3, 2019; Josh Halliday, “[Far Right 'Infiltrating Children's Charities with Anti-Islam Agenda'](#),” *The Guardian*, March 5, 2019.

532 Gaby Hinsliff, “[Antisemitism, Islamophobia – What's Gone Wrong with the Middle Aged?](#)” *The Guardian*, March 8, 2019.

533 Keith Kahn-Harris, “[How a Radical New Form of Anti-Racism can Save Labour](#),” *The Guardian*, May 29, 2019.

fight against pandemic and hatred,”⁵³⁴ and “If Boris Johnson really cared about Jews, he’d stop using us to distract from his own bigotry,”⁵³⁵ “TikTok bans misinformation about Jews, but antisemitic conspiracy theories still get millions of views,”⁵³⁶ “Online antisemitism at highest rate ever recorded.”

The parliamentary debates typically call for Holocaust education as one of the more prominent ways to fight antisemitism and Holocaust denial. Whether through formal education (i.e., the national curriculum) or the Lessons from Auschwitz programme, and additional commemorative initiatives, it is broadly agreed across parties that education is key. Consider the following statement made by Labour MP Barry Gardiner during the 2019 *Antisemitism in Modern Society Parliamentary* debate: “It is only through education that we will protect future generations from falling into insidious falsehoods and conspiracy theories.”⁵³⁷ Worth noting however, the following argument made by Conservative MP Andrew Percy in the same debate:

It is right that Holocaust education is written into the national curriculum. When we teach Holocaust education, we of course teach the history of antisemitism in Europe as part of it, but I fear that the teaching of the Holocaust in isolation could leave pupils with the impression that that was the end of it. We say that antisemitism started and ended with the Holocaust and the end of the Second World War, but we need to look at how we can broaden the school curriculum so that the liberation of Europe and the camps is not the end of the antisemitism story.⁵³⁸

To this extent, despite the Holocaust being the only compulsory topic in the history curriculum in England, many voices call for the Holocaust to be taught in context. An elaboration of this point can be found in Baroness Deech, Crossbench, statement in the 2021 *Anti-Semitism: University Campus Incidents* parliamentary debate:

Holocaust education, which is compulsory for schoolchildren, sadly has not worked. How is it possible that an entire generation who has studied the Holocaust can arrive at university and behave in the ways I have outlined? It is because they have studied the Holocaust in a vacuum, as an example of generalised hate, and have resigned it to history. They have learned nothing about the contribution of Jews to civilisation, about the millennia of persecution, and how that, and religious teaching, led to genocide.⁵³⁹

534 [“UN Chief Urges Global Fight against Pandemic and Hatred,”](#) *The Independent*, November 10, 2020.

535 Matt Greene, [“If Boris Johnson Really Cared about Jews, He'd Stop Using Us to Distract from His Own Bigotry,”](#) *The Independent*, November 29, 2019.

536 Adam Smith, [“TikTok Bans Misinformation About Jews, but Antisemitic Conspiracy Theories Still Get Millions of Views,”](#) *The Independent*, October 21, 2020.

537 [Antisemitism in Modern Society](#), Vol. 654: Debated on February 20, 2019, Hansard.

538 Ibid.

539 [Anti-Semitism: University Campus Incidents](#), Vol. 809: Debated on January 21, 2021, Hansard.

Here, the claim is that to study the Holocaust “in a vacuum,” without the context is not working. The rising numbers of antisemitic incidents prove that antisemitism is alive and not yet overcome, and that learning about the Holocaust is not enough. It must be made relevant through the grounding and contextualizing of the past in light of the present.

Two additional connections are made to antisemitism in the context of the HMD parliamentary debates: First, the importance of learning from the past in light of various conflicts around the world; Second, the link between the lessons of the past and the present-day issue of refugees and immigration. The first connection that is made typically addresses the need to learn from the lessons of the past by connecting the issue of *antisemitism with present-day conflicts*, and, similarly to the previous issue of the increasing rise in antisemitism, it is a prominent theme across time and political affiliation. Discussing the issue of contemporary antisemitism, as “the lived experience of [...] our colleagues, and [...] constituents,” Conservative MP Stephen Crabb calls upon his peers to not only remember the Holocaust, but “reflect” on what can be done to combat antisemitism, “renew” commitments to act, and, in essence, prevent the next genocide (2019).⁵⁴⁰ Similarly, as can be demonstrated in various conflicts throughout the world, Conservative MP Crispin Blunt contends that “we have not learnt.” And since “antisemitism is the virulent hatred that led inexorably to the Holocaust,” this lesson cannot be ignored or side-stepped (2020).⁵⁴¹ The following statement, made by Labour MP Wes Streeting in 2021 is telling in this regard:

So if the words “Never again” are really truly to mean something, being the light in the darkness is not just about our country’s responsibility on the global stage to tackle ongoing acts of genocide and atrocities such as those being perpetrated by China; it is also our everyday responsibility as citizens and Members of Parliament to tackle antisemitism under our very noses.⁵⁴²

Linking the idea of “never again,” with both tackling antisemitism in British society and government, and addressing “ongoing acts of genocide and atrocities,” Streeting contends that the lessons of the Holocaust ought to be about assuming responsibility in the present.

It seems that the rhetorical lessons of the Holocaust vary between right and left, mostly in terms of the direct responsibility that Britain assumes in present day conflicts. To this extent, Conservatives tend to discuss how Uighurs in Xinjiang are suffering crimes against humanity and genocide and also criticize the situation in Myanmar (Burma). In contrast, Labour MPs tend to associate it more with *refugees and immigration policy*. For example, in the 2021 HMD parliamentary debate consider the following statement made by MP Kim Johnson:

⁵⁴⁰ [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 688: Debated on January 28, 2021, Hansard.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

We recognise that the forces that drove this evil were pervasive and widespread: Governments and politicians throughout Europe – even in the UK – made antisemitism acceptable through their statements and actions, especially when denying safety to refugees. Today, as our government locks asylum seekers in inhumane conditions in military bases and closes the door on unaccompanied child refugees, it is clear that we still have much to learn.⁵⁴³

Discussing how notions of antisemitism in the past enabled denying safety to refugees, MP Johnson admonishes the British government's policy regarding asylum seekers and refugees in the present. Notably, in this excerpt, she suggests the British government and political actors should also be accountable for making "antisemitism acceptable" in the past, and how this continues to this day mainly through the policy directed to those seeking refuge. An additional example can be found in the statement made by Charlotte Nichols, Labour, in the same debate:

I spoke in my speech last year of the incredible story of the Sarajevo Haggadah and Dervis Korkut, a Muslim man who is recognised by the Yad Vashem World Holocaust Memorial Centre as a righteous gentile to whom the Jewish people owe a huge debt. We are not short of these stories of heroism and resistance [...] We need not risk our lives smuggling Swedish passports into Nazi-occupied Hungary [...] because we can bring about a fair and just immigration system that protects the lives of refugees, we can work to halt the proliferation of fascist propaganda online, and we can use our international standing, our influence and our trade policy to hold other nations accountable.⁵⁴⁴

Nichols connects between heroic stories of saving Jews during the Holocaust and the present-day British government policy on immigration. It is accompanied by much criticism, underlining the need to change immigration policy and to act morally to help persecuted people around the world.

One final theme that can be discerned in various parliamentary debates is how the IHRA definition of antisemitism is useful in the context of anti-Muslim attitudes. In the 2019 *Definition of Islamophobia* debate, Wes Streeting, Labour, said the following:

Alongside our definition, we produced a series of examples, inspired by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism, to help people to understand how Islamophobia manifests itself [...] They include calling for, aiding, instigating or justifying the killing or harming of Muslims in the name of a racist or fascist ideology or an extremist view of religion; the tropes that Muslims suffer about entryism in politics, accusing Muslims of being more loyal to the alleged priorities of Muslims worldwide than to their own nations; and applying double standards not applied to any other group in society.⁵⁴⁵

543 Ibid.

544 Ibid.

545 [Definition of Islamophobia](#), Vol. 660: Debated on May 16, 2019, Hansard.

Also, in the 2019 *Religious Persecution* debate, Baroness Berridge, Conservative, said the following: “Anti-Semitism is defined by the International *Holocaust* Remembrance Alliance and, of course, means Semite people. It is worth noting that both *Islamophobia* and antisemitism are being defined by the communities.”⁵⁴⁶ Both statements refer to the IHRA definition as a useful tool through which to contemplate and define Islamophobia. In so doing, a connection is made between antisemitism and anti-Muslim sentiment as similar and parallel discriminating attitudes.

In the media outlets, the discussion of antisemitism and its relation to the Holocaust is quite similar to what is discussed in the parliamentary debates. It is, however, more clearly divided between political parties with the Left and Centre discussing antisemitism in the context of Holocaust denial whereas the right discusses antisemitism through the perspective of Holocaust inversion (in the case of Israel) and Covid conspiracy tropes.

In *The Guardian*, the primary theme through which antisemitism is linked to the Holocaust is the rise in antisemitism and Holocaust denial in England. To this extent, a majority of the articles relay statistics and information from official polls and reports made by various institutions. For instance, the Community Security Trust report(s) on antisemitism, and more prominently, the 2019 Holocaust Educational Trust (HET) poll, that shows that 5% of UK adults don’t believe that the Holocaust actually happened (e.g., “One in 20 Britons does not believe Holocaust took place”).⁵⁴⁷ *The Guardian* links between the upsurge in antisemitism and the need to learn from the Holocaust, “that hideous marker of where antisemitism leads.”⁵⁴⁸ Alongside the polls, the articles also cite additional findings such as antisemitic Google searches, jokes mocking Jewish people, negative stereotypes, and violent phrases targeting Jews.

In *The Times*, the issue of Holocaust denial is also discussed through various polls and reports although in a more nuanced manner. In terms of Holocaust denial, the articles *One in twenty Britons think Holocaust never happened*, (Kaya Burgess, Religious Affairs Correspondent and Oliver Moody, Berlin correspondent),⁵⁴⁹ and *Cult of victimhood is a dangerous addiction; Sometimes the desire to expose callousness and ignorance makes us too eager to believe we’ve found evidence of them* (Matthew Parris, Columnist)⁵⁵⁰ refer to the unlikelihood of the HET poll results of widespread Holocaust denial in British society. Both articles suggest either a misunderstanding of the poll’s questions and/or a skewed estimation.

Other articles in *The Times* refer to the issue of Holocaust denial by addressing online antisemitism, for instance reporting on the Conservative-led initiative to investigate the Bing Microsoft search

546 [Religious Persecution](#), Vol. 798: Debated on July 11, 2019, Hansard.

547 Harriet Sherwood, “[One in 20 Britons does not Believe Holocaust Took Place, Poll Finds](#),” *The Guardian*, January 26, 2019.

548 Paul Chadwick, “[Ignorance of the Holocaust is Different to Wilful Disbelief](#),” *The Guardian*, February 10, 2019.

549 Kaya Burgees, “[One in Twenty Britons Think Holocaust Never Happened](#),” *The Times*, January 28, 2019.

550 Matthew Parris, “[Cult of Victimhood is a Dangerous Addiction](#),” *The Times*, February 8, 2019.

engine as an engine that “promotes Holocaust denial,”⁵⁵¹ YouTube’s antisemitic adverts that “unambiguously equate the actions of Israel with those of the Nazis,”⁵⁵² or how Amazon UK stocks books that draw on “longstanding and offensive antisemitic tropes.”⁵⁵³

Other articles in *The Times* address the issue of antisemitism at various universities and councils, in particular with regard to their refusal to adopt the IHRA definition. For instance, in the *Universities face cuts over antisemitism* article⁵⁵⁴ a large amount of attention is devoted to describing how universities and councils that refuse to adopt the IHRA definition face cuts to their funding and to statements made by Robert Jenrick, British Conservative Party politician serving as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government since 2019, and Dominic Raab, the Foreign Secretary, both advocating the adoption of IHRA, and connecting this to the fight against antisemitism and the importance of educating future generations about the Holocaust as part of this fight. A limited number of articles in *The Sun* (3) and in *The Daily Mail* (2) also address the issue of universities being urged to adopt the IHRA definition.

An additional theme that arises in *the Times* and in *The Sun* is that of Covid related antisemitic conspiracies, as can be discerned by a number of articles that create an analogy between Covid-related public health restrictions and the Holocaust, also connecting between the type of people that use conspiracy theories and those that deny the Holocaust. In *The Sun* there are also three articles that address Covid-related restrictions and how these are compared to the Holocaust by various people (e.g., *In A Tiss: Matt Le Tissier sparks Twitter storm after comparing coronavirus mask train row to Anne Frank*).⁵⁵⁵ One of the articles in *The Daily Mail* also linked antisemitism to the Holocaust through Covid, by publishing the tweets of 54-year-old-mother-of-four from East Sussex, likening lockdown restrictions to Nazi atrocities, asking “whether the public would wake up on the cattle truck? Or in the showers?”⁵⁵⁶

Out of all the media outlets, it is *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* articles that link antisemitism in British society to the Holocaust in the context of the debate on Israel, specifically by reporting on comparisons that are being made between Israel and Nazi Germany, accusing “Zionists of hiding behind the Holocaust cry,” (*Vile Rants and a Hitler Tweet*)⁵⁵⁷ and claiming that Jews have “conspired to secretly exert control over Western politics and the media” (*Will Football Blow the Whistle on Black Lives Matter Anarchists? Platers are Going Cold on UK Movement After its Hard-Left Manifesto Was*

551 David Leask, “[Microsoft’s Bing ‘Promotes Holocaust Denial’ and Antisemitic Tropes](#),” *The Times*, December 3, 2020.

552 Mark Bridge, “[YouTube Runs Antisemitic Adverts by Holocaust Denier](#),” *The Times*, January 28, 2019.

553 Mark Bridge, “[Amazon Stocks Children’s Book by Nazi War Criminal](#),” *The Times*, February 22, 2020.

554 Francis Elliot, “[Universities Face Cuts if they Reject Antisemitism Definition](#),” *The Times*, January 27, 2020.

555 Thomas Burrows, “[In a Tiss: Matt Le Tissier Sparks Twitter Storm after Comparing Coronavirus Mask Train Row to Anne Frank](#),” *The Sun*, December 4, 2020.

556 Padraic Flanagan, “[Mum-of-Four Leading Covid Crackpots](#),” *The Daily Mail*, September 20, 2020.

557 Sajid Javid, “[Vile Rants and a Hitler Tweet](#),” *The Daily Mail*, June 20, 2019.

Revealed, Says Guy Adams).⁵⁵⁸ *The Daily Mail* articles do so specifically by reporting on the various acts of antisemitism in the Labour party, some of which explicitly evoke the Holocaust through anti-Israel statements such as “the Holocaust has been exploited to oppress others” (*Stench of Hypocrisy over the Real Labour Villains*).⁵⁵⁹ Other examples include actual denial of the Holocaust, and extreme antisemitic statements such as the “Zionists ran camps in the Holocaust,” “Adolf Hitler was a Zionist God,” or “we shall rid the Jews, who are a cancer on all of us” (Labour’s Racism Bombshell).⁵⁶⁰

Antisemitism in the Labour party

The fourth discursive event this research attends to is the issue of antisemitism in the Labour party. This issue has been prominent in public discussions since Jeremy Corbyn was elected as leader of the party in September 2015 (Hirsh 2017; Rich 2016). After the comments by Ken Livingstone, former Labour Mayor of London, in an interview (*BBC Newsnight*, 2016), media coverage of the issue increased. These allegations of antisemitism eventually led to the Labour Party being investigated by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (2019). The EHRC found Labour responsible for committing unlawful acts of harassment and discrimination. Three breaches of the Equality Act were found: political interference in complaints on antisemitism; failure to provide adequate training to those handling complaints of harassment and antisemitism; suggesting that these antisemitism complaints were fake or smears. Following a controversial response to the report, Corbyn was suspended from the party in October 2019 and new Labour Leader Keir Starmer decided not to allow him back into the parliamentary party.

The issue of antisemitism in the Labour Party is not brought up during official HMD speeches. It is most prominently discussed in the context of parliamentary debates and in media outlets. In the parliamentary debates, antisemitism in British politics is tellingly referred to as “a cancer in our politics, on both the left and the right” (Conservative MP Andrew Percy, 2019 HMD parliamentary debate).⁵⁶¹ However, on the Left calls are made to “first get our own house in order” (MP Ian Austin, Labour, 2019).⁵⁶² Indeed, it is crucial “that the Jewish people have faith and trust in the Labour party’s ability to investigate cases of antisemitism. Anything else falls short and is a failure; anything else is shameful” (MP Stephen Morgan, Labour, 2020).⁵⁶³ Beyond this self-reproach, the need to eliminate antisemitism from the Labour party is linked to its ability to “criticize” its opponents: “Labour Members must understand that we will have no right to criticise our opponents on

558 Guy Adams, “[Will Football Blow the Whistle on Black Lives Matter Anarchists? Players are Going Cold on UK Movement after its Hard-Left Manifesto was Revealed](#),” *The Daily Mail*, July 1, 2020.

559 Andrew Pierce, “[Stench of Hypocrisy over the Real Labour Villains](#),” *The Daily Mail*, May 30, 2019.

560 David Wilcock, “[Labour’s Dossier of Shame: Jeremy Corbyn is Personally Accused of Nine Anti-Semitic Acts in Bombshell Report – as New Video Shows him Embracing ‘Blood Libel’ Preacher Later Jailed for Raising Funds for Hamas](#),” *The Daily Mail*, December 5, 2019.

561 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Volume 653: Debated on January 24, 2019, Hansard.

562 Ibid.

563 [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), Vol. 670: Debated on January, 23 2020, Hansard.

such issues if we do not first get our own house in order” (MP Ian Austin, Labour, in 2019 HMD parliamentary debate).⁵⁶⁴

The connection between antisemitism in Labour and Israel is also made. For example, in 2019 when Conservative MP Andrew Percy discussed the notion of the “Israelification of antisemitism.” Describing two separate incidents in which he was personally targeted for being a Jew, he linked antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiments, to demonstrate how antisemitism is used to convey political criticism against present-day policies. In the same debate, Dame Margaret Hodge, Labour, said the following:

I want to raise an issue around social media and the way that it has been exploited by, I am afraid, the hard left in what I would call almost Holocaust weaponization. The hard left are trying to close down any constructive debate that we can have on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They are trying to fuel modern antisemitism and trying to silence many Jews in public life.⁵⁶⁵

Describing her own personal experiences of antisemitism, Dame Hodge discusses the phenomenon of Holocaust inversion, and how a link is made between the Holocaust and the ongoing discussions of Israeli conduct with regard to the Palestinians.

It is interesting that across the media outlets Jeremy Corbyn is often portrayed as the source of antisemitism in the Labour party. In *The Guardian* the reports on the rise in antisemitism levels are primarily linked to the Labour party, with many articles (28) discussing Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership and its connection to the rise in antisemitism in Labour. Within this framework, for instance, various articles portray the different responses to Corbyn’s suspension due to his response to the EHRC report. On the one hand, there are articles that quote Keir Starmer’s full support of this decision, cited as saying this is “a day of shame for the Labour party.” On the other hand, articles also report the unwavering support Corbyn receives from members of the party, among them also Jewish Voice for Labour (JVL). For instance, *The Guardian* reported on JVL’s petition to reinstate him, citing its “appalled” response, calling the decision an “injustice,” and arguing that Corbyn’s comments were “a pretext to purge Corbyn and the left, and delegitimise left wing politics more broadly.”⁵⁶⁶

The Independent presents a relatively large number of articles discussing whether criticism against Israel constitutes antisemitism. The following articles all deal with this discussion: “Yes, Labour members can criticise Israel without being antisemitic – Clare Short has spread a poisonous myth”; “None of the most frequently heard criticisms of current Israeli government policy fall foul of the

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Andrew Sparrow, “[Jeremy Corbyn to Fight Suspension from Labour after EHRC Antisemitism Report Comments – as it Happened](#),” *The Guardian*, October 29, 2020.

IHRA definition”⁵⁶⁷; “Kate Ramsden: Labour election candidate quits after likening Israel to a child abuser”; “Resignation comes as John McDonnell is criticised for claiming Labour has done all that has been asked to tackle its antisemitism problem”⁵⁶⁸; “Here’s how to talk about Israel without sliding into antisemitism”; “Of course there are legitimate reasons to criticise Benjamin Netanyahu and Israel’s treatment of Palestinian people – but it’s shocking how often antisemitic language is used to do so”⁵⁶⁹; “There is no conflict between the struggle against antisemitism and the struggle against Israeli occupation”; “Today, the charge of antisemitism is addressed at anyone who critiques Israeli policy.”⁵⁷⁰ In all of the above, discussion focuses on whether rhetoric describing Israel political policies and/or discussing the fate of Palestinians vis-à-vis Israeli military operations is antisemitic, linking the discussion to the Holocaust via the IHRA definition of antisemitism. Notably, these kinds of discussions typically refer to post-Holocaust antisemitism as echoing pre-Holocaust antisemitism when criticizing Israel and the Jews at large.

Twelve articles in *The Times* address the issue of antisemitism in Labour, primarily linking between antisemitism that led to the Holocaust and how antisemitism has increased in the present. Corbyn is also portrayed as the primary reason that enables antisemitism in the party: “[U]nder Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership the party had descended into a ‘moral twilight’ where hatred of Jews flourished,”⁵⁷¹ not only in terms of his opposition to adopting the IHRA definition, but also by transforming the party into “a safe haven for anti-Semites.” *The Times* also addresses the issue of Holocaust inversion, specifically its use as a political tool. For instance, in the “BBC links Holocaust to Palestine” article the story of BBC correspondent Orla Guerin is reported as an example of an offensive attempt to link Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians to the Holocaust. The article focuses on the criticism of various Jewish groups and the response of the BBC Board of Deputies regarding the statement she made: “The state of Israel is now a regional power. For decades, it has occupied Palestinian territories but some here will always see their nation through the prism of persecution and survival.”⁵⁷²

In *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail*, the issues of antisemitism and the Holocaust are most prominently linked through discussions of antisemitism in the Labour party. When discussing antisemitism in Labour, *The Sun* reports on various incidents in which party members exhibit antisemitism, focusing on Corbyn’s leadership and his resistance to adopting the IHRA definition, and the EHRC report. Notably, the connection between antisemitism and the Holocaust in the various articles is typically

567 Alan Johnson, “[Yes, Labour Members can Criticise Israel without Being Antisemitic – Clare Short has Spread a Poisonous Myth](#),” *The Independent*, May 29, 2019.

568 Rob Merrick, “[Kate Ransden: Labour Election Candidate Quits after Likening Israel to a Child Abuser](#),” *The Independent*, November 7, 2019.

569 David Schneider, “[Here’s How to Talk About Israel without Sliding into Antisemitism](#),” *The Independent*, May 9, 2019.

570 Slavoj Žižek, “[There is no Conflict Between the Struggle Against Antisemitism and the Struggle Against Israeli Occupation](#),” *The Independent*, December 3, 2019.

571 Oliver Moody, “[Holocaust Survivor Charlotte Knobloch Rails at Jeremy Corbyn](#),” *The Times*, February 1, 2019.

572 Mark Sweney, “[Former BBC Executives Criticise Orla Guerin’s Holocaust Report](#),” *The Guardian*, January 24, 2020..

made by citing or quoting explicit statements made by different people, such as “Hitler was right,” or “Hitler was a Zionist,” comparing Israel to the Nazi regime, referring for instance to Gaza as a “concentration camp,” or calling Israel “an Apartheid state that was excused because of the Holocaust.” In *The Daily Mail*, Corbyn is also portrayed as the origin of antisemitism in the Labour party, with statements such as “Since Jeremy Corbyn became leader of the Labour Party, he has made the party a welcoming refuge for anti-Semites.”⁵⁷³ One of the articles written by Ian Austin, formerly member of Labour and MP, “How Did my Great Party Become so Poisonous?” says the following: “Under Corbyn, senior figures claimed Jewish people worked with Adolf Hitler or peddled the myth that they financed the slave trade.”⁵⁷⁴

One of the articles in *The Sun* discusses antisemitism in the Conservative party,⁵⁷⁵ citing the story of a Portsmouth councillor who caused outrage when baking a bun with a Nazi swastika image on it. Additionally, two articles in *The Independent* also addressed the issue of British Conservatism accused of Holocaust revisionism. The first, published on February 5, 2020, discussed how only a week after Holocaust Memorial Day a British Conservative Party politician participated at a National Conservatism conference in Rome, sharing “a platform with antisemites, Islamophobes and homophobes” (“Jewish leaders call on Tories to discipline MP who shared stage with notorious far-right figures”; “‘If the Conservative Party fails to discipline Mr. Kawczynski, it runs the serious risk of the public assuming that they share his views on association with such people,’ Board of Deputies chief says”).⁵⁷⁶ The second, published the following day, also referred to MP Kawczynski, quoting him as saying that Viktor Orbán, Hungary’s nationalist PM, and Matteo Salvini, Italy’s ex-deputy PM, “represent serious ideas and concerns, some of which are shared by many citizens of the UK” (“Daniel Kawczynski is being used as a scapegoat over Tory antisemitism”).⁵⁷⁷ Both articles admonish the Conservative Party for not disciplining the MP concerning his affiliation with far-right.

Immigration

A final word is in order regarding Holocaust memory and how it is linked to the issue of immigration in the media outlets. First, immigration is raised in connection to Jewish immigration to the UK after the Holocaust. This is mostly the case in *The Times*’ articles and *The Independent*. One article in *The Sun* discusses Brexit to raise the point that Europe at large considers Britain “as champions of peace in Europe,” quoting a senior editor of Germany’s biggest newspaper, *Bild*: “[...] it was Britain that

573 David Wilcock, “[Labour’s Dossier of Shame: Jeremy Corbyn is Personally Accused of Nine Anti-Semitic Acts in Bombshell Report – as New Video Shows Him Embracing ‘Blood Libel’ Preacher Later Jailed for Raising Funds for Hamas](#),” *The Daily Mail*, December 5, 2019.

574 Ian Austin, “[How Did My Great Party Become so Poisonous?](#)” *The Daily Mail*, July 23, 2020.

575 Adam Bennet, “[Nazi Rap: Ex-Lord Mayor Accused of Baking Swastika into a Hot Cross Bun and Posting Image on Snapchat](#),” *The Sun*, April 17, 2020.

576 Vincent Wood, “[Jewish Leaders call on Tories to Discipline MP who Shared Stage with Notorious Far-Right Figures](#),” *The Independent*, February 5, 2020.

577 Rivka Brown, “[Daniel Kawczynski is Being Used as a Scapegoat over Tory Antisemitism](#),” *The Independent*, February 5, 2020.

opened its doors to thousands of Jewish refugees fleeing certain death during the Holocaust.”⁵⁷⁸ It should be noted that these kinds of discussions do not question or complicate Britain’s “conventional, celebratory narrative of the war” (Sharples and Jensen 2013, 3), according to which Britain rescued Jewish children, serving as a safe haven after the Holocaust.

The second way in which the Holocaust is linked to immigration is through the discussion of individuals and public figures who are racist, antisemitic, deny the Holocaust and are typically also anti-immigration. This is the case across all media outlets. For example, the article “Why race science is on the rise again; After the Second World War, the belief that differences between so-called “races” are genetic became taboo. Now, with the far-right resurgent, it’s back”⁵⁷⁹ or the article “Far-right extremists using euphemisms to spread mainstream violent and racist ideas, report warns”; “Seemingly innocuous words and symbols are used “to make radical-right ideas more palatable to a wider public,” Lizzie Dearden reports.”⁵⁸⁰ The connection is thus not about immigrants’ attitudes to Jews in England, or specifically how British Muslims view the Jewish community, but rather how far-right and other extremists view the Holocaust and immigration in general. This aligns with research that posits that “there is no evidence to suggest that immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East contribute in any significant way to the rise in recorded antisemitic hate crime” (Feldman & Gidley 2018, 8; see also Feldman 2018). This finding, however, does not align with the 2020 Muslim Anti-Semitism in Contemporary Great Britain report (Ehsan 2020). The report, commissioned by the Henry Jackson Society (HJS), The Centre on Social & Political Risk (CSPR), and The Centre on Radicalisation & Terrorism (CRT), demonstrates how British Muslims have the least favourable attitude towards Jewish people, with 34% of the view that Jews have too much control over the global banking system, and 33% believing that Jews have too much control over global political leadership.

2.5.4. Conclusion

Britain undeniably played a dignified role during WWII. Though overall it enforced quotas and often only acted under pressure from outside parliament, Britain did stand up to the Axis powers, liberated some of the camps, saved Jews targeted for murder by the Nazi regime and its collaborators, and even admitted Jewish survivor refugees into its borders. Since the end of the war, British Jews’ overall successful integration into society, alongside the development of a prominent Holocaust memory, renders them secure, accepted, and affluent. Indeed, British Jews are not viewed as marginal or fragile, but rather as an extraordinary economic, political and social success, a collective that is largely culturally assimilated.

578 Trevor Kavanagh, “[The Cult of the Remainer is Finally Fading – Now is the Time for Theresa May to Act](#),” *The Sun*, January 27, 2019.

579 Angela Siani, “[Why Race Science is on the Rise Again](#),” *The Guardian*, May 18, 2019.

580 Lizzie Dearden, “[Far-Right Extremists Using Euphemisms to Spread Mainstream Violent and Racist Ideas, Report Warns](#),” *The Independent*, May 3, 2020.

Nonetheless, and although there are those that deem that “there is no real Jewish ‘problem’ in England,”⁵⁸¹ it is quite broadly agreed upon and substantially supported by an abundance of recent surveys and polls,⁵⁸² that antisemitism is on the rise.⁵⁸³ According to the 2021 United Kingdom Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness Survey (commissioned by The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany) not only is there a lack of awareness of key historical facts, including the UK’s own connection to Holocaust history and Britain’s policy toward Holocaust survivors but also a significant rise in antisemitism, Holocaust denial and distortion on social media or elsewhere online.⁵⁸⁴ An additional recent study (2020) by the British Community Security Trust (CST) reveals that far right extremists regularly share and distribute extremely violent antisemitic videos, memes and posts on fringe social media platforms.⁵⁸⁵ The report demonstrates how British far right extremism is on the rise, positioned within a global movement that celebrates terrorist attacks on synagogues, mosques and other minorities in Europe.

On the Left, many identify an emerging “politics of position” in which hostility to Israel becomes a key marker of identity (Wistrich 2011). Antisemitism, according to this view, “positions Jews as ‘oppressors,’ and those who develop hostile narratives about Jews as ‘oppressed’” (Hirsh 2017: 5). The idea that being on the Left means being opposed to Israel and Zionism began to take shape in the radical fringes in the 1960s (after the six-day war), gained momentum in the 1970s (with the launch of the first grassroots activist groups dedicated to the Palestinian cause), and was accepted by mainstream left-wing thinking in the 1980s (see Hirsh 2015). Since then, Israel retains support within the Labour party, yet opposition to Israeli policies concerning the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and sympathy for the Palestinian struggle dominate. For those who identify this form of anti-Israel or anti-Zionism as antisemitism (see e.g., Boyd 2022; Staetsky 2020), this “new antisemitism” was embodied in Jeremy Corbyn’s rise to leadership and consequent turmoil that characterized the

581 Giora Goodman, [“Antisemitism in Britain,”](#) Orwell Foundation.

582 A survey published by YouGov in June 2015 found that 7% of British adults had either a “fairly negative” or “very negative” opinion about Jews; A report on Antisemitism in Contemporary Great Britain published in 2017 by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) found that 5% of the general population “can justifiably be described as anti-Semites”; In 2018, a survey carried out for the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) show that there are increased shares of respondents (27% increase in comparison to 2012 survey) who say antisemitism is “a very or fairly big problem.” In 2020 the Campaign Against Antisemitism (CAA) commissioned King’s College London to survey British adults’ attitudes towards Jews in 2020 using YouGov. The survey shows that although 55% of British adults do not harbor any antisemitic views, 45% affirm at least one antisemitic statement, and 12% have entrenched antisemitic views, affirming four or more antisemitic statements.

583 Feldman’s 2018 study shows that the overall trend of antisemitic incidents in the UK is on the rise. Specifically, in 2016 in the UK there was a “further leap upwards” (p. 21) in contrast to other countries in the study such as Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. At the same time, Feldman demonstrates caution in interpreting these findings, contending that “there are compelling reasons to believe that, at the very least, part of the increase is due to increased resources given to policing and monitoring antisemitism and a growing willingness to report on the part of individual victims” (p. 21). See Feldman 2018.

584 [“New Study Reveals U.K. Respondents Believe Two Million or Fewer Jews Were Killed in the Holocaust. Claims Conference,”](#) Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

585 [“Hate Fuel: The Hidden Online World Fuelling Far Right Terror,”](#) CST Blog, June 11, 2020.

Labour party up until recently (and perhaps currently as well).⁵⁸⁶ Notably, the prominent discourse on the Left is that accusations of antisemitism are a smear in a political and strategic effort to silence criticism against Israel and to discredit Left-wing politics.⁵⁸⁷

Broadly, the Holocaust in England today is depicted as the ultimate symbol of evil, a unique tragedy that serves as a universal lesson. More than anything else, the popular narrative of the British Holocaust memory feeds British self-perception as an international power and serves to reinforce a positive sense of British self-conception and position in the world. Holocaust memory, including the memory of liberating Bergen-Belsen and the Kindertransport, has long been established as a prominent British memory, and is a frequent feature in HMD ceremonies, education and various cultural products (television programmes and films). Indeed, British Holocaust memory is commonly perceived as a meaningful collective memory that shapes British values and conduct. At the same time, it is consistently becoming more and more ambiguous for the British public and society (see also Stiles 2016, 2022). To quote Gordon, “Britain has undertaken little in the way of ‘*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*’ [coming to terms with the past] in relation to its relationship with the Holocaust” (2020, 219; see also Stone 2013). Indeed, while Holocaust education and commemoration are shaped to contribute to a patriotic narrative that places British efforts in the centre, it can no longer ignore or sidestep critical evaluations of British behaviour past and present.

The public debates that are presented in this research are a useful framework through which to understand how contemporary British social and political culture approach the Holocaust.⁵⁸⁸ In this regard, the Holocaust is adopted as part of the widely-accepted narrative of why Britain fought in the war, helping to reinstate “British values” of democracy and freedom, heroism, and a leading role in the global culture of commemoration. As a prominent example, the decision to build the National Holocaust Memorial and Education Centre near institutions of government, is about the importance the British government and public bestow upon such an endeavour. In this context, a strong connection is also made between British values and the need to eradicate antisemitism. Specifically, an argument is made that antisemitism has no place in British society. Conservative MP Marco Longhi, in 2021 discusses what it is to be British, namely to fight and die for “values of democracy, equality and freedom, fairness and tolerance – that make us British.”⁵⁸⁹ British values are thus crucial when discussing present-day antisemitism in England (Pearce 2020a). Furthermore, British values are central for understanding the role Britain played in the war and the years after.⁵⁹⁰

586 For an extended discussion on Corbyn’s Left, see Hirsh 2017.

587 Feldman opposes this view, claiming that first, criticism of Israel and its policies and support for the Palestinian cause were “shared widely across the political spectrum” (2019, 68), and second, that the Labour party became increasingly critical of Israel not because of antisemitism or anticolonialism, but rather “because the state [Israel] had departed from ideals that, rightly or wrongly, it had invested in the Jewish national home” (ibid., 70).

588 For research that deals with the individual’s involvement and motivation to engage with Holocaust memory, see Richardson 2018.

589 [Holocaust Memorial Day 2021](#), Parallel Parliament, January 28, 2021.

590 For research that deals with Britain’s policy toward Holocaust survivors and focuses on how Britain prevented Jews from reaching Palestine, see for example Kochavi 1998; 2001.

These public debates raise to the fore issues relating to the unsolved and ambiguous memory of the role of Britain during the Holocaust (Critchell 2020).

In the various media outlets, similar to the official speeches and the parliamentary debates, much discussion centres on the urgency and necessity of Holocaust commemoration and education and the imperative to “never forget.” Remembering the Holocaust in this context is achieved primarily by sharing stories about Holocaust survivors. To adequately remember the Holocaust, one must learn from the past, and these lessons are closely connected to present-day exigencies, genocides and atrocities in different places in the world, but also issues that are closer to home such as immigration.

Notably, while the political strife between right and left did not appear in the official speeches (“epideictic” in Campbell and Jamieson’s terms, 1990), the issues discussed on HMD in the parliamentary debates were typically presented according to the MPs’ political affiliation. In the context of the HMD parliamentary debates, it tends to be the Left that demonstrates interest in the intersectionality of the Holocaust, linking antisemitic prejudice with other contemporary British issues, such as colonialism, racism, and slavery. The other debates in parliament in which the Holocaust is raised, similar to the debates in the various media outlets, present a more complex picture, with discussions heavily oriented toward political affiliation. As such, Holocaust memory in England continues to be instrumentalized by political figures. At the same time, the consensus around its meaning is beginning to unravel, revealing a society that may finally be required to work through its past.

2.6. The Shifting Holocaust Memory in Spain⁵⁹¹

2.6.1. Introduction: the evolution of Holocaust memory in Spain

Holocaust memory in Spain appeared on the political and educational agenda less than twenty years ago. Reyes Mate wrote in 1998: “There are no traces here of what we could call a culture of the Holocaust. Spain has lived with its back turned to this singular event, the most significant of the twentieth century” (Mate 1998). Prohibited by Franco and set aside during the process of transition to democracy, it was not until the beginning of this century, with the adoption of the International Day of the Commemoration of the Victims of the Holocaust in 2004 and Spain’s joining the IHRA in 2008, that the Holocaust gradually gained a presence in Spanish Society.

The Spanish Civil War ended in 1939 with the victory of Francisco Franco. In September 1939 WWII began and Spain, while not formally entering the war, could be classified as a collaborator of Nazi Germany. Collaboration occurred at several levels: the provision of raw materials, sending Spanish workers to Nazi Germany and through the Blue Division, a Spanish army unit integrated into the Wehrmacht to fight on the Soviet front (Simó 2018).

In the aftermath of WWII, Franco’s regime tried to whitewash its past links to Nazi Germany. The aim was to strengthen Spain’s weakened international position using idealized narratives of its attitudes and actions during the years of persecution and genocide of the Jews in Europe (Baer & Correa 2020). At the international level, the myth about Franco as a saviour of Jews was formed around the accounts of Jews who escaped through the Pyrenees (see also Calvet 2020). At the national level, Spain avoided any details of the Jewish genocide and Nazi death camps. Even films that were critical of Nazism, such as “To Be or Not to Be” (1942) by Lubitsch and “The Great Dictator” (1940) by Chaplin, were only permitted after Franco’s death in 1975. Moreover, since 1945, numerous Nazis and fascists have found asylum in Spain and lived there freely, even after the restoration of democracy. Meanwhile, the fate of the Spanish Republicans in Nazi Camps was forgotten (Simó 2018).

From 1939 to 1960, the Spanish authorities promoted a discourse equating the Civil War with a crusade. The Franco regime presented the three-year war as a war of liberation between the Spanish nation and “anti-Spanish” forces. According to Franco’s propaganda, Spain had lost its independence during the Second Republic to a “Russian-Jewish,” “Jewish-Masonic” or “Jewish-Communist” conspiracy. However, in the 1960s, due to the need to end its isolation, a new official narrative of the Civil War appeared: a “war between brothers, a war that had taken place as a consequence of the opposition between ‘two Spains’” (Aragoneses 2015, 129). This official version of Spain’s civil war concealed Nazi Germany’s and Fascist Italy’s participation in the war while emphasizing the involvement of the Soviet Union on the Republican side to legitimize Franco’s anti-communist crusade.

591 This chapter is written by Marta Simó. Translations from Spanish are by Simó unless the texts were available in English.

During the Spanish transition to democracy from 1975 to 1982,⁵⁹² the various political forces agreed to leave the legacy of the civil war and dictatorship out of the political debate. This “pact of silence” consisted in actively forgetting Spain’s recent past for the benefit of the public good, placing the need for peace above that of memory or of justice (Baer & Sznajder 2020). There was neither reparation nor justice for the Franco dictatorship’s victims, and no recognition for the victims of Nazism. Successive Spanish Governments did not revise their narratives of deportation, involvement in WWII, or of the nature of the Civil War (Aragoneses 2015).

The 1990s signalled the beginning of change as seen in the new historical research and approach to the relation of Spain to the Holocaust. Entering the European Union and establishing diplomatic relations with the State of Israel (1986), the Balkan wars in the 1990s and the Rwandan genocide in 1994, films like Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993) or Roberto Benigni’s *Life Is Beautiful* (1997) – all played an important role. It was also during the 1990s that the lawsuit of Violeta Friedman, an Auschwitz survivor and Madrid resident, against León Degrelle, a Belgian Waffen SS who lived comfortably in Spain and who belonged to Spanish neo-Nazi movements. It gave rise to a significant controversy and several trials until the Constitutional Court accepted Friedman’s claims in 1991 (Aragoneses 2015; Baer & Correa 2020; O’Donoghue 2018; Simó 2019).

During the 1990s there was an explosion of public interest in the civil war and Francoism. Several civil society movements fighting for the recovery of these memories spearheaded greater interest in the Holocaust. The significance of Spain’s relationship with Nazi Germany and its responsibility for and actions regarding persecuted Jews and Spanish Republicans was emphasized; this in turn led to a Spanish Historical Memory Law (Ley 52/2007). This law did not establish any criminal procedures or truth commissions and only declared that the hundreds of thousands of judicial convictions against republicans were “unfair.” As Aragoneses points out: “The social and political reconstruction of the Holocaust in Spain must be interpreted in this particular context of impunity and lack of antifascist (or anti-Franco) culture in Spanish law and politics” (2015, 133).

For Baer and Correa, “the specific way in which this relationship and these events have been represented through the media, commemorations, and even historiography, has become a function of present-day memory politics” (2020, 404). Indeed, the manner in which historical facts are highlighted, omitted, or interpreted differently according to each ideological position is undoubtedly political. Not only is this because antagonistic Holocaust interpretations in Spain align with existing political fault lines dividing Spanish society. It also references “how supranational Holocaust memory discourses are reinterpreted in the country and how these interact with Spain’s internal memory conflicts” (ibid.). One example is the omission or non-specification of the relationship between the Franco Government and Nazi Germany. For instance, in Spanish minister Miguel Angel Moratinos’ presentation on the catalogue of the exhibition *Visas for Freedom* in 2009, he only talked about the Spanish diplomats who saved Jews but made no mention of the relationship of Franco’s Government with Nazi Germany during the Holocaust (ibid.) or how programmes for learning about the Holocaust

592 Although there is a broad consensus on the start date of the transition, which is fixed at the time of Franco’s death in November 1975, the final date is a matter of debate among historians, ranging from 1977 to 1982.

in the curricula for primary and secondary education excluded it entirely (Simó 2016). Insofar as the politics of history in general, and the Holocaust in particular, have become a discursive battlefield in Spain, the globalized Holocaust memory culture has also led “to the restoration of old myths and the emergence of new counter-myths” (Baer & Correa 2020, 408).

According to Baer (2012), Holocaust memory is also heavily linked to antisemitism in three prominent ways. First, primary antisemitism and (dis)memory of the Holocaust exist due to Spain’s avoidance of debates about its Nazi and collaborationist past in Europe. Accordingly, Spaniards can openly hold antisemitic positions mainly because people are ignorant about the fact that they are antisemitic, and even the term antisemitism is little known. As such, openly derogatory and stereotyped comments are produced and tolerated in Spain.

Second, the bulk of anti-Jewish expressions predominantly occur in the context of references to the Israeli-Arab conflict. They are usually criticism, accusations and condemnations that transcend the State of Israel or its citizens and are projected onto “the Jews” as a global and permanent whole. In this context, particular dynamics of rejection, comparison, appropriation and instrumentalization of the memory of the Holocaust emerge, which create a set of specifically Spanish discourses in relation to the Jews. The forgotten memory of the civil war and Francoism provokes a sense of grievance or lack of recognition among Republicans, even though their invisibility during the decades of democracy is not because they were overshadowed by the Holocaust. Nevertheless, this feeling of injury is sometimes channelled into attitudes of rejection of Jewish memory.

Finally, the last thesis put forward by Baer is what he terms the invisibility and/or naturalization of antisemitism. According to this argument, antisemitism is considered a matter of the past, a hatred that only existed during Franco’s regime and which is not found today in democratic Spain. This argument is mainly sustained by the leftist movements, who thereby claim it is unnecessary to fight against such discrimination or hatred.

This chapter analyses how these and other themes in the public-political discourse in Spain were discussed in relation to the Holocaust in the years 2019-2021. It pays special attention to how the rise of the far-right party VOX has impacted discourse on the Holocaust by public figures and the media, as well as to the struggle between the different political camps in Spain as it manifested in their discourse about the Holocaust and WWII more broadly.

2.6.2. Sources and methodology

The discursive events we chose to focus on are Holocaust Remembrance Days; the controversy over the “Holocaust Carnival” on February 25, 2020 in Campo de Criptana; the nomination of Holocaust denier Fernando Paz as VOX’s candidate to run for Parliament in Albacete; the debate over the naturalization of Jews of Spanish descent in August 2021; and the impact of the rise of VOX on Holocaust memory, which we treat as a broader discursive event by itself because of its importance in understanding the way the memory of the Holocaust is invoked in today’s Spain.

Online journals and parliamentary debates constituted the main sources for this research. The newspapers we chose to focus on are the following:

- *ABC* – Conservative-right.
- *El País* – Centre-left.
- *La Vanguardia* – Centre-right.

These are general newspapers with the largest number of readers⁵⁹³ that represent the full progressive to conservative ideological spectrum (Martínez-Nicolás et al., 2014). In Catalonia *Diari Ara* was selected in order to evaluate whether any specific elements of Holocaust memory are to be found in Catalonia.

A keyword search was conducted to retrieve relevant journalistic texts.⁵⁹⁴ This included the following terms: Holocaust; Israel; Antisemitism; Auschwitz; Jews; BDS; Nazism (see Table 4).

Table 4: Number of relevant articles, by venue, in Spain

	Holocaust	Israel	Auschwitz	antisemitism	Jews	BDS	Nazism
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	114	1158	237	121	982	5	290
<i>ABC</i>	411	1334	183	398	1203	8	404
<i>El País</i>	137	466	37	58	58	5	302
<i>Diari Ara</i>	13	85	14	17	3	0	42

Following the exploratory search, the most relevant data (news, chronicles and reports) was chosen and topically classified (see Table 5).

The second phase included three new types of sources. The first was *Observatorio Antisemitismo*.⁵⁹⁵ Founded in 2009, this source was created within the framework of the second International Seminar on Antisemitism in Spain by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain and the Movement Against Intolerance. Its aim is to centralize, catalogue and analyse incidents of an antisemitic nature in Spain. Data collection was from January 2019 until July 2021 (see Table 6).

The second source includes documents extracted from presentations and discussions carried out in the Congress of Deputies in Spain. The following keywords were used: Holocaust, Antisemitism, and Israel (see Table 7).

The third source was informal information received from Jewish religious groups and Jewish cultural organizations, such as Mozaika, Licra, Bet Shalom and CIB as well as some informal interviews with relevant informants: four academics in the fields of antisemitism, education, and sociology of religion from different Spanish Universities.

⁵⁹³ AIMC Report 2019, [Estudios General de Medios en España](#).

⁵⁹⁴ This exploratory search was only partially accurate. In some cases in *ABC* and *La Vanguardia* the search keywords yielded news items that were irrelevant and/or consisted of duplications.

⁵⁹⁵ [Observatorio de Antisemitismo](#).

Table 5: Types of data classified, Spain

Holocaust	La Vanguardia	ABC
Commemoration	7	1
Relations with other countries	9	1
Books, films, art, survivors	21	6
Negationism – Far Right – Banalization	10	7
Spain	1	2
Israel	ABC	
Neutral or positive Information	6	
Auschwitz	Diari Ara	
Commemoration	7	
Nazism	El País	
Historical information	8	
Commemorations	2	
Relations with other countries	5	
Books, films, art, survivors	4	
Negationism – Far Right – Banalization	8	
Spain	5	
Jews	El País	
Israel	1	
Spain	1	

Table 6: Additional sources, Observatorio Antisemitismo, by year and topic, Spain

	2019	2020	2021 (July)	Total
Antisemitism – Far Right – Islam	2		1	3
Antisemitism – Far Right – Nazism	5	6	2	13
Antisemitism – Traditional	3	2	1	6
IHRA Definition		3		3
Fight Against Antisemitism	1	2	1	4
Antisemitism Far Left – Israel	1	4	1	6
Antisemitism – Far Right – Francoism	1		1	2
Covid		3		3
Total	13	20	7	

Table 7: Additional sources, Congress of Deputies, by year and topic, Spain

	2019	2020	2021	Total
Antisemitismo	9	30	39	78
Holocausto	4	20	15	39
Israel	48	105	106	259
Total	61	155	160	

2.6.3. Findings and analysis

Holocaust Remembrance Days

The 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and Holocaust Remembrance Day (2020) was the most prominent discursive event in terms of the attention it received in the media and political discourse. While the 2019 Remembrance Day received virtually no attention in the media surveyed here, the 76th anniversary was a focus of attention, mostly due to the presence of VOX in the Spanish Parliament from April 2020, and as a consequence of various incidents that took place during the 75th anniversary as detailed below. The discursive analysis is therefore conducted as a continuum, and not divided according to specific dates.

When explicitly connected to Spain, the 75th anniversary received little media attention. News items mainly described the commemorative events that took place in Auschwitz and in Jerusalem. Only two articles discussed the ceremonies in Auschwitz, despite the presence of the Spanish King and Queen. The article by the correspondent of the Royal House for *ABC* is particularly notable.⁵⁹⁶ First, it included several errors and omissions. For instance, the article stated that there were four million victims at Auschwitz and did not mention the fact that 90% of the victims were Jews. Second, the article highlighted the number of Spaniards who perished in Nazi concentration camps, among them a person whose photograph is exhibited in one of the pavilions visited by the royal couple – an indication that the correspondent was more interested in reporting on the presence of the monarchs than in explaining what Auschwitz meant or how it should be remembered. Indeed, it described how monarchs Don Felipe and Doña Letizia placed the wreath of red and yellow flowers – with a band of the Spanish national flag colours – that read “SS.MM the Kings of Spain” in front of the Death Wall, stressing that in that same place, monarchs Don Juan Carlos and Doña Sofía made a similar offering 31 years ago. Finally, the article ends with a description of how candles written in Sephardic remembering the dead were offered next to the plaque – thereby stressing the remembrance of Spanish Jews and the Spanish tradition rather than Jewish victimhood in the Holocaust. As such, overall, the article focuses on Spain and its monarchy and exalts their presence. Although it mentions Spanish victims, it does not mention that these were Republicans,⁵⁹⁷ nor that they were Jews.

In the other newspapers, not much was said about the king and queen of Spain or any relation of Spain to the Holocaust. One notable exception is an article in *El País* by Alejandro Baer, in which he discusses the three arguments mentioned above about the relations between antisemitism and Holocaust memory in Spain.⁵⁹⁸ Another article in *El País* discussed the aims of the various

596 Almudena Martínez-Fornes, “[Los Reyes, tras visitar Auschwitz: 'Que nunca más la Humanidad caiga en un horror semejante'](#),” *ABC*, January 27, 2020.

597 In *La Vanguardia* there was an article with a photo of the King and the Queen and an explanation of their visit. In this case it was mentioned that they met with representatives of the Republicans. See Redacción /Agencias, “[El mundo conmemora el 75 aniversario de la liberación de Auschwitz](#),” *La Vanguardia*, January 27, 2020.

598 Alejandro Baer, “[La lección de Auschwitz en España](#),” *El País*, January 26, 2020.

government representatives who attended the fifth World Holocaust Forum in Jerusalem.⁵⁹⁹ The article's title reads: "Israel and the US Take Advantage of the Holocaust Forum in Jerusalem to Charge against Iran" and in the subtitle: "Putin calls for a summit of the permanent members of the Security Council to 'defend peace'." Overall, the article highlights how Israel and the US use Holocaust commemoration to advance their political aims.⁶⁰⁰

During January 2020, a number of city councils in Spain presented motions to institutionalize the Day of Remembrance for the victims of the Holocaust. On January 30, 2020, VOX, the relatively new ultra-nationalist and far-right party, refused to sign an institutional declaration in memory of the Holocaust at the municipal plenary session of the Valencia City Council.⁶⁰¹ The stated reason was that the text also condemned, in addition to antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism and LGBTQ-phobia. Arguing that "in the Nazi camps there were no homosexuals," VOX stated that the content of the declaration "diluted the very meaning of the Jewish Holocaust, [which was] based solely on antisemitism." Additionally, they stated: "today was a day to commemorate the Holocaust, nothing more, and the Valencia City Council has taken the opportunity to introduce other issues for which we have not been able to sign, since we would be disrespecting the Jewish people." VOX also accused the other municipal groups of including "ideological content referring to LGBTQ or Islam in the declaration, without including Catholic victims, thereby diminishing the value and meaning of the Holocaust."⁶⁰²

That same day, VOX announced on its webpage its decision to present motions condemning the Jewish Holocaust in all the municipalities in which it had representation.⁶⁰³ Their argument was that the left wanted to instrumentalize, once again, a tragic historical event to implant its ideological interests, by introducing new groups of victims (Muslims or LGBTQ+ communities), which was a distortion of what really happened and diluted the importance of the Jewish victims while undermining a condemnation that could have been unanimous. Therefore, in the motion they presented to condemn the Jewish Holocaust, VOX stated that it remembers all the people who suffered persecution in the concentration camps during WWII and especially the Jewish community, as well as Catholics, political dissidents, ethnic Roma and homosexuals. It also stressed the courage of the Spaniards who fought to protect the victims of this persecution and who have been declared Righteous Among the Nations by the Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem.

599 Juan Carlos Sanz and Miguel González, "[Israel y EE UU aprovechan el foro del Holocausto en Jerusalén para cargar contra Irán](#)," *El País*, January 23, 2020.

600 See also Jordi J. Baños, "[La comunidad internacional arropa a Israel en el 75.º aniversario de la liberación de Auschwitz](#)," *La Vanguardia*, January 24, 2020.

601 Raquel A. Durà, "[VOX niega que hubiera personas LGTBi en Auschwitz](#)," *La Vanguardia*, January 30, 2020.

602 Cristina Vazquez, "[VOX rechaza en Valencia una declaración sobre el Holocausto porque condena la LGTBIfobia](#)," *El País*, January 30, 2020.

603 VOX, "[VOX condena el Holocausto Judío y presenta moción en todos los ayuntamientos en los que tiene representación](#)," January 31, 2020.

On July 24, 2020, Podemos, the main leftist party in Spain, presented a nonbinding resolution for discussion and approval at the Constitutional Commission, to promote public policies of democratic memory and to end impunity for crimes against humanity committed in Spain. The examples they presented were mainly against VOX:

[...] It is worrying to see how, today, extremist and xenophobic political forces in Spain even make an effort to distort and hide historical facts, such as crimes against humanity or serious human rights violations [...]. Today, memory is the most effective weapon to build a containment dam against ghosts of the past that once again threaten the present and to put limits on extremist political groups that use denialism as a platform for electoral advancement. Specifically, last January, in the Valencian Community, the far-right political group VOX trivialized and refused to condemn the Holocaust and extermination for reasons of sex [...]. One of the attacks we have suffered in recent months is the serious insults towards some victims of Franco's repression, such as those made against the Thirteen Roses⁶⁰⁴ by the leader of VOX, Ortega Smith [...]. It is essential that public administrations assume and guarantee the right to truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition to all the people repressed, murdered or disappeared from the anti-Franco resistance as victims of political violence; democratic institutions must publicly recognize, name by name, all the victims of the Franco regime.⁶⁰⁵

Here, it is quite evident how the left relates VOX's denial of Nazi persecution of the LGBTQ community to the nationalist-right refusal to condemn Franco's repression, violence, and murders, thus connecting the far-right party VOX to Spain's fascist past.

This back and forth between the far left and the far right, with the Holocaust as an important reference point, continued into the subsequent Holocaust Remembrance Day as well. On February 5, 2021, VOX, under the provisions of Article 193 and following the current Regulations of the Congress of Deputies, presented a nonbinding resolution regarding the "Memory of the Holocaust and the prevention of crimes against humanity" for discussion at the plenary session. The aim was to clear their name after their refusal to approve the International Day of the Commemoration of the Victims of the Holocaust at the Valencian Parliament and since some of their members were accused of Holocaust denial. Their proposal presented Nazism and Communism as equivalent, but at the same time underlined the Jewish Holocaust as a unique crime:⁶⁰⁶

604 "Las Trece Rosas" (the Thirteen Roses) is the name given in Spain to a group of thirteen young women who were executed by a Francoist firing squad just after the conclusion of the Spanish Civil War. Their execution was part of a massive execution campaign known as the "saca de agosto," which included 43 young men (among them a fourteen-year-old).

605 BOCG-14-D-125, July 24, 2020, [Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales Serie D: General \(congreso.es\)](https://www.boe.es/boletines/BOG/BOG-14-D-125-2020-07-24)

606 Nonbinding resolutions are parliamentary initiatives through which Parliament expresses its position on a certain issue or urges the government to follow a certain policy or take some action. They do not have a legislative nature or purpose, rather their name makes it clear that they differ from legislative initiatives of parliamentary origin, namely Bills.

The totalitarian ideologies – Nazism and Communism [...] shared contempt for democracy and the unconditional subordination of the individual to a “total state” that supposedly embodied a great historical project [...] Both practiced the complete criminalization of human collectives: ethnic groups in the case of Nazism, social classes in the case of communism [...] But the Holocaust is a crime without equal in History [...] put into practice with diabolical thoroughness and industrial efficiency [...] and having largely achieved its objectives (70% of the Jews in the territories controlled by the Nazis were exterminated: almost six million).⁶⁰⁷

In the same proposition, they again paid special tribute to the Spanish Righteous among the Nations and also emphasized Muslim and far-left antisemitism. That same week, VOX presented a motion to stop what they called “the migratory invasion” of Spain, provoking a flood of criticism from several leftist groups who called them “fascists” or “semi-fascists.”⁶⁰⁸ As we shall explore later in this chapter, these are recurring themes in VOX’s discourse, which are often linked to the Holocaust either by VOX representatives themselves or by their rivals.

“Holocaust Carnival”

The Carnival Festivities that took place on February 25, 2020 in Campo de Criptana, a small town in Ciudad Real near Madrid, took an unexpected turn when one of the parades featured dozens of people in full Nazi-style regalia and others wearing the striped pyjamas worn by concentration camp prisoners. Children were dressed in the yellow Star of David. As mentioned in the *Times of Israel*: “On top of one float, a woman in Nazi uniform could be seen gyrating alongside a model Doberman under two giant chimneys. Elsewhere a line of Jewish victims in red hotpants and bustiers with a gunshot wound to the heart danced with Israeli-style flags.”⁶⁰⁹ Notably, the Spanish media covering the event mostly referenced Israel’s condemnation and did not refer to the trivialization or distortion of the Holocaust. For instance, the newspaper *El País* wrote the following: “Israel condemns a parade of the Carnival in Campo de Criptana for ‘trivializing’ the Holocaust. The carnival organizers, from Cuenca, affirm that their intention was to honour the victims of Nazism.”⁶¹⁰

Here, a (dis)memory of the Holocaust can be discerned together with the naturalization of antisemitism, namely speaking and acting in ways that are offensive to Jews and are considered antisemitic without being aware of doing so. Interestingly, almost all the media outlets put the word

607 162/000519—BOCG-14-D-215, February 5, 2021. [Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales Serie D: General \(congreso.es\)](https://www.boe.es/boletines-oficiales/BOE-A-2021-000519), 33.

608 “VOX aprovecha una iniciativa contra el Holocausto para que el Congreso condene el nacionalsocialismo y el comunismo,” *Europapress*, February 7, 2021.

609 AFP, “Top Spanish Diplomat ‘Horried’ at Holocaust-themed Carnival Parade,” *Times of Israel*, February 26, 2020.

610 See EP, “Israel condena a una comparsa del carnaval de Campo de Criptana pro ‘banalizar’ el Holocausto,” *El País*, February 25, 2020; “Israel denuncia a una comparsa del carnaval de Campo de Criptana por ‘banalizar’ el Holocausto,” *ABC*, February 25, 2020; Redacción, “Embajada israelí denuncia la ‘repugnante’ banalización del Holocausto en una comparsa del carnaval de Campo de Criptana,” *La Vanguardia*, February 25, 2020; Ara Cultura, “Israel condena una comparsa de Carnestoltes de Campo de Criptana per ‘banalitzar’ l’Holocaust,” *Diari Ara*, February 26, 2020.

“trivialization” in inverted comas, as though to point out that this is an exaggeration. Moreover, an apology was issued by the organizers only after the Israeli embassy protested against the parade. The City Council of Campo de Criptana assured the embassy that it shared the criticism of the way the Holocaust was represented by the Cultural Association “El Chaparral de Las Mesas (Cuenca) in the Regional Carnival Parade,” but pointed out that it was allowed “because of the conviction that it was remembrance of the victims from the strongest condemnation of the Holocaust.”⁶¹¹ As reported by the City Council in a press release, in the documentation presented by the “El Chaparral” Cultural Association in the weeks prior to the parade, they referred to “one of the bloodiest episodes of the twentieth century,” and explained that the assembly was “a tribute to the millions of people who unjustly died in the extermination that took place during WWII in Germany.” However, the city council as well as the organizers admitted that their aim of commemorating the victims was not achieved due to the controversy that it had caused.⁶¹² It can be inferred that they were not aware that what they were doing was antisemitic, and it is notable that the media did not consider this to be a Spanish “issue,” but an Israeli one, as they mainly treated it as an exaggerated reaction from Israel.

*Vilaweb*⁶¹³ was the only Spanish (Catalan) media outlet that took a different approach. The headline and subtitle explicitly referred to the event as a trivialization of the Holocaust: “A Castilian carnival group wearing costumes about the Nazi Holocaust. Bodies dedicated (to fighting) antisemitism have called it ‘disgusting’.” The article also cited the Israeli Embassy’s and StandWithUs organization’s condemnations of the parade.⁶¹⁴

The nomination of Holocaust denier Fernando Paz

In March 2019, Fernando Paz was nominated as VOX’s candidate to run for Parliament in Albacete, a city in south-eastern Spain. Fernando Paz is a historian and a secondary school teacher, known for his homophobic, revisionist, and at times Holocaust-denial positions. His book *Nuremberg: Juicio al Nazismo*, which presented the Nuremberg trials as a farce and as exemplifying victors’ justice, was presented at the Madrid Headquarters of “La Falange,” an openly antisemitic party of unequivocally fascist ideology, and in the headquarters of “Alianza Nacional,” an openly neo-Nazi political party.⁶¹⁵

611 Lanza, “[El Ayuntamiento de Criptana condena la puesta en escena de El Chaparral sobre el Holocausto en el desfile de Carnaval](#). Lanza Diario de La Mancha,” February 25, 2020.

612 C. Manchegos, “[Comunicado oficial del Ayuntamiento de Campo de Criptana en relación con la representación 'Holocausto' de la Asociación Cultural 'El Chaparral' de Las Mesas \(Cuenca\)](#),” *Cuadernos Manchegos*, February 25, 2020.

613 *VilaWeb* is a catalan-language web portal and daily news outlet, founded in May 1995 by the journalists Vicent Partal and Assumpció Maresma. It was the first online medium produced completely in Catalan, and the first news media in Spain to be based entirely online. Its editorial line advocates for Catalonia’s separation from the Spanish state.

614 Redacció, “[Una comparsa d’un carnaval de Castella fa gresca amb disfresses sobre l’Holocaust nazi](#),” *Vilaweb*, February 25, 2020.

615 Redacción, “[Dimite el candidato de VOX que negó el Holocausto](#),” *El Plural*, March 21, 2019.

In response to public pressure, including from the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain (FJCS), Paz retracted his candidacy. Publicly condemning his nomination, the FJCS focused attention on Paz's revisionist and denialist statements, also recalling that he "has described the Nuremberg trials of the Nazi leaders as a farce, has questioned the mass murder of six million Jews, has made clear his suspicions that Jews did not die in the gas chambers but at the hands of the inhabitants of Eastern Europe and has denied the racist origin of the Holocaust." Furthermore, the FJCS stressed that "in any country in Europe where justice has been done on this traumatic chapter in history, it is inadmissible for a person with such views to run for a position of public representation."⁶¹⁶

VOX, in response, far from condemning Paz only briefly stated the following: "We confirm that Fernando Paz submits his irrevocable resignation as VOX's candidate for Congress for Albacete. From VOX we appreciate the high-mindedness and patriotic gesture of Fernando Paz in resigning his candidacy so as not to harm this project. And at the same time, we condemn the political and media lynching he has suffered."⁶¹⁷ Podemos, responded with the following statement during a Parliamentary debate:

Of course, its [VOX's] leading historians not only have in common not having studied History, but they also learned from Franco what the Franco regime in turn learned from its Nazi allies: that a lie repeated a thousand times becomes true. But, knowing that your reference on the subject is the pseudo-historian Fernando Paz, who had to resign from the VOX candidacy due to his Holocaust denialist statements [...] [it is clear that] [i]n reality, what bothers you about this law [the Democratic Memory Law, to which we return below] is precisely the truth, because you are ideological heirs of those who rose up against the legally constituted order, with the help of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy.⁶¹⁸

Ms. Lastra from PSOE also stressed VOX's connection to Francoism, Fascism and neo-Nazism. Specifically, she reflected on their acts against the memory of the Republicans in Nazi camps and the complicity of PP and Ciudadanos, stating the following:

Who they are has been made clear by their MP, Jorge Buxadé, repeating slogans of the Vichy regime, a Nazi collaborator, and also by their deputy, Rocío de Meer, who is dedicated to promoting messages from neo-Nazi parties throughout Europe on social networks [...] Therefore, let us call things by their name: you [VOX] are a fascist party. A few days ago, they removed the names of two socialists from the streets of Madrid, they destroyed statues of defenders of social justice and victims of Nazism with hammer blows. [One of them, Francisco Largo Caballero] dedicated his life to protecting workers and expanding rights. Those you revere dressed him in rags, locked him up in a Nazi concentration camp, and tried

616 Miguel Gonzalez, "[Los judíos españoles ven 'inadmisibles' que VOX presente al Congreso a un negacionista](#)," *El País*, March 21, 2019.

617 Meite Loureiro, "[Fernando Paz renuncia como candidato de VOX por sus polémicas declaraciones sobre la homosexualidad y el Holocausto](#)," *Libertad Digital*, March 21, 2019.

618 [DSCD-14-PL-56](#), May, 27, 2021.

to turn him into a number that they carved into his clothes. Gentlemen of the Popular Party, gentlemen of Ciudadanos, between the extreme right and a victim of Nazism imprisoned in a concentration camp, you have voted to destroy the memory of the latter with a hammer. [...] What you have done is called whitewashing fascism, and that would really put any democrat to shame.⁶¹⁹

Here we see that while VOX, like other far-right parties in Europe, has distanced itself from Holocaust denial, parts of its constituency, including prominent members, are still attracted to such ideas, which are often an expression of the broader appeal antisemitism has for this sector of the Spanish population. Moreover, we see that VOX does little to “discipline” its members on these issues. We also see again how Holocaust denial on the part of right-wing nationalist parties like VOX is immediately mobilized by other parties, especially by the left, to condemn not only VOX itself but the Franco regime and its crimes, particularly against the Republican camp. In this context, stressing the links between the Franco regime and the Nazis is of the utmost importance for the left – in this way they build on the ultimate evil the Nazis and particularly the Holocaust represent to condemn both the Franco regime and those who defend it in Spain, most prominently the far-right parties. In other words, when the Holocaust is invoked in the public discourse in Spain, it often serves to highlight the Republican victims of the Franco regime, as part of persistent memory struggles in this country.

Naturalizing Jews of Spanish descent

VOX continued to draw attention as some of their affiliates exhibited antisemitic behaviour, while other members of the party emphasized the importance of the memory of the Holocaust, at least in its mythological Spanish version. One example of the latter is in relation to Law 12/2015, of June 24, 2015, regarding the granting of Spanish nationality to Sephardim originating in Spain. This is a very illustrative example of what Aragonese (2018) describes as the constructed idea of “*convivencia*,” an imagined harmonious coexistence of the three cultures (Jewish, Muslim and Christian) in the Middle Ages. This myth was created by Spanish intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth century and has become linked to the myth of the Franco regime as saviour of Jews during the Holocaust and to the emphasis on Spanish “Righteous among the Nations.” In this spirit, the bill was presented as a means to emphasize a supposed process of reunion and as repaying the “historical debt” Spain owed.

The Preamble of the law begins with a reference to the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 but states that the Jews were not expelled by the Catholic Kings but “because of the imperatives of history the Jews took again the paths of the Diaspora” (Aragoneses 2018, 215). Thanks to an amendment proposed by the Basque National Party in 2021, this was changed to acknowledge the “unfair pain” provoked by the “persecution and suffering” of the descendants of those who were forced to leave Spain in 1492. Moreover, the preamble also considers the Monarchs to be Jewish-friendly and claims that during the Holocaust Spain was on the saviours’ side, without any reference to the complicity of Franco’s Government with Nazi Germany:

619 Ibid.

Today's Spain, with this Law, wants to take a firm step to achieve the reunion and the definitive reconciliation with the Sephardic communities. [...] The brutal sacrifice of thousands of Sephardim is the imperishable link that unites Spain with the memory of the Holocaust. The Royal Decree of December 20, 1924, had an unexpected utility that its drafters probably did not think of: it was the legal framework that allowed Spanish diplomatic legations, during WWII, to give consular protection to those Sephardic Jews who had obtained Spanish nationality under this Decree. The humanitarian spirit of these diplomats extended consular protection to unnaturalized Sephardim and, ultimately, to many other Jews. [...] Thousands of Jews thus escaped the Holocaust and were able to rebuild their lives.⁶²⁰

In August 2021, this law became the focus of an intense debate between the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), VOX and the People's Party (PP). VOX and PP accused PSOE of denying citizenship to descendants of Spanish Jews in violation of the law. On March 22, 2021 VOX had proposed a nonbinding resolution where they demanded:

To develop the necessary measures to provide today's General Directorate of Legal Security and Registry of Public Faith with the material and human resources necessary to process the files generated under Law 12/2015, of June 24.

To issue an express resolution to the applications for the acquisition of Spanish nationality by naturalization letter of the Sephardim originating in Spain, formulated within the framework of Law 12/2015, of June 24, which are still pending. This must be carried out as soon as possible and, in any case, before the judgment is handed down in the various contentious administrative appeals that have been filed by the interested parties.⁶²¹

Both PP and VOX accused the PSOE and other groups of antisemitism and of being against the Spanish nation. The PP representative, Mr. Rojas García, said the following:

They [the Jews] are not only friends [...] they are a sister nation of the Spanish and they have always been linked to Spain [...] Sephardim are a precious part of the great Hispanic family, who left the peninsula five hundred years ago with the keys to their houses in their hands. It is the responsibility of the government to clarify whether the Sephardim are being denied their citizenship due to a political decision such as a position in favour of stale left-wing antisemitism [...]⁶²²

620 162/000578—BOCG-14-D-243, March 23, 2021, [Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales Serie D: General \(congreso.es\)](https://www.boe.es/boletines-oficiales/Boletín-Oficial-de-las-Cortes-Generales-Serie-D-General-congreso.es).

621 BOCG-14-D-243, March 22, 2021, [Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales Serie D: General \(congreso.es\)](https://www.boe.es/boletines-oficiales/Boletín-Oficial-de-las-Cortes-Generales-Serie-D-General-congreso.es), 25.

622 DSCD-14-PL 119, August 25, 2021, [Diario de Sesiones de Pleno y Diputación Permanente \(congreso.es\)](https://www.congreso.es/publicaciones/boletines/Diario-de-Sesiones-de-Pleno-y-Diputacion-Permanente-congreso.es), 54.

Similarly, VOX's representative, Ms. Romero Vilches stated:

These communities [the Sephardim] have tenaciously maintained their Spanish language, their customs, their surnames and their longing for their lost homeland to this day, which is truly exciting [...]. Allow me in this regard to mention a testimony that should not be suspicious to you, that of Shlomo Ben Ami [...] [who] declared: "The only country in Europe that really gave a hand to the Jews was a country in which there was no Jewish influence, Spain, which saved more Jews than all the democracies combined [...]" In this case, we are reviving a kind of new antisemitism carried out by the extreme left, which uses the actions of the State of Israel as an excuse to attack people who identify themselves as Jews [...] We really do not find an explanation for this antisemitism directed in this case against the only existing democracy in the Middle East.⁶²³

Here we see how representatives of the conservative-nationalist right, position themselves as protectors of Jews (of Spanish descent, at the very least) and contrast themselves with the governing parties and the supposed antisemitism that motivates them. In this process they not only build on the "*convivencia*" myth, but also present a mythological Francoist Spain which did all it could to save Jews during the Holocaust. Their use of the authoritative testimony of the Jewish-Israeli historian Shlomo Ben-Ami, who also served as the Foreign Minister of Israel in the late 1990s, is also suggestive in this context. It connects remarkably well with VOX's attempts to present itself as the best friend of Israel and Jews among the political parties in Spain and as protectors of Judeo-Christian civilization against the common Muslim enemy.

PSOE's representative, Mr. Aranda Vargas, responded to these accusations by referencing the statement made by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain, that they are the only organization that has the competence to prove the ancestry of any applicant, and added: "[T]here must be a link with the territory in which you reside. There is no question of antisemitism here."⁶²⁴ Mr. Gómez-Reino Varela, from Podemos, responded more harshly:

You said antisemite, which is first an absolute excess and, second, [expresses your] ignorance. Because when you say antisemitic, the Semitic peoples are not simply the Sephardim; the Palestinians are a Semitic people and many other peoples in that part of Asia and the Middle East are Semitic peoples. Secondly, it is not surprising that with the many issues that may concern us at the level of citizenship and migration, the Popular Party brings to this Permanent Deputation an issue that we undoubtedly support, such as the practice of naturalizing Sephardic citizens, although let's say that it is a little late, as it takes us back to 1492, when we have current problems derived from the immigration issue or the issue of many citizens who request and demand our Spanish citizenship, which are much more relevant and current.

623 Ibid., 59.

624 Ibid., 60.

Several issues emerge from this statement: First, we see the rejection of the accusation of antisemitism by the left, which is itself part of the mutual accusations of antisemitism employed by the right and left in their political struggles. Second, we see how Podemos' response at the same time employs a flawed understanding of historical antisemitism, ignoring the fact that it was aimed specifically against Jews rather than against other "Semite" groups. Third, we see how the left, although supportive of naturalizing Jews of Spanish descent, treats the expulsion of the Jews as something of the far past that is less urgent than more recent Spanish treatment of immigrants and refugees – a reflection of the fact that the left is less invested this issue, including in the related "*convivencia*" myth and the myth of Spain as a safe haven for Jews during WWII.

Finally, we note the two issues lurking in the background of this debate: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which Varela references in his emphasis on Palestinians as a "Semitic" people, alluding to Podemos' support of the Palestinian cause (while VOX, as mentioned, is a strong supporter of Israel); and the issue of Muslim immigrants and refugees, which Varela alludes to in his comment on the more recent and more immediately relevant problems of immigration and citizenship, which Vox treats as an "invasion." In short, we see how Spain's treatment of Jews – in the long past, during WWII and today – are part of a broader struggle over high-order issues on the contemporary political agenda, particularly between the far-right and the far-left.

The impact of the rise of VOX on Holocaust memory

As can be seen from the discussion so far, many of the references to the Holocaust in parliamentary debates and more broadly in the public-political discourse in Spain are either provided by VOX or by other parties in response to VOX's statements, policies, and actions. Indeed, since the rise of VOX to prominence in Spanish politics, there has been a noticeable increase in references to the Holocaust. In sheer quantitative terms, more references to the Holocaust or the Nazis in parliamentary debates can be found in the period 2019-2021 than in any other year in the last decade; with the exception of 2015, due to the discussions about the Law for the acquisition of Spanish citizenship for descendants of Sephardim, which came into force that year, as well as the discussions about the Syrian refugee crisis, in which the Holocaust was more often invoked. More to the point, in the parliamentary debates between 2019 and 2021, practically all references to the Holocaust either came from representatives of VOX or from members of other parties responding to statements and interventions by members of VOX.

This has important implications for the shifting Holocaust memory in Spain and might also reflect similar tendencies in other European countries. This section will therefore explore several other examples of how the discourse around the Holocaust in Spain in recent years has been associated with VOX and more broadly the rise of the conservative-nationalist right – either as responses to their actions and positions or used by them to attack their rivals and highlight issues that concern their political agenda.

Connecting the Holocaust to other mass atrocities is common practice in Spain's public discourse. A good example is the debate around the New Organic Law of Education from 2019, which states the following:

In the curriculum of the different stages of Basic Education, learning about the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts in all areas of personal, family and social life, and the values that sustain democracy and human rights [...] must include equal treatment and non-discrimination [...] as well as the prevention of gender violence. Likewise, attention will be paid to the study and respect of other cultures, particularly that of the Roma people and that of other groups and collectives, as well as historical events and conflicts that have seriously violated human rights, such as the Jewish Holocaust.⁶²⁵

It is important to note that the emphasis on these connections between the Holocaust and other mass atrocities arose mainly as a reaction to discriminatory positions taken by VOX against women, immigrants, and the LGBTQ community. For example, in November 2020, Podemos proposed an amendment to the Education Law to include in it the importance of “knowledge of historical facts and conflicts that have seriously violated human rights, such as the Jewish Holocaust and the history of the struggle for women’s rights,” to which VOX responded with a formal request to reject it. In addition, Podemos suggested the following:

Likewise, attention will be paid to the study and respect of other cultures, particularly that of the Roma people, as well as historical events and conflicts that have seriously violated human rights, such as the Jewish and Roma Holocaust and that of other groups and collectives such as Africans and Afro-descendants, rooted in the infamous regime of slavery, with the aim of ending the structural discrimination they have suffered and continue to suffer.⁶²⁶

As one can see, the Nazi persecution and genocide against the Roma, as well as anti-Gypsy sentiment in general, are often discussed hand in hand with the Holocaust and antisemitism, to the point where they are characterized as “Holocausts.” Although the Roma in Spain represent 1.63% of the population,⁶²⁷ they have traditionally been the most stigmatized and discriminated minority group. In the laws promoted mainly by left-wing parties, we see an attempt to focus greater emphasis on their discrimination and persecution throughout their history in Spain, and particularly the importance of recognizing the genocide committed against them by the Nazis, which these leftist parties sometimes call “the forgotten Holocaust.”

Parliamentary debates around this issue are used mainly to accuse VOX and the Popular Party of racism, discrimination, xenophobia and even Holocaust denial, as well as their whitewashing of the Franco regime, which harshly persecuted Roma. Consider, for example, the following statement made by Ms. Carrillo de los Reyes, representative of the Socialist parliamentary group and a Roma herself, during a parliamentary debate on December 14, 2020, about a nonbinding resolution on promoting measures to support the Roma in the face of the crisis caused by Covid:

625 BOCG-12-A-49-1, February 22, 2019, [121/000048 Proyecto de Ley Orgánica por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación. \(preparadorainfantilyprimaria.es\)](#), 45.

626 [Amendment no. 84 BOCG-14-B-146-4](#), May 27, 2021.

627 Council of Europe, Estimates on Roma population in European Countries, 2012, [rm.coe.int.xls \(live.com\)](#).

Here we have also heard speeches of [...] those who say they respect the traditions of the Roma people and, nevertheless, do not hide their racism when it comes to calling the neighbourhoods where the majority of the Roma population live, together with the immigrant population [...] “dunghill”; of those who say that they respect the Roma people because we are Spanish [...], [but] at the same time exploit their hatred for us through messages on social networks because a Roma is holding a position of responsibility [she is referring here to herself, M.S.]; of those who say they stand in solidarity with those who suffer discrimination for being Roma, but who refuse to condemn the Franco dictatorship, that dark period in our history when they caught women, imprisoned them and shaved their heads for being Roma [...].⁶²⁸

Here Ms. Carrillo de los points to the tendency of right-wing politicians to make various explicit or implicit racist comments against the Roma and notes the continuity between the persecution of the Roma during the Franco regime and the attitudes the “ideological heirs” of the regime expressed toward Roma in today’s Spain. She went on to argue:

All these injustices that I cry out and also expose with great pain have a clear origin [...] it is called anti-Gypsyism, no matter who it may be. The accepted and widespread racism in our society that aims to destroy the only heritage that the Roma People have possessed, which has been our culture. The proliferation of hoaxes and discriminatory acts during this crisis has been unforgivable, accusing us unjustly of being responsible for spreading the virus [...]⁶²⁹

It is at least partly in this context of right-wing attacks against the Roma and the broader struggle over the Franco regime’s legacy, that one should understand the efforts by the leftist parties to stress the importance of commemorating the Nazi genocide against the Roma and the way they place it on an equal footing with the Holocaust.

To consider another example: in a motion suggested by Ciudadanos in the Senate on May 12, 2021, urging the Government to adopt measures within the framework of the national strategy for inclusion of the Roma population in Spain,⁶³⁰ Carles Mulet from Compromís⁶³¹ referred to the idea of *Convivencia* mentioned earlier and also to the specificity of the genocide against the Roma and the expulsion of Jews and Muslims in the Middle Ages. He specifically asked for the inclusion of the history and culture of the Roma in the school curriculum, not only regarding the Roma in the

628 DSCD-14-CO-247 N. 161/001228, December 14, 2020, [Diario de Sesiones de la Comisión Derechos Sociales y Políticas Integrales de la Discapacidad \(congreso.es\)](https://www.congreso.es/publicaciones/diario-sesiones/comision-derechos-sociales-politicas-integrales-de-la-discapacidad).

629 DSCD-14-CO-247 N. 161/001228, December 14, 2020, [Diario de Sesiones de la Comisión Derechos Sociales y Políticas Integrales de la Discapacidad \(congreso.es\)](https://www.congreso.es/publicaciones/diario-sesiones/comision-derechos-sociales-politicas-integrales-de-la-discapacidad).

630 Sesión núm. 30 celebrada el miércoles, 12 de mayo de 2021, [Núm. exp. 662/000065—DS_P_14_51](#), May 12, 2021.

631 Coalició Compromís, also known as Compromís, is a Valencianist electoral coalition in the Valencian Community. The parties involved include the Valencian Nationalist Bloc, the left-wing Valencian People’s Initiative, and a group of environmentalist (Greens Equo of the Valencian Country) and independent parties. Together they defend Valencianist, progressive and ecological politics.

Spanish State, but also the contribution they have made as a transnational people in the history of Europe: episodes like the Samudaripen, the Holocaust or Roma genocide, slavery in Romania or the attempted genocide during the “great round-up” in Spain.⁶³² As in other cases, VOX abstained, claiming that: “It is intolerable that you try to take advantage of minority groups for political purposes, promising to solve their problems and forgetting the remaining Spanish citizens who, due to their not belonging to this group see how, despite the fact that they share many of the difficulties of these minorities, are left aside.”⁶³³

Another of VOX’s positions in the context of which the Holocaust is invoked is the question of LGBTQ rights. On February 24, 2020, Montero Gil, the Minister of Equality, reported the general parameters of her department’s policy.⁶³⁴ In an intervention by Podemos, Ms. García Puig cited Israeli historian and author Yuval Noah Harari, who has argued that this is a period of discursive setbacks, especially with regard to the rights of the LGTBQ community, and that these setbacks will only increase in the coming years. She also mentioned the example he had given about the period before the Holocaust, when there was progress in terms of the situation of the Jewish people and in reducing antisemitism, and yet this did not avert the disastrous developments that followed. She went on to argue that if there is something truly revolutionary in our society today, it is sexual and gender diversity, because it advances a more diverse, richer society. What scares the far right, she stated, is the revolutionary potential of LGBTQ policies that have the capacity, together with feminism, to break down the gender stereotypes that constrain women, dissident sexualities and society as a whole.

A reply was offered by Ms Méndez from VOX. She asked, first, to remove from the minutes the accusation by Podemos that VOX represents an “extreme right” and that they made an LGBTQ-phobic speech which poses a threat to LGBTQ people. She then asked the Minister to re-consider the Law on Gender Violence because it does not work. She accused them of using this drama and the deaths of women to disseminate what she called “their feminazi ideology” that seeks to implant a cultural Marxism in the relations between the sexes and vilify men. In both cases, the two political representatives of the left and far right parties accuse each other of “Nazism” to support their differences regarding the new gender equality policies.

Like other far-right European parties, one of VOX’s primary demons is the Jewish philanthropist and Holocaust survivor, George Soros. Their accusations against him present a mix of coded antisemitism, which posits the Jew who made his money out of financial speculation behind the scenes of the Muslim “invasion” of Spain, along with ugly allusions to Jews who profited from their collaboration

632 The Great Gypsy Round-up, also known as the general imprisonment of the Gypsies was a raid authorized and organized by the Spanish Monarchy that led to the arrest of most Roma in the region and the genocide of 12,000 Romani people. Although a majority were released after a few months, many others spent several years imprisoned and subject to forced labor. The raid was approved by the King Ferdinand VI of Spain, and organized by the Marquis of Ensenada, and set in motion simultaneously across Spain on July 30, 1749. See “[La Gran Redada. 30 de julio de 1749](#),”.

633 Sesión núm. 30 celebrada el miércoles, 12 de mayo de 2021, [Núm. exp. 662/000065—DS_P_14_51](#), May 12, 2021, 179.

634 Sesión núm. 2 celebrada el lunes 24 de febrero de 2020, [File number 214/000019—DSCD-14-CO-41](#).

with the Nazis, while at the same time expressing strong rhetorical support for Israel. During a debate over a motion of no confidence in the Government on October 21, 2020, chaired by Mr. Pedro Sanchez, VOX's president Santiago Abascal brought all these together in a succinct fashion. He asked about the relations between the Socialist Party and George Soros, and explained:

Mr. Soros [...] is a declared enemy of the European borders, of the North American president and also of the State of Israel. That billionaire speculator, enriched by the suffering of millions of people, is surprisingly never attacked by the left, neither by the political left nor by the leftist media, although he has even admitted that he made money off the victims of the Holocaust. What and how much do you owe Mr. Soros? How much of the damage that you do to Spain can be explained by that obedience? Why have you ordered the National Intelligence Centre to protect Mr. Soros? Why have you ordered the National Intelligence Centre to protect globalism when the only thing it should have to defend is the sovereignty of Spain?⁶³⁵

The danger to Spain's sovereignty Abascal alludes to is the acceptance of Muslim refugees, following pressure from the EU. Like other far-right European parties, this is a central theme for VOX and one for which it is attacked by leftist parties as fascist and neo-Nazi. A prominent example is a discussion that took place on June 23, 2021, in a debate on a nonbinding resolution against racism and xenophobia by the PSOE parliamentary group, presented by Diouf Diohof, who is of Senegalese origin and who was for a long time a person "without papers." Diohof said: "There is no excuse. I want to remind racist people that hate speech precedes hate crimes. The Holocaust did not begin with the gas chambers, it began much earlier with Nazi propaganda."⁶³⁶ He was confronted by the deputy for VOX, Rocio de Meer, as she understood him to be accusing VOX: "First of all, I do not accept lessons from Mr. Diouf, a man convicted by the Provincial Court of Gran Canaria in 2008 for beating a man and causing him a head and facial trauma. I just want to say that I am ashamed to share a seat with his lordship" (she did not mention that the fight occurred after a racist insult). Her speech was prominently against immigration and multiculturalism, especially against Islam:

You are that doormat of the 2030 Agenda decided in the World Economic Forum in Davos and all those billionaires bossing you around encourage these types of things that you bring to Parliament, such as, for example, saying that it is good and positive and that we should aspire to a multicultural society, when we already see the consequences of a multicultural society in humble neighborhoods. [...]

Furthermore, all of you are complicit in not wanting and not allowing the Spaniards to preserve what they inherited from their grandparents. There are Spaniards who want to preserve what they have known, preserve what they have inherited, preserve their identity,

635 [BOCG. Congreso de los Diputados, serie D, número 156](#), October 21, 2020. (Número de expediente 82/000001), 19.

636 Sesión núm. 16 celebrada el miércoles 23 de junio de 2021, [Número de expediente](#) 161/002795—DSCD-14-CO-447, June 23, 2021.

preserve their values, preserve their principles, preserve their civilization, and they are not guilty for wanting it.⁶³⁷

In answer to de Meer, Mr. Gutierrez from Ciudadanos used the idea of medieval “*Convivencia*” in the city of Melilla, as a perfect example of coexistence between three cultures: Christian, Muslim and Jewish. Ms. Rodríguez from Podemos, responded to VOX: “When you think like a Nazi, when you speak like a Nazi, and when you act like a Nazi, then it is clear that you are one.”⁶³⁸

A few months later, in a debate in November 2021 on the opening of Spain’s southern border to refugees, a VOX representative warned against the expected result of:

40,000 illegals entering Spain this year [...] refugee invasions like the one Poland is suffering [...] and massive illegal immigration as has happened in Ceuta recently [...] more attacks, more rapes – rapes have increased by 31% in these first nine months of 2021 – more fights, homophobic beatings, neighbourhoods where it is impossible to live and the gift of Spanish nationality to those who maintain loyalty to Morocco.⁶³⁹

A Podemos representative responded:

[T]he founding fathers of the European Union were very clear that inequality and poverty bring fascism and that fascism brings violence and war. This was the fundamental lesson that the Second World War, Nazism and the Holocaust left our continent and it was this lesson that made Europe one of the most prosperous places in the world in the second half of the 20th century.⁶⁴⁰

One can see how repeatedly, in response to VOX’s positions, Podemos in particular invokes the memory of the Holocaust, either by recalling the obligation to accept refugees and provide them with necessary living conditions or by accusing VOX of espousing Nazi-like positions.

Another important aspect of VOX’s positions that increases the discourse about the Holocaust has already been mentioned above: their tendency to equate Nazi and Communist regimes and crimes. For example, on January 4, 2020, during the investiture of Pedro Sanchez, the Socialist candidate for the presidency of the Government,⁶⁴¹ Mr. Abascal Conde, VOX president, said the following:

You talk about the lies of VOX when you spread all kinds of lies; you say that we are outside the Constitution, when we defend the constitutional order; dared to say that we denied the

⁶³⁷ Ibid., 39.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁶³⁹ [DSCD-14-PL-136](#). November, 2021, 21.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁶⁴¹ File number [080/000001 DSCD-14-PL-2](#), January 4, 2020.

Holocaust, when we precisely affirm that we must fight all totalitarianism, the Nazi and the communist, with which you want to agree, which does not deny neither the gulags nor the “Checas.”⁶⁴²

In the debate of October 21, 2020, Mr. Sanchez used the Holocaust in his statement about the new Democratic Memory Law,⁶⁴³ which Mr. Abascal considered as a “totalitarian memory law” that seeks to tell Spaniards how to think about the past. Mr. Sanchez said:

The Democratic Memory Law does not reopen any wound, none, except for those who believe that the dead are better off in the ditches or that the dictator deserves homage. Civic education includes democratic memory. Let’s talk about what happens in other countries that also suffered fascism. In Germany, for example, the Holocaust and Nazism are an obligatory part of the history program in all German states, with freedom of configuration on the part of teachers and with a pedagogical approach of critical reflection to precisely avoid repeating that past.⁶⁴⁴

As a response to the proposal of the new Democratic Memory Law, VOX again used references to the Holocaust. On October 23, 2020, VOX formulated the following nonbinding proposal regarding the commemoration of the victims of communism.⁶⁴⁵ Among their justifications, they considered that the totalitarian nature of the communist regimes was not a distortion of the original Marxist doctrine, but a consistent development of its premises exemplified through Marx’s “The Jewish Question” (1844), where he supposedly called for the destruction of Christianity and Judaism. They also called for a list of the crimes of communism, including-

The 3.9 million people starved to death in the Holodomor or “Ukrainian Holocaust” in 1932-33 [...] or the 4,000 German Jews and Communists handed over for execution by Stalin to

642 A facility used during the Spanish Civil War by militiamen on the Republican side – especially left-wing parties and unions – to arrest, interrogate, and judge in a very brief manner and execute suspects of sympathizing with the opposing side. They were usually known by the street where they were located, or by the name of the person who ran them. Apart from those that depended directly on the government of the Republic – such as the Czech Fine Arts or Development Council – several political parties, athenaeums, committees, unions, or organizations affiliated with the Popular Front or the CNT had one. Trad. see: [Txecca on Wikipedia](#).

643 The New Democratic Memory law states that its purpose is the recovery, safeguarding and dissemination of democratic memory, understood as the knowledge of the claim and defence of democratic values and fundamental rights and freedoms throughout the contemporary history of Spain, as well as the recognition of those who suffered persecution or violence, for political, ideological reasons, thought or opinion, conscience or religious belief, sexual orientation and identity, during the period between the coup d’état of July 18, 1936, the Spanish War and the Franco dictatorship until the entry into force of the Spanish Constitution of 1978, including a person’s moral reparation and recovery of his personal, family and collective memory. This new law substitutes the Law 52/2007, of December 26, popularly known as the Historical Memory Law.

644 [BOCG. Congreso de los Diputados](#)», serie D, número 156, October 21, 2020, (Número de expediente 82/000001), 55.

645 [162/000410—BOCG-14-D-166](#), October 23, 2020.

Hitler in 1939-40, under the Nazi-Soviet alliance and the 72,500 people executed in the rear of the Republican side during the Spanish Civil War, among them 6,800 priests and nuns.⁶⁴⁶

Moreover, they urged the National Government to comply with Resolution 2019/2819 of the European Parliament on the importance of European historical memory for the future of Europe, which calls for the commemoration of the crimes of totalitarian regimes, including Nazism and communism. To follow the Resolution, VOX asked for the removal of monuments, street names and other signs of tribute to figures who took a significant part in the crimes committed by any of those totalitarian movements; to prohibit emblems of totalitarian regimes; to promote May 25 as International Day of Heroes in the Fight Against Totalitarianism but also as a first measure, to “ensure that sufficient information on the crimes and other human rights violations of the Nazi and Communist regimes, including those committed by Spanish Communists and anarchists, are included in textbooks and school programs.”⁶⁴⁷

Also related to the importance of the debate around Spanish historical memory and its links to the memory of the Holocaust, was the intervention by the Secretary of Democratic Memory, Mr. Martínez on November 5, 2020, concerning the creation of the new Secretary of State for Democratic Memory. He stated:

Since the end of the civil wars and world conflicts that devastated Europe in the twentieth century and especially since the Holocaust, the impulse of democratic memory policies has become a moral imperative that is essential to strengthen and neutralize oblivion and avoid repetition of the most tragic episodes in our history. A strong commitment to ‘never again’ pedagogy has become a fundamental ethical imperative in democratic societies around the world. The design of public memory policies in Spain must be clearly interconnected for all purposes with transnational memorial processes linked to contemporary paradigms on the preservation of human rights and the development of democratic pedagogies to critically understand the traumatic past. These paradigms are reflected in schemes already known in international legislation and in transitional justice of truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-repetition [...].⁶⁴⁸

He also commented on the declaration of the European Parliament Resolution of September 19, 2019, condemning Nazi and communist totalitarianism as a response to VOX:

In this, allow me to tell you, I quickly see an unusual paradox, because those who are reluctant to condemn a totalitarian regime such as Franco’s, which is fully included in that resolution, try to equate it with the representatives and defenders of a constitutional, democratic and

646 Ibid., p.26.

647 Ibid.

648 [DSCD-14-CO-204 N. 212/000528](#) and [N. 212/000885](#), November 5, 2020.

legitimate regime that ended up being overthrown, after the coup d'état and the war that provoked it.⁶⁴⁹

Indeed, it is quite common to link Francoism, Nazism and the Holocaust. For example, on February 16, 2021 a debate took place on a bill by the Socialist Parliamentary Group for equal treatment and non-discrimination.⁶⁵⁰ During this debate, Euskal Herria Bildu, ERC⁶⁵¹ and Podemos mentioned several neo-Nazi and neo-fascist demonstrations and events, such as the falangist antisemitic act of commemoration of the Blue Division on February 12, 2021.⁶⁵² Another example is the motion presented on March 30, 2021 urging the Government to take steps for the return of the ownership of what was the domicile of Emili Darder Cànaves to the Palma City Council (Balearic Islands) for the creation of a publicly owned civic and humanistic centre by Mes per Mallorca.⁶⁵³ The senator used the term “Spanish Holocaust” coined by Paul Preston:⁶⁵⁴

Emili Darder was a doctor, the last republican mayor of the city of Palma, symbol of the struggle and the commitment to face inequalities, social struggle and support for the most disadvantaged. He was shot after a sham trial, a trial that cannot be called as such, in February 1937. [...] In Mallorca where there was the murder of between 3000 and 5000 persecuted people, between 1936 and 1938. Authors as prestigious as Paul Preston, a British historian, call it the Spanish Holocaust.

In the intervention by ERC, they used a rhetorical parallel to the Nazis: “Can you imagine that the German Government had kept assets seized by the Nazis?” VOX voted against it.

Another context in which VOX sometimes invokes the memory of the Holocaust is to express its opposition to abortions, for example in a debate over a non-binding reparations on June 10, 2021 proposed by VOX, regarding the elimination of disability as a legal cause for voluntary interruption

649 Ibid., 86.

650 Número de expediente [122/000121—DSCD-14-PL-78](#), February 16, 2021.

651 Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, ERC is a pro-Catalan independence, social-democratic political party in the Spanish autonomous community of Catalonia, with a presence also in Valencia, the Balearic Islands and the French department of Pyrénées-Orientales (Northern Catalonia). It is also the main sponsor of the independence movement from France and Spain in the territories known as Catalan Countries, focusing in recent years on the creation of a Catalan Republic in Catalonia proper.

652 During the event, Isabel Medina Peralta, one of the speakers addressed the audience dressed in a blue shirt and surrounded by Spanish flags and a few meters from a priest: “It is our supreme obligation to fight for Spain, to fight for Europe, now weak and liquidated by the enemy. The enemy will always be the same, although with different masks: the Jew. [...] The Jew is to blame and the Blue Division fought for it.” See Miguel Ramos, “[‘El judío es el culpable. El enemigo siempre va a ser el mismo’: 300 neonazis homenajean en Madrid a la División Azul](#),” La Marea, February 15, 2021.

653 Més per Mallorca is a Majorcan political coalition formed by Socialist Party of Majorca (PSM), IniciativaVerds (IV) and Entesa per Mallorca (ExM), as well as some small independent, local parties around the island. It was created in 2010 by the PSM, Left Initiative (Iniciativa) and The Greens (EV) under the name PSM–Iniciativa–Verds.

654 [DS_C_14_184—Núm. exp. 661/000034](#), May 12, 2021.

of pregnancy and the creation of a systematic protocol of care for families who are going to have a child with a disability. In their presentation, they equated the abortion law with the practice of Nazi eugenics:

But today, unfortunately, prenatal diagnosis has become the greatest ally of discrimination against people who, for example, have Down's Syndrome. It is no exaggeration to say that a real Holocaust is taking place against these people, that in some places it is leading to the extermination of between 80% and 90% of the people affected by this syndrome [...] We cannot forget that this type of practice constituted one of the policies of Hitler's Germany, which considered that there were unworthy lives and that the State was authorized to eliminate them to make life easier for the best-endowed beings.⁶⁵⁵

Finally, the ease with which various parties use the Holocaust to chastise their political rivals and express their positions can be seen in a debate on February 4, 2021, about the proposal to reform the Organic Law 4/2015, on the Protection of Citizen Security. In her speech, Mrs. Jiménez-Becerril Barrio from the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress, part of the right-wing Popular Party, spoke to the deputies of Euskal Herria Bildu:⁶⁵⁶

I have seen how some of you, last week, remembered the anniversary of the Holocaust – which is very commendable – I did too; but, I would have liked that you had remembered with the same passion the anniversary of the murder of my brother and his wife, which was on January 30. But, no, you, from Bildu, pay homage to ETA⁶⁵⁷ terrorists rather than honour their victims.⁶⁵⁸

We have already seen how often Podemos reference the Holocaust to gain support for their positions or to condemn right wing parties like VOX. Yet this extends to other leftist parties as well, particularly when it comes to their condemnation of the Franco regime and legacies. An example from the plenary session of June 23, 2020, in the discussion on the stolen babies' issue, illustrates this point. Mr. Botran from the CUP party⁶⁵⁹ explained that the origin of abducting children from their mothers was given as a consciously planned policy of the Franco regime:

655 Número de expediente [161/002237-DSCD-14-CO-426](#), June 10, 2021.

656 A Basque nationalist political coalition active in the Navarre and Burgos Province of the Basque Country.

657 ETA, an acronym for Euskadi Ta Askatasuna ("Basque Country and Freedom"), was an armed Basque nationalist and separatist organization in the Basque Country (in northern Spain and southwestern France) founded in 1959 and later evolved from a group promoting traditional Basque culture to a paramilitary group engaged in a violent campaign of bombing, assassinations, and kidnappings in the Southern Basque Country and throughout Spanish territory. Its goal was to gain independence for the Basque Country. On May 2, 2018, [ETA made public a letter dated April 16, 2018](#) according to which it had "completely dissolved all its structures and ended its political initiative."

658 Número de expediente [122/000003-DSCD-14-PL-77](#), February 4, 2021.

659 The Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP) is a left-wing to far-left pro-Catalan independence political party active primarily in Catalonia, where it has political representation, but also in other autonomous communities in Spain

[...] not from some doctors, not from some nuns, but a consciously planned policy of the Franco regime. Some still doubt that the Franco regime was a fascist regime. Knowing the writings and experiments of Dr. Vallejo-Nágera, a doctor who came to have a lot of power due to the trust that Franco gave him, dispels all doubts about it. His pseudo-scientific theories sought a pathological explanation for left-wing militancy and are in no way different from those put into practice at that time in Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy.⁶⁶⁰

2.6.4. Conclusion

The data in this case study is relatively scarce, mainly because the Holocaust is far from prominent in public discussion in Spain. At the same time, the research sheds light on a number of themes, foremost among them is the relationship between political ideology and the use of Holocaust memory.

The prominence of VOX in the Spanish political arena has been a turning point in the way the Holocaust is used discursively in Spain. Both media and parliamentary debates have seen a distinct rise in the number of references to the Holocaust and Nazism. Similarly, one can identify a rise in the discursive use of Fascism and Francoism by different political parties, and how these references provoke polarization and affect social cohesion. The analysis presented in this chapter strengthens Baer's (2012) thesis of primary antisemitism and (dis)memory of the Holocaust, as can be seen in the example of the "Holocaust" Carnival Parade. The second type of antisemitism seems, however, to be even more prevalent. Rejection, envy and instrumentalization of the Holocaust are evident in many discussions wherein different political parties remember and use the Holocaust or references to Nazism to promote their own political agenda.

Despite the new Democratic Memory Law, the relationship between Francoist Spain and Nazi Germany continues to be downplayed and pushed aside. The far left continually "universalizes" the memory of the Holocaust by mentioning it together with other mass atrocities, typically that of the Roma genocide. They do so, however, mostly without trivialization or distortion. The far right demonstrates attempts to connect Sephardic heritage⁶⁶¹ in terms of Hispanicism with the Holocaust and the myth of Franco as saviour of Jews by selectively using specific Spanish diplomats'

it considers to be part of the Catalan Countries. The CUP has traditionally focused on municipal politics and is made up of a series of autonomous candidates that run in local elections. Its presence is strongest within the contemporary Catalonia autonomous community. From [Wikipedia – Popular Unity Candidacy](#).

660 [DSCD-14-PL-31](#), June 23, 2020. The term "stolen babies" encompasses the thousands of boys and girls, now adults, who could have been victims of appropriation, forced disappearance and/or substitution of their identity in Spain from the end of the civil war until the mid-1960s. The illegal abduction of minors, whose context of Francoist gender ideology and control over women deserves special attention, occurred in multiple scenarios: prisons, hospitals, maternity hospitals and welfare centres managed by religious congregations without adequate state supervision. The phenomenon even overflows Spanish borders in some cases of people who suspect they were abducted and handed over to families in Latin American countries such as Mexico or Chile. Translated from: "[Sustracciones Ilegales De Bebés En España](#)," *Amnistía Internacional España*, March 16, 2021.

661 Sephardic issues are completely absent from the left parties' agenda.

actions, and ignoring other acts that reflect a more collaborationist nature. The far right's equation of Communism and Nazism without any reference to Francoism is also telling in this regard.

The third strand of antisemitism is the only one that seems to have changed. Throughout the debates, one finds expressions of antisemitism on both sides of the political map. On the left these discussions focus less on Israel as the target of antisemitic discourse or actions, but they also tend to deny antisemitism as a specific form of racism or discrimination, claiming that antisemitism does not exist in Spain and therefore Holocaust memory can be focused on fighting against others type of discrimination. Their interest is directed especially onto anti-Gypsism, LGBTQ-phobia and Islamophobia. On the far right, in contrast, one sees a rise in positive references to Israel, such as Israel's strategic friendship with the United States, or the fight against Islamic terrorism. That being said, statements from the far-right continue to demonstrate Holocaust denial or traditional antisemitism.

Finally, this research allows us to see the importance of political discourse and memory policies for the construction of the historical narrative about a specific event. In the Spanish case, the two most terrible episodes for the Jewish Community, the Holocaust and the Expulsion of 1492, re-appear today as aspects that continue to reflect the latent antisemitism that permeates Spanish society. In light of the shifting nature of Holocaust memory we have attempted to capture in this chapter, this study should be considered as only a first step in addressing in more depth the relationship between antisemitism and memory policies or the use of political discourse and knowledge of the Holocaust in Spain.

2.7. Beyond Western vs. Eastern Memory Cultures: Comparative Analysis of the Public-Political Discourse⁶⁶²

2.7.1. The presence of the Holocaust in public-political discourse

As the chapters in this part of the report demonstrate, Holocaust memory plays a role in public-political discourse about contested national issues in each of the countries examined, although to different degrees. At one end of the spectrum is Germany, where the Holocaust is present in various discussions about German national identity, moral obligations, antisemitism, Germany's colonial legacy, and its relations with Israel; and Poland, in which the Holocaust is recurrently and intensively invoked in politicians' speeches, parliamentary debates and in media outlets. At the other end of the spectrum lies Spain, where the Holocaust plays a marginal role compared to other countries. However, even there we identify a clear increase in references to the Holocaust in public discourse since 2019, presumably in response to the rise of the far-right party VOX. In England and Hungary, besides particular commemoration days, the Holocaust is invoked mainly in discussions about antisemitism.

Indeed, one important conclusion of the analyses presented so far is the enduring presence of the Holocaust in the European collective consciousness. From scandals over antisemitic expressions and violence, through battles over responsibility for past atrocities, to the treatment of immigrants, LGBTQ communities and abortion – Holocaust memory serves to express political views, social identities, and cultural concerns. Moreover, even in countries where Holocaust memory seems marginal or virtually non-existent, it is apparently still invoked by political actors and resonates with broad audiences in response to certain triggers. The rise of a far-right party that espouses policies and views that associate in the public imagination with the Nazis (or can be presented as similar to Nazi views and policies by rivals of the party) is a case in point. Similarly, the Covid pandemic occasioned invasive measures such as the use of newly created vaccines, isolation or quarantine; and opponents of these measures associated them with particularly famous Nazi atrocities, such as concentration camps or Mengele's medical experiments (or at the very least they made use of such associations).⁶⁶³ This suggests that the memory of the Holocaust is deeply entrenched in Western collective consciousness, even if often through popular associations rather than deep historical knowledge, or that it is used instrumentally to promote social and political views and interests.

Our analysis of public-political discourse around the Holocaust in the five European countries under consideration in this report reveals important differences as well as similarities. The following discussion seeks to characterize the major patterns we identified and to explain their significance.

⁶⁶² This chapter is written by Shmuel Lederman.

⁶⁶³ On the way references to the Holocaust increase in response to such triggers, see the third part of this report, on the Holocaust in social media.

2.7.2. Evading responsibility for Jewish victimhood in the Holocaust

In all the countries in this study except Germany, mainstream public-political discourse about the Holocaust is characterized by a tendency to present a heroic or at least guilt-free narrative of the nation's behaviour during the Holocaust. The form it takes, and its moral and political implications differ from one country to another, depending on their historical role during WWII and the memory culture that developed in the country in the decades following the war.

In Poland, the government's "historical policy" denies any significant involvement of Poles in the murder of Jews. It celebrates the Polish "Righteous Among the Nations," emphasizes that the Holocaust was committed by Nazi *Germany* and its supporters alone, and prides itself on the fact that unlike other countries, Poland did not collaborate with the Nazis, did not have a "quisling" regime and resisted Nazi occupation throughout the war. The narrative promoted by the Polish government marginalizes Polish collaborators and perpetrators within Polish society. It depicts Poles who participated in the murder of Jews or denounced Jews to the Nazis as "bandits" and "criminals," who did not reflect any significant, broader attitudes toward the Jews in Polish society before, during or after the Holocaust. Thus, no self-criticism is required of Poles as a national community and there is no need to address Polish antisemitism and the historical implications of certain, exclusionary versions of Polish nationalism.⁶⁶⁴

In Hungary, the government acknowledges the collaboration of the Hungarian *state* – namely the government and its branches – with Nazi Germany; but for the most part denies or at least fails to acknowledge the significant involvement of portions of the Hungarian *people* in atrocities against the Jews. Here we should emphasize the important difference between the historical roles Poland and Hungary played during WWII: while Hungary collaborated with Nazi Germany throughout most of the war and was occupied only in March 1944 by the Germans, Poland was occupied from the beginning of the war, its government went into exile, and it was destroyed as a state. This strengthens the Poles' denial of agency and resistance to any notion of their people's participation in the murder of Jews in Poland.⁶⁶⁵

Another point to keep in mind is that in Hungarian public discourse, Hungarian victimhood is focused on the legacy of Trianon – the peace treaty that Hungary was forced to sign at the end of WWI, in which Hungary lost some two thirds of its territory; as well as on Soviet rule over the country, rather than on WWII. As the chapter on Hungary demonstrates, a persistent antisemitic trope places the blame for the trauma of Trianon partly on the Jews, due to the prominence of some Jews in the 1919 communist revolution – most famously Béla Kun, the leader of the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic. A similar legacy still associates Soviet rule over Hungary after WWII with the Jews – an association prominent in Poland as well. Important national traditions in both countries, then, share a strong sense of historical victimhood, which large sections of society feel remains insufficiently

664 There is extensive scholarship that challenges this narrative. See in particular Gross 2001; Grabowski 2013; Grabowski and Engelking 2022.

665 See also the third part of this report, on the Holocaust in social media.

recognized by the international community, in contrast to the Holocaust. Together with the still widespread association of Jews with communism and therefore with Soviet crimes and oppression, there is a strong tendency towards “competitive victimhood” and “blaming the victims” in both countries, especially when charges of complicity in the murder of Jews arise.

Finally, we should remember that the Soviet Union marginalized Jewish victimhood in WWII and “assimilated” the Jewish victims as victims of fascism, without acknowledging the particular place the Jews had in Nazi ideology and the extermination project, and this narrative became entrenched in the “Warsaw Pact” countries as well. Therefore, coming to recognize the particular Jewish experience is still a relatively recent historical phenomenon in Poland and Hungary. Moreover, while Germany and the UK have in recent decades promoted a European Holocaust memory with a focus on the destruction of the Jewish people, Poland and Hungary have struggled to receive recognition of their own suffering and victimization. Their acceptance of some aspects of this European memory, such as Holocaust commemoration days or education, has largely been reactive and tailored to their integration into the European Union.

Neither Hungarians nor Poles, however, speak with one voice. Despite their weakness and marginality in the public sphere, the liberal and left-wing opposition in both countries challenge the kind of Holocaust memory promoted by the government and more broadly by the conservative-nationalist right. As the chapter on Poland shows, while not diminishing either German responsibility or Polish victimhood, oppositional journalists and writers argue that the use of the term “Nazis” is important because it emphasizes the importance of Nazi ideology, potentially reminds us that there were also German victims of the Nazis and also makes clear that the Holocaust was not only a German project and that the Nazis were aided by many collaborators throughout Europe, including a significant number of Polish nationals.

Similarly, as the chapter on Hungary documents, the liberal and left-wing opposition in Hungary are careful to highlight that it was not only Horthy and his government that aided the Nazis, but thousands of “ordinary” Hungarians as well. This opposition also criticizes the nostalgia for the Horthy regime that has become quite prominent in Hungary, and notes that this nostalgia, which tends to whitewash the regime’s crimes, humiliates those it discriminated against and killed or sent to death. Granted, in both Poland and Hungary, these voices are weak and are increasingly marginalized by the respective governments and more broadly by the dominance of the nationalist-conservative forces in these countries, yet they might reflect important historical, present, and future alternatives to the current dominant memory culture in these countries.

Polish and Hungarian reckoning with the Holocaust, then, remains an ongoing challenge. Yet in Spain and England – despite significantly different historical contexts and meanings of responsibility – we find similar evasion of responsibility for morally questionable policies and behaviour during the Holocaust.

In Spain, we found a general ignorance and avoidance of the Franco regime’s collaboration with the Nazis. Franco is mythologized by the right as a savior of Jews, and Spanish “Righteous Among the Nation” are celebrated. These aspects of Spanish Holocaust memory are quite similar to

Polish and Hungarian dominant memory culture, but as the chapter on Spain clarifies, the context in Spain is different: with the troubled legacy of the Spanish Civil War and the long rule of the authoritarian Franco regime, the marginality of the Holocaust in Spanish public discourse reflects more a general lack of knowledge about the Holocaust, the limitations of Spanish participation in European memory culture, and its difficulties in dealing with its own national past – which is still strongly contested between the different sides on the political spectrum – than an active effort to suppress uncomfortable historical facts about the Holocaust, as is the case in Hungary and Poland. The formal neutrality of Spain during WWII also “helps” to avoid serious discussion of the way the regime actually collaborated with Nazi Germany in significant ways, including providing them with raw materials, sending Spanish workers to Germany, integrating the “Blue Division” into the German army in the fight against the Soviets, and other ways (see Brenneis & Herrman 2020). The liberal or left-leaning side of the political spectrum focuses on the Spanish victims of the Franco regime and the Nazis, rather than on their Jewish victims. In short, Spain arguably evades responsibility for its own part in the victimization of the Jews more by omission than by commission.

In England, the dominant narrative focuses on the heroic role of Britain in WWII and tends to avoid discussion of the way Britain restricted the immigration of Jewish refugees into Palestine and into Britain itself before, during and in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust (Kochavi 2001), and the failure to act more meaningfully in the face of knowledge of the Nazi extermination of the Jews. There are occasional expressions of recognition of these issues, yet they remain few and far between. Similarly, while British fascism led by Oswald Mosley is occasionally mentioned, we find little mention of the quite prominent antisemitic tradition that existed in the UK before (and after) WWII.

An important element in English public discourse is the celebration of its leading role in promoting the values of freedom, democracy, and human rights, as well as a European and even global Holocaust memory whose main “lessons” are precisely those values. A certain challenge to this hegemonic memory comes from the left, which occasionally invokes European or specifically British failure to accept larger numbers of Jewish refugees right after the breakout of WWII. These aspects of Britain’s historical legacy are often invoked to criticize the current treatment of refugees by the Conservative government.

Germany’s acknowledgment of its responsibility for the Holocaust remains strong and unwavering, as shown in various statements by public figures from most of the political spectrum. As public figures and journalists often insist, no other country in the world has faced its own dark past so bravely. But this very insistence, critics argue, creates a paradoxical situation in which public discourse in Germany about the Holocaust, not entirely unlike in the other countries studied in this research, tends to paint a positive image of Germany, not for its role during WWII but for its willingness to acknowledge the crimes it committed, first and foremost the Holocaust. Moreover, as critics from the left as well as activists from Germany’s former colonies point out, while the “dark past” of the

Holocaust is addressed by Germany in an admirable way, its confrontation with its colonial legacy and particularly colonial crimes remains limited at best.⁶⁶⁶

The far-right in Germany, in particular the AfD, which has grown in power considerably in recent years, also presents a significant challenge to Germany's memory culture: it tends to reject German guilt; to insist that German civil society or "ordinary" Germans' participation and support for Nazi crimes was limited at best; to emphasize German victimhood by the Allies; and to de-emphasize the Holocaust and the Nazi era more generally as of little importance in the "big picture" of German history and cultural achievements. The AfD and other far right movements thus present a resistance to the "politics of shame" similar to that of the governing parties in Poland and Hungary.

2.7.3. Othering antisemitism

In all the countries examined in this study, antisemitism is both a genuine concern and a tool used for political purposes. In Poland and Hungary, the governments have committed themselves publicly to the protection of the Jewish community from antisemitism, and often emphasize that Jews are safe in their countries, in contrast to western European states where Jews are subject to antisemitic attacks. At the same time, politicians from these governments use coded antisemitic language, building especially on associations between Jews and communism as well as on the notion of "globalists" like George Soros, who allegedly undermine society by promoting immigration and "extreme" liberal ideology in these countries. In Hungary, in particular, the government and more broadly the conservative-nationalist right celebrates notoriously antisemitic historical figures as heroes and expresses nostalgia toward the Horthy regime. Both governments deny that there is a serious problem of antisemitism in their countries and accuse those who argue otherwise of being motivated by hatred toward their countries, supposedly promoted by Jews in Israel and the US in particular.

Yet as the chapters in this report (and various other studies⁶⁶⁷) demonstrate, overt antisemitism among the far-right in Poland and Hungary is alive and well, as are different forms of Holocaust revisionism and denial. For many in the far right in Poland, it is ethnic Poles who were the main victims in Auschwitz; they argue that when the Polish government accepts the "Jewish" narrative

666 This represents a broader European tendency (Sierp 2020), but as we discuss below, in Germany discussion about the relations between the Holocaust and German or European colonialism is particularly fraught.

667 A recent, comprehensive report on antisemitism in Europe places Poland and Hungary only after Greece among countries where there are "far more antisemites than average" in Europe. The report concludes that 42% of the population in Poland and Hungary can be seen as antisemites (Kovács & Fischer 2021, 37). In 2018, representatives of Polish Jewish organizations expressed their outrage over what they described as the "growing wave of intolerance, xenophobia, and antisemitism in Poland. Increasingly, hate speech has escaped the confines of the internet to infiltrate the public sphere. It has found its way into newspapers and television broadcasts, including those belonging to public media outlets." See ["Open statement of Polish Jewish organizations to the public opinion,"](#) [sic]. Similarly, a recent report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) cites the concern of Jewish leaders in Hungary about "the introduction of nationalist historical figures, who also engaged in antisemitism, into school textbooks and other areas of public cultural and political prominence," as well as politicians' use of language that can be understood as "antisemitic codes, such as 'rootless cosmopolitans' and 'globalists.'" In particular, states the report, Jewish leaders worry about "far-right extremist groups, such as the neo-Nazi Legio Hungarian Group." See USCIRF 2021, 20.

about Auschwitz, it forgets that it is a government of Poles and it is manipulated by the Jews, who try to exploit the Holocaust to their advantage. In short, according to this far right, Poland still needs to be freed from Jewry, including from its “Judaized” Poles such as the historians who challenge the dominant narrative about the role of Poles in the Holocaust.

Here again we find important similarities not only between Poland and Hungary, but also between the discourse of the governments in Hungary and Poland and the discourse of the far-right parties in Spain and Germany. While distancing itself from Holocaust denial and open antisemitism, the far-right Spanish party VOX also treats George Soros as a demonic figure, who represents the powers of hegemonic groups or great lobbyists of globalism, anti-nationalism, and financial speculation. VOX’s insistence that it is not an antisemitic party did not prevent it from attempting to run a Holocaust denier, Fernando Paz, for parliament, highlighting how antisemitism and Holocaust denial remain part of the party’s legacy and are still attractive to some of its constituency. The far-right in Germany similarly tends to deny accusations of antisemitism and to reject the notion that it is somehow responsible for right-wing attacks on Jews, while at the same time using coded antisemitism in the form of the “Great Replacement” theory⁶⁶⁸ and other conspiracy theories.

One way the governments of Poland and Hungary, as well as the far-right parties in Germany and Spain defend themselves against the accusation of antisemitism is by emphasizing their support for Israel – a relatively new phenomenon among far-right parties in Europe (Kahmann 2017; Rose 2020) – and by constantly condemning what they identify as the most dangerous forms of antisemitism: Muslim as well as leftist, anti-Zionist antisemitism. They express a sense of a common worldview they feel they share with Israel concerning the legitimacy of preserving their ethnic national identity and protecting their security. In their discourse, they describe Israel as a state which demonstrates a “healthy” nationalism and a “realist” foreign policy, which puts the national interest at the forefront rather than succumb to “idealist” liberal cosmopolitanism, and which stands firm against Muslim terror and aggression. This kind of “philosemitism” can be interpreted in different ways: as a strictly instrumental tool to gain respectability for these far-right parties; as a deeper process wherein anti-Muslim racism gradually replaces antisemitism as a “cultural code” (Volkov 1978, 2011) for far-right parties in Europe; or as a genuine sense by those far-right parties that the state they envision is manifested in important ways in Israel. A deeper understanding of this support for Israel by far-right movements and parties requires more research than the scope of our study allowed.

A related theme that is common to both the governments of Poland and Hungary and to far-right parties in Germany and Spain, is that as part of their objection to Muslim immigration, they portray it as “importing” antisemitism into their otherwise antisemitism-free countries and thus endangering local Jewish communities. This is a recurring theme particularly in the rhetoric of the Hungarian government, but it exists in Poland as well. The Spanish VOX and the German AfD

668 The “Great Replacement” theory claims that liberal and progressive elites seek to culturally and demographically marginalize whites by promoting large scale, non-white and particularly Muslim immigration into Europe and other Western countries. Often, promoters of this theory explicitly or implicitly identify Jews (for example, George Soros), as being the primary power in or behind this elite.

also regularly call to stop the “invasion” of Muslim immigrants, which they identify with crime, terrorism, and antisemitism. As the chapters in this report illustrate, for these political actors it is part of their rejection of the vision of a multicultural society, which they claim the European Union, a rich “globalist” elite (with Soros as a major symbol), and radical liberal or leftist forces within their countries attempt to promote, thereby seeking to destroy their national identity, values, and culture. At the same time, it also expresses specific anti-Muslim sentiments shared by these parties.

In English public discourse it is more common to connect antisemitism with Islamophobia and more general discrimination and persecution of minorities as related and equally pernicious phenomena. The historical lesson of antisemitism, particularly in its relation to the Holocaust, thus tends to be mobilized differently in the dominant memory culture in England when it relates to immigrants and refugees. This difference speaks to a broader point: in England even conservatives tend to share, at least rhetorically, the liberal or “cosmopolitan” Holocaust memory, while in Hungary and Poland the conservative-nationalist right tends to mobilize it against certain minority groups. This is but another example of how the relations between global and local forms of Holocaust remembrance are particularly complicated in these latter countries.

Mainstream German parties and media are resolute in rejecting antisemitism in all its forms. Antisemitic positions and incidents are widely condemned, especially when it comes to violent attacks against Jews, which are severely treated by most political parties and the mainstream press as a breach of trust with the Jewish community. Most German parties also present a consensus when it comes to what is sometimes called the “new antisemitism” – understood as Israel-centred forms of antisemitism – as demonstrated by the anti-BDS law of May 2019, and by the fact that German politicians occasionally go as far as to draw parallels between the boycott of Israel and the Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses. Groups within the far left in Germany are regularly condemned for what their critics argue is a disproportional focus on Israel and the use of antisemitic tropes to criticize Israel. This speaks to the broader point, that the dominant memory culture in Germany perceives the memory of the Holocaust as imparting a particular obligation of Germany to protect Israel’s security and its right to exist.

We find a similar phenomenon in England and Spain, where the far left is accused of antisemitism by its rivals, whether on the right or on the left, with regular references to Holocaust memory as requiring the defense of Israel’s right to existence and security. The most prominent example in England is the scandal over the rise of antisemitism in the Labor party under Jeremy Corbyn. More generally, in parliamentary debates and in right-wing media outlets in particular, condemnation of what is described as leftist forms of antisemitism is a recurring theme in discussions where the Holocaust is mentioned or remembered. One such form of antisemitism that is often invoked is Holocaust inversion – namely the presentation of Israel as a Nazi state or Israelis as Nazis. In this context, public figures sometimes point to refusals to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism on the part of universities or other institutions as indications of antisemitism. Importantly, politicians across the political spectrum talk about the existence of antisemitism in England as an indication of the success or failure of Holocaust remembrance in the country, and more broadly of the health of the society.

As reflected most clearly in the chapter on Germany in this report, the far left tends to reject such accusations of antisemitism as politically motivated to shield Israel from criticism and accountability. When it comes to antisemitism, the far-left tends to focus on far-right antisemitism, which it sees as one of the central ideological elements of these movements. Similarly, it tends to criticize the insufficient analysis of the connections between antisemitism and racism. Another important theme in the discourse of growing portions of the far-left is an emphasis on the connections between Nazism and German or European colonialism more broadly.

In conclusion, the general tendency across the countries studied here can be described as “othering antisemitism,” in the sense that each party on the political spectrum accuses its rivals of antisemitism, support for antisemitism, or downplaying antisemitism among its members and constituency – and in this way also positions itself as protector of the Jews.

2.7.4. Universalizing the Holocaust’s uniqueness

The way states in Eastern Europe have been making use of the Holocaust to highlight their own victimhood by both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union has been thoroughly explored in recent scholarship. The fact that Holocaust uniqueness (or singularity / unprecedentedness) has long been a staple of Western memory culture might be one reason why public figures in Poland and Hungary seem to oscillate between an insistence on the similarity between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union *and* an acceptance of the singularity of the Holocaust. The dominant tendency in these countries remains to treat Nazi Germany and Soviet communism as totalitarian regimes equal in the evil and oppression they represent, and this theme is often framed through the notion that Poland and Hungary were victims of a “double” genocide.⁶⁶⁹

This serves not only to emphasize Polish and Hungarian victimhood, but also to “exorcize” fascism – as well as the support communism received from some sections of the society – from their own national history. The unique status of the Holocaust in Western Holocaust memory serves these regimes in drawing attention to the crimes of communism, as the crimes of both regimes are commemorated together in the public discourse as well as in museums such as “the House of Terror” in Hungary, which actually focuses much more on the crimes of communism (see also Subotić 2019). Moreover, as mentioned above, since Jews are often associated with communism in the explicit or coded discourse of the conservative-nationalist right, it also serves in the battle to uphold Polish/Hungarian righteousness when it comes to their treatment of the Jews, as the explicit or implicit argument is that whatever violence had been committed against Jews was in fact a justified revenge against communist Jews. Finally, treating Communism and Nazism as equally murderous regimes serves the claim that leftist extremism has the same moral consequences as rightist extremism, and so “levels the field” in terms of the available political rhetoric in present-day struggles between right and left.

669 Comparing the victims of these two regimes and emphasizing the enormous human toll of the Soviet Union often serves the same goal.

Here again we find similar tendencies among the far-right in Spain and Germany. In Spain, VOX also pushes for recognition of both National Socialism and Communism for the suffering they caused, treating both as examples of the evil of totalitarianism. They draw on the 2018/2019 European parliament's resolution that calls for the commemoration of the crimes of both totalitarian regimes: Nazism and Communism. Building on this equation, they call for the remembrance – and inclusion in educational curriculums – of the crimes of Spanish Communists and Anarchists. In this way they effectively turn the table on the Spanish left: they distance the Franco regime from Nazi Germany (as it was not a totalitarian regime), and at the same time identify the Spanish Communists, Anarchists, and Republicans with the crimes of Communism.

As the previous chapters show, an important aspect of this discourse is the emphasis on protecting "Judeo-Christian civilization." In this narrative, Nazism and Bolshevism were based on a complete break with the essence of European civilization. The continuities these regimes represent with long-standing European "traditions" – from antisemitism to visions of racial empires – are marginalized and ignored. Nazism and Bolshevism thus become historical phenomena that have little to do with "us" and represent a foreign element that somehow infiltrated Europe. Moreover, Jewish civilization becomes part and parcel of the European tradition, despite the long centuries of persecution and discrimination Jews and Judaism suffered in Europe. While in Hungary and Poland it manifests in an overly positive narrative about the past co-existence of Poles/Hungarians and Jews, in Spain VOX draws on the imagined golden past of co-existence between Christians and Jews in Spain and emphasizes their commitment to the descendants of the Jewish exiles from Spain to point to the same idea of a shared civilization. Jews of Spanish descent thus gain special significance as part of this shared civilization, while other Jews (for example of Eastern European or more generally Ashkenazi origin) are perceived as foreign to it. This last point should be underlined: typically, in this narrative of Judeo-Christian civilization, it is only a certain portion of the Jewish people that is part of this civilization – those who supposedly share its conservative and nationalist values, while other Jews might be particularly subversive (communists, progressives, those who are part of the global elite, those who participate in the defamation of our country, etc.). In other words, this kind of philosemitism often encompasses quite significant antisemitic undertones.

In the narrative of the conservative-nationalist right, Judeo-Christian Europe is also a Europe of *nations*, in the sense that it fosters rather than suppresses national self-determination, expression and identity. This means that those who seek a more multicultural Europe, such as the liberal and leftist opposition parties, can be seen as undermining not only national foundations but also European civilization itself. Similarly, in this narrative, those who are willing to accommodate Muslim refugees and immigrants into Europe are undermining not only national security and the security of Jews but also European, Judeo-Christian civilization.

European Judeo-Christian civilization is also a *conservative* civilization, in several senses. First, it is a civilization underpinned by religion. The brutality of the communist regimes, in this narrative, is seen as a natural development from the Marxist attack on Christianity and Judaism, just as the brutality of Nazi Germany is considered a natural consequence of its attack on Christianity as an offshoot of Judaism. Second and relatedly, it is a civilization that cherishes the traditional family,

gender roles and sexual relations. Thus, in Spain, VOX attacks the commemoration of LGBTQ victims of the Nazis as a manifestation of a radical liberal ideology that instrumentalizes the Holocaust for its own ideological purposes; while members of this party at the same time compare laws that facilitate abortion to Nazi eugenics. In Poland, the heterodox gender identity of critics of Poland's "historical policy" is explicitly referenced as manifesting a broader radical leftist attempt to destroy the institution of marriage and thus the foundations of society.

Such discourse is much more marginal in England. What we do find in England is a certain ambiguity as to how to treat the Holocaust in relation to other mass atrocities. Public figures in England link the Holocaust to past and present genocides and other mass atrocities. The latter are discursively constructed as both similar and dissimilar to the Holocaust, by emphasizing the singularity of the Holocaust while at the same time making analogies to other mass atrocities, from the Armenian and Rwandan genocides to contemporary Chinese and Burmese treatment of their Muslim minorities. Thus, the Holocaust is simultaneously particularized and universalized. Indeed, one of the recurring themes in English public discourse about the Holocaust is that it imparts the obligation of "never again," which means not to be a bystander in the face of mass atrocities, as well as to fight against racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and any form of discrimination against ethnic, religious, and political minorities. In this sense, public discourse in England about the Holocaust exemplifies (again at least rhetorically) the Western or "cosmopolitan" Holocaust memory.

However, a common feature of the mass atrocities invoked by public figures and journalists in England is that they are all cases in which the UK's moral stature remains largely untainted. This discourse can be critical at times: British inaction in the face of mass atrocities in the past is sometimes mentioned as a way to call on policy makers to act against mass atrocities in the present. However, the mass atrocities mentioned are all such that Britain played either the role of a bystander or of an "upstander" that intervened at least at some point to stop the genocide. Mass atrocities in which Britain was or is complicit in, in contrast (one may think for example about the Indonesian genocide in East Timor or Rwandan atrocities in the Congo), are rarely if ever mentioned in the dominant public discourse around the Holocaust in England.⁶⁷⁰ We find here an interesting corollary to the way English memory of the Holocaust tends to emphasize, as mentioned above, the more heroic aspects of British behaviour during WWII and de-emphasize the less savory ones. In this sense, the invocation of the Holocaust to talk about the need to confront current mass atrocities tends to replicate the heroic, even when mildly critical, narrative about British behaviour during WWII.

As mentioned above, in Germany in particular the challenge from the left to the dominant forms of Holocaust memory concerns not the nation's role during WWII but rather its colonial and racist legacies, which remains little acknowledged. The Holocaust in the left's discourse is positioned either as a "model" to draw on when it comes to the need to acknowledge the nation's dark colonial past or participation in the slave trade, or as an event that overshadows and "competes" with the acknowledgment of other major crimes committed by the state. In Spain, the left is mostly concerned

670 For a critical discussion of this tendency, see Moses 2008; Hinton 2012.

with the need to come to terms with Republican victims of the Franco regime, rather than with the responsibility of Spain for the victimization of Jews. Yet in this context, it regularly mentions the Holocaust together with other mass atrocities, from the extermination of the Roma and the persecution of LGBTQ communities by the Nazis to African slavery. This should be understood at least partly as another way of criticizing the conservative right and the far-right in Spain, as it alludes to the Franco regime's racist tendencies and persecution of minority groups such as the Roma.

The gap between Holocaust memory and post-colonial memory, in particular, has been a subject of much debate in recent years in Germany. This followed first, the accusations of antisemitism against the Cameroonian political theorist and historian Achille Mbembe; then the translation into German of the political theorist Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory*; and finally, the polemical article published by the historian and genocide scholar A. Dirk Moses, "The German Catechism" (2021). As the chapter on Germany in this report shows, the debate brought into sharp relief the tensions between the place of the Holocaust in German national identity, its memory culture and various contemporary questions, from its policy towards immigrants to its foreign policy, particularly with regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is still ongoing and reflects, among other developments, the broader transformation of Germany into an increasingly multicultural society with the different experiences and perspectives it entails (see also Rothberg 2022).

Indeed, the fact that a significant percent of the German population have their origins elsewhere, is a concern for the dominant German memory culture in another way. The challenge is manifest in the insistence of figures like Wolfgang Schäuble, former president of the Bundestag, that immigrants take on the German identity as regards the Holocaust. Yet the expectation that descendants of immigrants would simply acquire the heavy burden of "the sins of the fathers" (Olick 2016) seems unrealistic, especially when it comes alongside the additional challenge of passing on this demanding memory culture to the next generation.

Be that as it may, one can identify a shared "leftist" Holocaust memory across Europe as well, even if here too it might vary somewhat in each country, in accordance with its specific historical and contemporary context.

2.7.5. Conclusion: moving beyond Western vs. Eastern memory cultures

Scholarship on Holocaust memory often distinguishes between Western and Eastern or post-Communist memory (e.g., Himka & Michlic 2013; Koposov 2017; Subotić 2019). The former, according to this scholarship, tends to be more self-reflective, more willing to acknowledge past wrong-doings, more liberal and cosmopolitan in nature. In contrast, East European or post-communist memory tends to be more focused on its own national victimhood and righteousness, more resistant to recognition of collaboration and complicity in the murder of Jews, and more nationalistic and anti-liberal in nature. This difference is understood to be mainly a result of the different roles during WWII and the different trajectories of these regions of Europe in the aftermath of WWII, particularly the legacy of communist rule in Eastern Europe, which was inclined to marginalize the particular Jewish experience in the Holocaust and led to little account for the way they suffered not only from the Nazis but also from widespread collaboration and hostility throughout Nazi occupied Europe

In broad strokes, our study identified similar patterns. However, we also find striking similarities between the kind of Holocaust memory espoused by the far-right in Spain and Germany, and the one promoted by the governments of Poland and Hungary, despite the very different historical and contemporary contexts in which they operate. Similarly, we find important affinities between the challenge to the dominant Holocaust memory posed by the liberal or leftist opposition in Poland and Hungary and the one posed by the leftist opposition in Germany, England, and Spain, as marginal as they may be in some of these places. Finally, while the mainstream, hegemonic Holocaust memory in Poland and Hungary is very different from the one in England, Germany, or Spain – along the lines suggested by the scholarship mentioned above – they do share a strong inclination to portray their respective nations in heroic and righteous terms and to marginalize the more problematic aspects of the national past (Germany, as mentioned above, is a special case in this regard).

This suggests that what we find is not so much a “Western” vs. “Eastern” Holocaust memory, but rather “memory camps” along the political spectrum from the far-right to the far-left that cut across Europe and within nations. Each of these camps has its own Holocaust memory, although some aspects of it might be shared between camps in each country. If we wanted to apply common terms from memory studies, we may say, in broad terms, that the conservative-nationalist parties and movements tend to present different forms of competitive victimhood and “antagonistic” memory to highlight the victimhood and heroism of their nation. Centrist parties and movements tend to present a certain version of “cosmopolitan” memory, in which the Holocaust is understood as a singular event, unprecedented in its evil and historical meaning, and it is from this vantage point that it imparts to us the imperative of “never again,” namely to prevent other mass atrocities and to fight against antisemitism, racism and discrimination, as well as to promote an international human rights regime. Leftist parties and movements, on their part, tend to offer what can be seen as a different version of cosmopolitan memory, an “agonist” one, where Holocaust memory serves to critique the hegemonic memory culture in their countries, to point to the gap between their governments’ rhetorical ethical commitments and their actual policies, and to advance recognition of various other mass atrocities, from colonial crimes and slavery to harsh treatment of asylum seekers.⁶⁷¹

These are, of course, broad generalizations, but they may be useful in making sense of the memory camps that exist today across the countries examined in this research, and possibly across Europe; as well as in the realization that all sides on the political spectrum in the countries we researched present their own version of “multidirectional memory,” where the memory of the Holocaust intersects and is in dialogue with other memories of victimhood and mass atrocities they seek to highlight and advance.

The difference between the countries when it comes to Holocaust memory turns out to be dependent not so much on the geographical part of Europe in which they are located, but on which

671 I build here on Kansteiner and Berger’s recent discussion of these conceptions of memory (2021), and particularly their suggestion that rather than an alternative to cosmopolitan memory, agonistic memory is best seen as based on an underlying cosmopolitan ethical commitment, but one that is political and critical. I am grateful to Wulf Kansteiner for his insightful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

political camp is dominant in the country. In Poland and Hungary, those who hold power represent a strong ethno-nationalist conception of collective identity, which has deep roots in the history of these countries.⁶⁷² The kind of Holocaust memory they promote corresponds to this conception, and it is no coincidence that far right parties in Spain and Germany, which hold a similar conception of national identity, promote a similar Holocaust memory. The parties in power in Germany, Spain, and England have a more liberal or civic conception of national identity, and accordingly present a more “cosmopolitan” Holocaust memory.⁶⁷³

This does not mean that the specific history of the country, the role it played during WWII or the distinct trajectory it had in the aftermath of the war are not important: they provide the context and the specific historical memories against which the struggles between the different political camps take place. Our findings suggest, however, that when it comes to the invocation of Holocaust memory in public discourse, the position on the political spectrum is more determinative than geographical location.

This also suggests that Holocaust memory has more to do with the construction of national identity and its negotiation among domestic parties, as well as with regard to the international community,⁶⁷⁴ primarily the European Union, than with the historical record of the Holocaust. As mentioned above, the kind of Holocaust memory that has developed in Poland and Hungary has been largely reactive, in response to the demands and norms introduced by the EU. Once their position in the EU was secured, they became active promoters of an alternative European memory, in which the crimes of communism, the notion of two totalitarian regimes equal in the evil they represent, and the status of East European nations as unique victims of a double genocide – plays a much more important role (Littoz-Monnet, 2012). In this process, as scholarship has long noted and as our study confirms, they draw on the well-established Holocaust memory to turn attention to their own victimhood (see also Kovács & Mindler-Steiner 2015; Pető 2019, 2022; Sabotic 2019). Holocaust memory, in other words, has become a site of tension not only in the struggle over national identity, but also in the struggle over European identity.

672 See, for example, Michlic 2006.

673 On the way Holocaust memory “travels” between different countries as reflected in political speeches, see Adams 2022.

674 See also the third part of this report, on the Holocaust in social media.

Editor:

Dr. Nurit S. Novis-Deutsch

Researchers

(listed alphabetically):

Dr. Tracy Adams

Prof. Jolanta Ambrosewicz-
Jacobs

Dr. Anikó Félix

Dr. Claudia Globisch

Maximilian Hauer

Adam Musiał

Dr. Nurit S. Novis-Deutsch

Dr. Marta Simó

Abby Zucker

Research assistants:

Jason Hall*

Mikayla Hoppe*

Noah Krasman*

Galina Lochekhina*

Pritha Majumder*

Yair Manas*

Ayelet Mann

Aliena Stürzer*

Petra Várhegyi

Gabi Wachs*

* Graduates of the Weiss-Livnat
International MA Program
in Holocaust Studies
University of Haifa

CHAPTER 3

Educating about the Holocaust in present-day Poland, Hungary, Germany, England and Spain



3.1. Introduction

Educating about the Holocaust (Henceforth: EaH¹) is a key locus in the shaping and transmission of collective memory on the subject. Situated between the spheres of public and personal memory, it is enacted locally in classrooms yet involves large-scale national and political agendas. The *national* facet of EaH is reflected in curriculum guidelines, textbooks, teacher training programmes, teacher supervision, and standardised testing. The *personal* aspect is reflected in students and their teachers, each of whom bring their own set of beliefs and attitudes to class. There is a third element to EaH as well: *professional expertise* that is based upon educational theories, research on EaH, programmes created by educational organizations and teachers' professional identity.

One source of complexity for EaH stems from the intersectionality of its national, professional and personal facets. For example, educational organizations that offer professionally designed EaH programmes to schools, also reflect broader political agendas. Similarly, Holocaust educators are influenced by their national context, even as their family memories or personal beliefs may lead them in different directions. This intersectionality makes it intriguing and challenging to understand how EaH plays out in different contexts and how it is affected by, and in return shapes, Holocaust memory in Europe today.

Another source of complexity in teaching about the Holocaust relates to its location at the epicentre of what is considered “difficult history” (Salinas 2022). Educators need to manage sensitive issues when teaching the subject, and this applies to their students both as individuals and as part of larger identity groups (Goldberg, Wagner & Petrović 2019). The Holocaust is a difficult topic not only because of its heavy emotive burden (Wrenn & Lomas 2007) or because it deliberates “histories whose central events are rooted in the trauma, suffering, and violent oppression of groups of people,” (Sheppard 2010, 1) but also because, in each of the countries we explored, it touches on at least some points (in some cases, highly sensitive ones) of national and historical controversy, shame and discomfort, raising a “clash between history’s critical reflective aspect and its role in collective memory” (Goldberg, Wagner & Petrović 2019, 10).

Our main goal in analysing contemporary Holocaust memory in the educational arena was to untangle the personal, professional and national elements affecting the teachers in this field, while exploring how teachers in different countries manage to convey the difficult and sensitive history of the Holocaust to their students. We did this by surveying and interviewing teachers while probing all three strands. We chose to focus on educators rather than on students or principals, because we consider them to be the chief conveyors of collective memory and key players in the educational arena. Although at first glance they may seem to be transmitting their respective Ministry of Education’s messages, they are in fact active and often autonomous memory-shapers: Not only

1 Educating about the Holocaust [EaH] is also termed Holocaust Education [HE] or Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust [TLH]. We use the acronym EaH to indicate that the process of teaching about the Holocaust in schools is an educational activity rather than one of transmitting knowledge as TLH might imply, and because this education is about the Holocaust, which the acronym HE does not convey.

do they translate national guidelines and professional norms into concrete lessons and messages, but, crucially, when they shut the classroom door behind them, they are the only ones interacting with the students. At the end of the day, EaH in schools boils down to what teachers convey to their students, and the manner in which they do so.

We set ourselves the task of formulating a comprehensive roadmap for EaH today in five European countries, each with a distinctive Holocaust legacy – Poland, Hungary, Germany, Spain and England – by listing five goals:

- *Goal 1:* To identify interactions between teachers' personal, professional and national Holocaust memory legacies and describe their combined effects on EaH as explanatory variables in understanding how Holocaust memory is preserved and transmitted.
- *Goal 2:* To map current goals, pedagogical methods and educational content that characterize EaH today in each country, from teachers' perspectives.
- *Goal 3:* To assess the level of freedom that teachers exercise, teach and offer students, in different national educational contexts.
- *Goal 4:* To evaluate the state of EaH in each country in terms of challenges and how they are being met, and in terms of the changes it has sustained in recent years.
- *Goal 5:* To explore the relation of EaH to public-domain issues – rise of extreme right movements, antisemitism and Islamophobia, attitudes towards immigration and the Covid pandemic crisis – as discussed by the teachers.

As we will demonstrate in this report, teacher autonomy was found to be a key factor bridging the national and professional facets of EaH, and its level varies across countries. In some places, teachers may be reluctant to express their professional or personal convictions for fear of being called out by stakeholders and risking their job or reputation. In other places, teachers are encouraged and even rewarded for advancing personal initiatives. A major issue, therefore, is the level of freedom that teachers have in translating information into content, pedagogy and educational messages.

We will revisit our five goals and describe how we translated them into specific research questions and what methods we used to address them, following a preliminary review of the state of EaH in each of the five countries, based on previous research.

3.2. The State of EaH by Country: A Literature Review

3.2.1. EaH in Poland²

Following the fall of communism, EaH in Poland has been closely aligned with political discourse, cultural memory, media debates and collective identity formation processes. Poland has undergone several educational reforms relating to the major political changes it has experienced, and the story of EaH in Poland, the epicentre of the Holocaust, can be narrated as a series of changes made during these different reforms. In recent decades, the Polish education system has been reformed several times, most notably in 1999, 2008, 2014 and 2017 (Jakubowski 2021).

A timeline of changes in Polish EaH

During the post-war communist regime, Holocaust memory in Poland was, to a large extent, distorted and denied until the mid-1980s. The field of education aligned with an official narrative that universalized an all-Polish war experience, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. This meant equating the fate of both groups in the war and downplaying the Holocaust, while often silencing its memory. The transition of Poland to a democratic republic in 1989 brought reform in this approach. The term “Holocaust” was introduced into the Polish education system in 1993 (Węgrzynek 2011) and made its way into school curricula in 1999–2001. Following the education reform of 1999–2001,³ the Holocaust became an obligatory topic in History and Polish classes in the higher grades of primary school (students aged 12–13), in *gimnazjum*, or junior secondary school (students aged 15–16), and in *liceum*, or senior secondary school (students aged 17–18). The reforms prompted the organization of many seminars for teachers, mainly by universities and NGOs, and the introduction of numerous grassroots educational projects focusing on EaH. Although no nationwide study is available to identify how many Polish teachers truly challenge students with the topic of the Holocaust, consistent and ongoing cooperation between Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and the Jagiellonian University was in effect until 2015. Teachers’ seminars were organized by many experienced organizations, including the Institute for European Studies of the Jagiellonian University, the Jewish Historical Institute, Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews, the Galicia Jewish Museum, and various others.

Nonetheless, the lack of systemic courses regarding the Holocaust in academic teacher training programmes and the lack of in-service teacher training were strongly felt in Poland. Polish experts

2 This section is written by Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs.

3 The Polish educational reform of 1999–2001 was a set of policies aimed at prolonging the general education common core curriculum by one year, postponing the first opportunity for students to select an educational track from age 15 to age 16, and improving the quality of education. Following the reform, Polish children attend primary school for 6 years (instead of 8), middle school for 3, and then choose tracks for upper secondary schooling for a further 3 years. Additionally, the education system was decentralized while simultaneously being monitored through standardized tests (Le Donne 2014).

wrote frequently about the theoretical, methodological, and logistical problems of EaH in Poland⁴ but the impact of EaH remains difficult to assess due to a lack of consensus regarding what level of knowledge would be considered satisfactory.

The education reform of 2008⁵ excluded the subject of the Holocaust from the junior secondary school History curriculum, while retaining it in the Civics and Polish curricula.⁶ Its effect was in exactly the opposite direction to that recommended by the findings of empirical studies, which indicated that efforts should be made to introduce EaH in earlier stages, before students were divided into different educational tracks (Ambrosewicz-Jacobs 2020).

Nearly half of the teachers surveyed at that time (45%) advocated that the Holocaust should be a separate topic of learning, not included in the representation of Polish suffering during WWII, but the other 51% of teachers opposed treating the Holocaust as a distinct phenomenon (Milerski 2010). In concluding one such study, Kucia (2008) recommended the introduction of in-service training for different professionals, not only teachers, and that the Holocaust become a component not only of the History and Literature curriculums, but also of Civics and Religion.

The challenge of inaccurate knowledge about the Holocaust

Despite systemic changes in teaching about the Holocaust in Polish schools and numerous educational efforts by NGOs and individual teachers, a sizeable proportion of students – 38.7% of the national sample and 66% of vocational school students in the 2008 study – remained ignorant of the term “Holocaust” (Ambrosewicz-Jacobs 2020). This study also revealed Polish students’ defensive attitudes regarding the history of the Holocaust. Students’ answers reflected a vision of history based on myths, rather than on historical facts, and a rejection of uncomfortable facts about the Holocaust. Such attitudes have been explained by the need to maintain positive social identity and positive group self-esteem (Bilewicz 2004).

A poll carried out in 2013 revealed a relatively low level of knowledge about Polish-Jewish relations during WWII among students. For example, 23% of them believed that the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was successful (Urzykowski 2013). In general, the percentage of Polish respondents who claimed that Jews constituted the biggest group of WWII victims in occupied Poland has been diminishing with time: from 46% in 1992 to 28% in 2010. Simultaneously, the number of respondents who

4 Kucia (2008) suggested an emphasis on strengthening the cognitive over the affective components in EaH. Trojański (2013) proposed shifting the focus from transmitting information to forming attitudes, as well as adding a dimension of value education. He felt that EaH ought to place greater emphasis on prevention by including a psychological prism, with the aim of understanding the processes leading to genocide.

5 The 2008 reform was mainly a curricular one, intended to improve cognitive and analytical abilities, problem-solving skills and academic competencies. Additionally, education was made mandatory for 5-6-year-olds (Wiśniewski & Zahorska 2020).

6 This change was prompted by the desire for an in-depth study of recent history to be spread over the course of a school education. This was to remedy its relegation to two superficial topics at the end of the third form in academic secondary schools and then in postsecondary schools, where time was limited because of final examinations.

believe that Poles were among the most victimized groups in WWII has risen from 6% in 1992 to 15% in 2010 (Witkowska et al. 2014).

The shift away from EaH and its implications

While inaccurate knowledge on the Holocaust among Polish students was a challenge, until 2015 EaH in Poland broadly reflected Western strategies and methods (e.g., relying on academic experts for historical accuracy). However, after 2015 the Polish education system, increasingly tailored by governmental decisions, began turning away from EaH altogether. A 2017 educational reform removed middle schools entirely, causing a major restructuring of the education system and strongly impacting EaH, because middle school teachers had been receiving the bulk of EaH training for several years.⁷ Since this shift was completed in 2019, many teachers find they have no time to teach about the Holocaust.

In a 2015 study among Polish educators and senior secondary school students, Gross demonstrated that respondents engaged with the difficult past, but the prototypical narrative included the suffering of Poles caused by Germans, their bravery and the camps where “many, many” people died. The essays Gross examined presented the suffering of Jews and Poles as equivalent, emphasizing a homogenous and national story. Gross (2017) also identified patterns of motivation for EaH among teachers. She found that the willingness to teach about the Holocaust originated in a sense of personal duty and a desire to understand themselves and their families’ histories in order to better cope with a traumatic past. However, the current Polish government (in power since 2015) shifted EaH to a different track.

The new government’s historical policy introduced the notion of a “pedagogy of pride,” replacing the previous “pedagogy of shame.” This pedagogy of nationalistic pride emphasizes the righteous Poles who saved Jews in the Holocaust and erases the context of denouncers and strict divisions between perpetrators, bystanders and victims. It creates an impression of innocent Poland under occupation and after the war. Szuchta, a longstanding analyst of Polish textbooks in reference to EaH, found that little space was devoted to the Holocaust in some new History textbooks introduced after the 2017 reform, that these books contained not only factual mistakes, inaccuracies and erroneous interpretations, but in some cases even expressed derogative language in reference to Jews (Szuchta 2021).

Today, the fact that Jews were stigmatized long before the Holocaust and were excluded from non-Jewish communities in occupied Poland during WWII is mostly overlooked in schools. Poles of all ages seek to see themselves exclusively, with notable exceptions, as the descendants of victims,

7 The most recent reform of the education system—and the most fundamental in terms of curriculum and organisation—took place in 2017 and was introduced by Minister Anna Zalewska of the current right-wing government. This reform re-organized the educational structure similar to the way it was during the communist regime: 8 years of primary school and 4 years of secondary school. It also did away with some of the solutions introduced by the 1999-2001 reform and generally put more emphasis on learning facts, rather than stimulating critical thinking.

heroes and rescuers. Thus, the gap between historiography and education in Poland is growing. The Holocaust narrative is still in flux and subject to obliteration through the selection of topics and the choice of the Righteous as a dominant motive of the attitudes of Poles toward Jews during WWII.

It is possible that students surveyed in the above-mentioned studies felt that Polish suffering during WWII might not be sufficiently acknowledged if Jewish suffering were highlighted (Sinnreich 2008). Symptoms of rivalry in suffering, otherwise known as “competitive victimhood,” reflect the fear that the in-group’s suffering might not have been recognized enough and might be diminished in the future, leading to an over-emphasis of their own victimization. The denial of the fact that only Jews and some Roma were condemned to death on the basis of their identities may be related to this tendency.

EaH can be very problematic in Poland as it has been found to increase antisemitism through “Holocaust fatigue” or through anxiety rooted in repressed inter-generational guilt. Indeed, secondary antisemitism has been making a reappearance following the amendment of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) Law on January 26, 2018, intended to “defend the good name of Poland” (Babińska et al. 2018). The term “Polish concentration camps” was cited as a motive for the infamous anti-defamation law (the Article 55a amendment to the IPN Law), which criminalized the attribution of “Nazi crimes to the Polish Nation or to the Polish State.” Following international protests, the new law was amended, and the threat of imprisonment removed but alleged “defamation of the Polish nation” via claims of complicity with Nazi Germany remains subject to civil suits and financial penalties.

Despite governmental policies, Milerski’s (2010) study of teachers found that most (68%) believe that the full range of ethnic Poles’ behaviours towards Jews, including rescuing them and acting violently towards them, should be included in the curriculum. However, 33% of respondents did not even consider the possibility that ethnic Poles were involved in any form of hostility towards Jews, leading Milerski to conclude that “[...] integrating the Holocaust into the collective memory of Polish society constitutes a fundamental problem” (2010, 6).

Polish psychologists Witkowska, Stefaniak and Bilewicz found in a series of studies found that when confronted with unwanted facts about their nation’s history, students responded in self-defence, leading to a decrease in their willingness to admit that Jews were the largest group of victims and to an increase in their assertions that Poles constituted the largest group. Moreover, rivalry of victim narratives was correlated with antisemitic attitudes. One of the more concerning findings by this group of researchers was that EaH in Poland today actually increases students’ distortions of history. The study found that the impact of education on attitudes includes the overestimation of Polish help to Jews during WWII and an increased resistance of the students towards Jews. This matches earlier findings that a positive impact of EaH on attitudes did not depend on the amount of teaching, but on the engagement of highly trained educators who taught creatively about the Holocaust (Ambrosewicz-Jacobs 2020).

The Holocaust is presented in educational materials of many countries as a reference-point for understanding the mechanisms of human rights abuses, mass violence and genocide. This approach

was not found, however, in two randomized, national surveys of youth and educators in Poland, nor was the commonly held perception of EaH as a moral duty (Kaiser 2014). Finally, the relation between societal diversity and knowledge or awareness of the Holocaust, a link found in studies conducted in the UK and Sweden, has not been investigated as of yet, in Poland.

3.2.2. EaH in Hungary⁸

A historical overview of EaH in Hungary and its status today

EaH has a relatively new status in the Hungarian curriculum (Jancsák et al. 2018). During Communist rule in Hungary, the Holocaust was not discussed separately but only taught as part of the anti-fascist discourse. After the regime change in 1989, a new Holocaust memory emerged and EaH became more developed, at a significant delay compared to Western Europe (Kovács 2016b).

Gradually, two changes began to occur: First, a tendency towards centralization, with the curriculum becoming more governmentally controlled (Benzinger 2017); and second, a move towards an identity and discourse of victimhood (Pető 2016). For example, the revisionist “process of re-canonization of literature” (Pető 2016, 14) was the result of the growing presence of a local form of remembrance (or non-remembrance) that minimizes the responsibility of the nation and emphasizes victimhood (Kovács 2016a).

In 2020, organizational changes to the school system further and significantly increased central control on school staff and principals (Bálint et al. 2020, 17). These changes included a new core curriculum that allotted minimal space to critical thinking and democratic values.⁹ Instead, it aimed at building a strong, ethnic-based, exclusive Hungarian national identity. For example, the goal of civic education for high school students is now described as “[strengthening] local patriotism and the national identity, [learning] the role, tasks and possible ways of national defence” (Government Regulation 2012). This new curriculum was also heavily criticized for changes that are directly connected to the Holocaust. The most concerning of these were in the Literature and History curricula. Writers who were sympathizers or members of the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party or even convicted war criminals, were included in the Literature curriculum (Félix 2021) while in the History curriculum, the country was portrayed as the innocent victim of historical circumstances (Bálint et al. 2020).

However, revisionist tendencies are not the only characteristic of EaH in Hungary today. Remembrance techniques exist alongside a “global form of remembrance,” which the government adopted. This

8 This section is written by Anikó Félix.

9 As of 2022, demonstrations have been taking place in Hungary against the difficult working conditions, heavy workload, centralized education system, and low teacher salaries. After the government banned the strikes in February 2022, protesters began calling for civil disobedience and some teachers were consequently fired. As a result, country-wide demonstrations erupted. The largest protest against the government took place in Budapest in October 2022 and was attended by tens of thousands of protesters. See: Horváth Kávai Andrea, “[Protesters demand reinstatement of fired teachers in Budapest](#)”, telex Website, October 3, 2022.

global remembrance manifests in the encouragement of educational activities, in a compulsory Holocaust Memorial Day in schools (Vida 2016, 50) and in governmental support of some extra-curricular initiatives such as teacher training at Yad Vashem.

Today, EaH takes place mainly within History classes according to the National Core Curriculum in Hungary. It is taught once in 8th grade and once in high school (in the 4th or 6th year of the six-year secondary school). EaH often takes place in Literature classes too (Forrás-Bíró 2016a, 92–93) and in Civics, Ethics and Religion classes (ODIHR 2015). There are also some universities in Hungary where EaH is part of the curriculum (IHRA n.d.).

Studies on EaH in Hungary and their findings

Only a handful of studies have been published about EaH in Hungary and those published were for the most part initiated by the Zachor Foundation. This foundation is one of the most important NGOs in this field in Hungary and among others is supported by the current government, while remaining strongly connected to the international EaH arena. The archive of the Shoah Foundation used by the Zachor Foundation for educational purposes contains approximately 53,000 interviews with Holocaust survivors, witnesses and rescuers (Mezei 2020, 36) and its studies tend to highlight the use of these testimonies as a key educational method. If other techniques are used by educators teaching about the Holocaust, they remain unexamined. In a study comparing textbook-driven lessons and lessons using video testimonies, video testimonies were found to make the lessons more interesting than text-based lessons and to increase expressions of empathy or the personal point of view among students (Mezei 2020, 47), although these differences became insignificant when democratic values and other factors were accounted for in the study's statistical model.

A regional comparison of secondary school textbooks in five Central-Eastern European countries (Jancsák et al. 2018), found that EaH is primarily located in classes on WWII, although personal narratives and original sources of information are embedded into the curriculum too. The researchers argued that in Hungary, educators teach the Holocaust in relatively more historical detail and with more emphasis on a moral-ethical perspective than in other Central-Eastern European countries, but that “the overregulation, the packed curriculum and as a consequence, the lack of time, prevent them from spending enough time and use appropriate techniques” (ibid., 136).

To date, the only study exploring the broader picture of EaH in Hungary is a large-scale 2016 study conducted by the Zachor Foundation (Forrás-Bíró 2016b). Thousands of educational directors, teachers and students were surveyed, and some 100 teachers were interviewed. According to this study, the exact way in which EaH is implemented in a school depends on the school leadership and level of support but it is also influenced by the type of school, age of students, the content taught and the teachers themselves (Forrás-Bíró 2016a, 89).

The study found that 67% of teachers believe that their school supports EaH, while others experience unsupportive or even hostile environments that prevent positive long-term results of their efforts (ibid., 103, 106, 134). The study also found that “teachers are hesitant about how to approach the topic” although willing to change (Vida 2016, 49) and that educators tend to conflate EaH with

teaching about the history of the Jewish population (Forrás-Biró 2016, 139). In 2017, an interview-based study confirmed that teachers are insecure about EaH and feel that their knowledge is incomplete (Jancsák et al. 2018, 137).

The Zachor Foundation's study found that teachers consider EaH to contribute to educational goals such as fostering debate culture and critical thinking (Forrás-Biró 2016, 139). 39% of them said that they watch documentary movies with the students, while 28 % use feature films for the same purpose. 22% take students to museums, 19% visit commemoration places and 10% invite experts to the class for EaH (Forrás-Biró 2016, 122).

Holocaust Memorial Day in schools is an especially important date regarding EaH (Jancsák et al. 2018, 126). According to the Zachor Foundation study, the compulsory Memorial Day has helped teachers focus on the topic of the Holocaust (Forrás-Biró 2016, 86). However, teachers hold different opinions about this: Some view memorial-day as a good opportunity to teach the topic while others oppose linking EaH to one compulsory date (ibid., 111-113). A wide range of school activities take place on this day, with some schools holding a school-wide commemoration ceremony and others focusing on class-based projects, trips to the Holocaust Memorial Centre and so forth (ibid., 116).

Challenges and concerns around EaH in Hungary

Several concerns about the educational messages offered to students via the framework of EaH emerge from previous scholarship, as well as various challenges.

A general problem in the Hungarian education system is the large quantity of content included in the core curriculum and the expectation of a high level of lexical knowledge (Civil Közoktatási Platform 2020). This makes it difficult to delve deep into specific topics, a challenge especially evident in the field of EaH, where the dominance of curriculum demands diminish the schools' and teachers' freedom in teaching about the Holocaust.

Another problem is that of uneven teaching resources. Socio-spatial inequalities in the education system, which are continually reproduced (Velkey 2019), inevitably impact the implementation of EaH in different regions or even within a single region. Attempting to overcome the huge regional differences harkens back to the individual capacity of the teachers. Even if they independently try to find and provide extra-curricular materials to the students, such materials are less accessible in a small village than in a large town. Differences in available resources further increase the gaps between regions.

A third challenge relates to EaH teacher training. The problem lies not in a lack of proper training options but rather in the fact that the institutionalization of Holocaust memory and education is incomplete (Kovács 2016b, 45). For those who have information and access to teacher training, there are plenty of options, including in-person training and numerous handbooks available from Yad Vashem, the Zachor Foundation and many other international organizations (Kovács 2016b, Vida 2016, 53). However, although one-third of teachers require EaH teacher training, as of 2016, only 9% have participated in such programmes (Forrás-Biró 2016, 108).

In sum, EaH in Hungary is a developing field, with teacher training programmes, textbooks and curricula updated periodically, a nationally enforced Memorial Day and large-scale studies reviewing all activity. However, its compulsory nature masks various challenges, and in fact plays a role in propagating them. As might be expected in a centralized and nationalist system, EaH is structured to reflect the government's policy, which is of a dual nature. It encompasses both participation in a cosmopolitan Holocaust memory and the minimization of Hungary's role in it.

3.2.3. EaH in Germany¹⁰

In Germany, EaH takes place within various institutions and practices, with a primary role allotted to the educational system, a crucial site for the inter-generational transfer of knowledge about the Holocaust. In a 2015 study, 63% of the student respondents listed their school as their main source of knowledge on this topic (Bilewicz et al. 2017). Beyond transferring knowledge, the educational system also functions as a key agent of socialization, through which young members of society adapt to the collective narrative and their national cultural identity that is deeply intertwined with the era of National Socialism. Not surprisingly, EaH in Germany is charged with strong and sometimes conflicting expectations (Sandkühler 2012).

We first offer a brief historical overview of the development of EaH in Germany after 1945, then outline two cultural trends that shape the contours of EaH today, before continuing to specify key institutional conditions under which EaH now operates.¹¹

Historical Overview: A timeline of ambivalence alongside *commitment* to EaH

Ever since the defeat of Germany in 1945, the period of National Socialism was seen as an event that called for a dedicated and comprehensive educational response (Meseth & Proske 2010, Ehmann & Rathenow 2000). In the immediate aftermath of WWII, the Allies encouraged a profound "re-education" of the German people, with culture, media and the educational system considered the pillars of a democratic culture. Consequently, they pushed for a reform of the German school system, which would lay the ground for an ideological reorientation of the youth that had grown up under Nazism, as well as for subsequent generations. The Allied efforts to re-establish the moral foundations of a democratic polity did not only tackle the ideological content taught in German schools, but also the institutional make-up of the school system. This led to a profound decentralization, meaning that each of the 16 German federal states became responsible for their own curricula. However, the federal states agreed on a common national framework in a coordinated effort by their Ministries of Education (Ehmann & Rathenow 2000, 29).

¹⁰ This section is written by Maximilian Hauer.

¹¹ The focus of this review is on EaH in state schools. We briefly touch upon informal education activities at memorial sites and museums, as well as extra-curricular workshops held by NGOs and other learning providers, but the educational impact of such platforms should not be underestimated. For an overview of these, see Boschki et al. 2010 and Ehman and Rathenow 2000.

In the years following WWII, the crimes of National Socialism were marginalized in the German school system. It was only in the 1960s that the recent German past became a mandatory school subject (Boschki et al. 2010, 135). It was in this same decade of cultural renewal that prominent intellectual Theodor Adorno published his essay on *Education after Auschwitz* (2003/1965), arguing for a new understanding of pedagogy in the face of the genocide. According to Adorno, “The premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again [...] the single genuine power standing against the principle of Auschwitz is autonomy.” (Adorno 2003/1965, 19, 23). This idea harboured a pedagogical paradigm shift: Students should no longer passively memorize facts about the past but be guided to develop historical consciousness and moral sensitivity (Boschki 2010, 145; Meseth & Proske 2010, 204, 206).

During the 1960s and 1970s, the quality of teaching improved but focus on the detailed facts and figures of Nazi history remained, while deeper discussions about the roots and conditions of antisemitism and German culpability were avoided. Rather, the concepts of extreme racism and mass murder were linked directly to Hitler’s persona (Boschki 2010, 135).

In the 1980s, catalysed by the television series *Holocaust* in 1979, the culture of memory became personalized, victim-oriented and empathetic. The encounter with survivors became a common educational practice (Brüning 2018), as did visits to memorial sites and an emphasis on the tangible, local dimension of history. This matched the lively grassroots New Historiography movement’s attempt to write local “history from below.” This movement made the traces of the past visible in the landscapes of everyday life, thereby enabling a more concrete understanding of the history of National Socialism (Siebeck 2019). Such educational practices, reflecting a new paradigm of student-centred learning, rose against a backdrop of broader developments in German civil society in that period (Ehman & Rathenow, 41).

EaH and cultural dynamics within German society

Since the turn of the millennium, two main social trends have become of particular importance for EaH. First, the generational shift: According to cultural scholars Jan and Aleida Assmann, memories are shared orally within three interacting generations as “communicative memory,” before they become a part of the more technically mediated “cultural memory.” With the waning of direct witnesses and most students of today belonging to the fourth generation since the war, the “communicative memory” sphere is coming to an end. It seems that teachers are uncomfortable with this process, and the powerful impetus to remain in dialogue with survivors can explain the trend of working with videos of eyewitnesses and other digital reproductions (Brüning 2018, 25).

The second social trend is migration and the diversification of German society. Since the 1950s, Germany has attracted large contingents of migrants from various regions. At first, they were considered “guest workers” or “foreigners” but in the last two decades a self-perception as a “migration society” or a “diverse society” has emerged. These developments have affected ongoing debates about the cultural implications of remembrance and EaH. Georgi (2003) has suggested four types of attitudes held by young migrants towards the history of the Holocaust: Identification with the victims; adoption of the negative heritage of bystander and perpetrator traditions in order

to fully belong to German mainstream society; exclusive participation in the collective memory of one's own ethnic group, and a universalist perspective oriented towards individual human rights. Today, educators are looking for ways to present the Holocaust to classes in which only a minority of the students have a genealogical connection to the topic. This challenge has sparked controversy. For example, Kößler and Schmidt (2020) warn against the dangers of *othering* and stigmatizing migrants in EaH. They find that some teachers construct a rigid distinction between the morally superior Germans, who have drawn lessons from the Holocaust, and the passive others, who must be instructed. They recommend that teachers search for ways to engage with this history beyond a tight national framework and suggest connecting EaH to colonialism and its aftermath, migration, forced labour and police violence (ibid., 217, 222). This approach was critiqued for exploiting the Holocaust, erasing its historical specifics and missing the contemporary phenomena it tries to grasp (Hartmann 2010).

Institutional structures, guidelines and their discontents

EaH in Germany is subject to various institutional conditions and guidelines, which strongly affect the quality and orientation of teaching. These include teacher training, educational programmes, curriculum, memorial sites and textbooks, which we will briefly survey in order.

The first factor is *teacher training*, which is often deemed insufficient given the high expectations of EaH on the part of students, teachers and society (Sigel 2012). When teaching the Holocaust, teachers are tasked with achieving cognitive, affective and political goals (prevention of neo-Nazism, human rights education etc). However, not all have had the opportunity to attend seminars or lectures on this topic during their training at university. Only a minority of teachers are capable of navigating the vast learning materials on the market. Doubting the quality of their own teaching, teachers tend to delegate the responsibility for EaH to specialized experts of memorial sites and NGOs (Sigel 2012; Baader & Freytag 2015).

Since 2000, the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education (ITF), renamed in 2013 International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance or IHRA, has increased its influence on the memory culture of its member states, including Germany. This institutional leverage entails the dominance of a certain *educational programme*, known as "Holocaust Education" (Sandkühler 2012; Sigel 2012). Some of its key features are the integration of historiography, ethics and social psychology; an emphasis on the perspectives of victims, helpers and resisters and the goal of fostering identification with them; the impetus to touch learners emotionally and to educate them morally and the drawing of connections from the atrocities of the past to the challenges of the present and future. This programme is not free of scholarly criticism. Sandkühler argues that it tends to neglect the specific historical context of National Socialism and WWII, resulting in decontextualization, while at the same time overburdening history lessons with exigencies of civic education. Plessow (2012) additionally problematizes a strong reliance on survivors' testimonies as the primary source of historical knowledge. Furthermore, he criticizes "the linking of an individualization of the view of the past with a future-oriented expectation of the salvation of society. Here, the Holocaust serves as a worst-case scenario of disregard for human rights, as the apex of the universalized 'pyramid of

hatred,' which extends from the basic formation of prejudice [...]. The royal road to solving social challenges is to work on one's own self" (ibid., 22).

The *curriculum* is the programme's binding framework and History is its central subject. In most federal states the Holocaust is commonly dealt with at length in the ninth or tenth grade; a few others schedule it for the eighth grade. The topic is then picked up again at the upper secondary level (eleventh to thirteenth grade). Earlier on, students are likely to come across the topic in other subjects, such as German classes and religious or ethics education. For example, the *Diary of Anne Frank* is often discussed in the seventh or eighth grade in Literature courses. Overall, the time devoted to teaching about National Socialism and the Holocaust exceeds, and in some states even doubles, that devoted to other historical topics (Bilewicz et al. 2017, 172).

In terms of content in today's History curriculum, several main themes emerge (Geike 2015). First, in line with overall didactic trends, the Holocaust is integrated into thematic longitudinal views, for example on the history of human rights since the eighteenth century. Next, general academic competencies are emphasized, instead of detailed knowledge-acquisition. Third, various governments want their students to connect the Holocaust to present political challenges, although the extent to which this is achieved is inconsistent. Some states introduce a comparative perspective to EaH, exploring other dictatorships as well. In comparison to the curricula of 2006, Geike notes a decline in historical specificity: Central sites and phases of the Holocaust are not mentioned, and the context of WWII is becoming less important. Regarding the victim groups of National Socialism, Jewish victims are highlighted more than they were before. Regarding the German population, problematizing the bystander is prevalent, while relatively little is taught today about perpetrators and their organizations. Only half of the curricula reviewed by Geike mention antisemitism in the context of National Socialism. In December 2016 the Conference of Education Ministers and the Central Council of Jews in Germany agreed on a landmark joint declaration in order to combat antisemitism. They declared that schools should make Jewish culture, religion and history visible within their diversity, foster personal encounters, visit learning sites and establish ongoing education programmes on the subject. However, three years later, Salzborn and Kurth (2020, 40-49) note considerable delays to implementation. Jewish life in pre-WWII Europe is still eclipsed by the subject of persecution under National Socialism, and discussions of antisemitism are limited to a single type: racist National-Socialist antisemitism. Finally, while contemporary antisemitism often targets Israel, this topic is minimally discussed in schools. Gläser et al. (2021) argue that a critique of antisemitism should be implemented in the curriculum, in a way that decouples the political and sociological analysis of contemporary antisemitism from a merely historical reappraisal of the Holocaust, as is common today. It is possible that the attack on the Synagogue in Halle in 2019 brought about a paradigm shift in this regard (ibid.).

In addition to the classroom curriculum, many students visit memorial sites to commemorate and learn about the Holocaust. Memorial sites have been playing an increasingly important role since 1998, when Germany first affirmed their crucial role in a democratic culture of commemoration, leading to an overarching framework for memorial sites of national significance (Deutscher Bundestag 2018). In some states, such as Bavaria, educational trips are mandatory, and the question

of whether such visits should become mandatory for all German students is one of public debate (Voss & Hillenbrand 2018).

Textbooks continue to be the most important medium used to translate the goals set by the curriculum into classroom teaching. Recent research (Mittnik 2017) on the development of German history textbooks from the 1980s to the present, finds that the prominence of the Holocaust within the overall presentation of National Socialism has increased dramatically throughout this period. The number of pages devoted to the persecution and murder of European Jews more than doubled, while the space devoted to the political and the military history of this era diminished. The focus is clearly on Holocaust victims rather than on perpetrators, yet discussion of perpetrators is gradually increasing. Economy, culture and everyday life under National Socialism hardly play a role. There is a strong tendency towards visualization in these textbooks, at the expense of the total amount of text. An emphasis on general competences, rather than specific knowledge, leads to a further decline in the space allotted to content.

Since the earliest days of EaH in Germany, the public educational system has been more than willing to face the German people's role as perpetrators. This contrasts with tendencies evident in informal family narratives, which are apt to highlight German victimhood and hardships and often include exaggerated or made-up stories of help and resistance. The gap between private and public memory has been accompanied by widespread resentment against EaH in schools, which is portrayed as being continuously repeated – a portrayal researchers claim to be false (Salzborn & Kurth 2020, 28).

In sum, despite some shortcomings, EaH is well established in the German educational system, with students learning about the topic on various occasions and spaces. However, in the midst of crucial generational shifts and against the background of a diversifying society, the relationship between the learners and the topic are becoming less well-defined. The trend towards a relative devaluation of specific knowledge in favour of readily applicable ethical messages risks decontextualizing the Holocaust and emptying it of historical content. While the presence of the Holocaust within the German educational system is uncontested, today's pedagogical and demographic trends indicate that the process of its interpretation remains open.

3.2.4. EaH in England¹²

Problems of EaH diversity in England

Despite comprising a compulsory part of the English National Curriculum since 1991, scholars find that “reference to the Holocaust in the National Curriculum has been consistently shorn of specific advice, recommendations or even requirements” (Foster 2020, 369). This fact underpins many of the resulting problems that scholars have encountered in EaH in England and has been compounded by the large discrepancies across schools regarding access to and quality of Continued Professional Development (CPD) on the Holocaust. Although many schools still see it as a crucial part of the

¹² This section is written by Abby Zucker.

curriculum, there is increasing variation between schools, reinforced by a fundamental lack of clarity on the reasons for EaH in the English curriculum in the first place.¹³ This issue is reflected throughout the academic literature, where researchers trying to assess teacher training, teacher knowledge and student outcomes in the field are limited by the lack of consistency in the goals and format of EaH. The consensus among scholars is that this situation is problematic.

This is evident in the ways in which researchers in England explain the lack of unified EaH recommendations and requirements at the governmental level. Some have related this to a lack of clarity on the difference between “knowledge about” and “knowledge from,” which leads to teachers not knowing whether the aim should be historical knowledge or moral lessons (Chapman 2020). Others perceive it as a reflection of “cultural dynamics” within wider British society, which present the relationship between Britain and the Holocaust as more benign than it actually was, a narrative that is only beginning to be challenged in recent years (Pearce 2020b, 17). In the first major national study on the state of EaH carried out by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education in 2009, Pettigrew offered the following explanation: “No single tradition or set of influences contributed to the original curriculum, and as a consequence it has been very difficult to assert that there are a coherent set of aims and purposes for [EaH] in England on which all can agree.” (Pettigrew et al. 2009, 15). Still others have cited the more global contexts of this issue; EaH, they argue, has “an overlapping multipolar pattern which is partly global, partly regional and partly national” and which results in “education about Holocausts” (Pearce 2020b, 6).

Whatever the cause, scholars seem to agree that unclear messages on a governmental level have led to extremely varied offerings and results of EaH across the country. British teachers are the first line of people affected by this. The landmark UCL Centre for Holocaust Education study mentioned above found that 85% of the teachers surveyed agreed on the need to address the Holocaust in Key Stage 3 education,¹⁴ but there was significant variation among what they believed to be the purpose of this education: “many teachers found it difficult to articulate the distinct historical significance of the Holocaust” (Pettigrew et al. 2009, 8), instead framing their teaching in terms of “universal lessons” such as “tackling racism, or encouraging respect for diversity,” a finding that was represented across the different subject groups. The conclusion was that “the majority of teachers felt that the purpose of EaH is to develop an understanding of the roots and ramifications of prejudice, racism and stereotyping in any society” (ibid., 77). It is notable that antisemitism isn’t specifically mentioned, indicating that it does not always hold specific importance among the unclear aims and desired knowledge and moral lessons to be drawn from the Holocaust.

13 On the impact of KS3 reforms, see: N.A. 2021. [“Continuity and Change Research Study – First Data Release: The impact of pressures on the key stage 3 curriculum on teaching about the Holocaust.”](#) UCL Centre for Holocaust Education.

14 “Key Stage 3” is the term used in Britain for the three years of schooling in public schools in England and Wales, otherwise known as Years 7, 8 and 9, for students aged 11–14. In Northern Ireland, the term also refers to Years 9 and 10.

Another issue that teachers expressed concern about was “making the Holocaust relevant” in their 21st century classrooms, which might help explain differences across various parts of the country (ibid., 9). Using the data from the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education 2009 study, Foster has argued that among teachers there exists an “overriding tension” between those who “present the Holocaust as a historical phenomenon, and those who sought to draw broader universal lessons... tackling racism, challenging prejudice, respecting diversity, often divorced from any specific historical context” (Foster 2020, 370). This cleavage is also expressed in the debate over whether or not an inclusive definition of the Holocaust¹⁵ should be used in EaH. With no directions on this issue from a policy level, the UCL study found that 2 out of 3 teachers favoured the use of an inclusive definition, often in order to make the topic more relevant to students (Pettigrew et al. 2009, 65).¹⁶

One way of framing the state of EaH in England is that it lacks uniformity, especially over the question of “why” educate about the Holocaust? There is unanimous agreement over its importance, but the purpose of this education ranges so widely through the historical, personal, contemporary politics and active citizenship agendas, that the teachers’ knowledge and student outcomes are extremely varied. The question of rationale is both, as Foster et al. 2020, p.13 conclude, “liberating, in terms of the opportunities it opens up for Holocaust education to continually renew and develop, [but] it is equally experienced by many at the chalkface as confusing, overwhelming and debilitating.”

Gaps in student knowledge about the Holocaust

According to the various researchers cited above, a lack of clarity over EaH aims has a trickle-down impact upon student outcomes when it comes to teaching the Holocaust in England. The gaps in student knowledge were highlighted in a 2016 follow up study by UCL Centre for Holocaust Education, “What do students know and understand about the Holocaust?” (Foster 2016). The study drew attention to gaps in students’ knowledge. For example, 68% of students reportedly did not understand what antisemitism meant, and 1 in 3 students significantly underestimated the scale of the murder operation (ibid., 1).

These gaps in knowledge had led to the development of the “mythical Holocaust,” Foster argues, drawing on previous research to show that “it is not to claim that it did not exist, but rather to suggest that its representation is explicitly tied to narratives which evoke strong feelings and address contemporary values, often at the expense of historical accuracy” (Foster 2020, 382). In turn, antisemitism is misunderstood and side-lined in favour of vague messaging about “never again,” leaving students lacking historical knowledge and specificity. Also, as Pettigrew et al. found in the

15 According to the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education 2016 report, an exclusive definition of the Holocaust refers only to the targeting of European Jews. Inclusive definitions use the term to reference the experiences of other groups, such as the Roma and Sinti, disabled people and many others (Foster et al. 2016, 65).

16 It is expected that the 2019/20 UCL Centre for Holocaust Education findings on “Continuity and Change,” a nationwide follow up study to the 2009 one, will address these questions. See footnote 13 above for details. As of January 2023, the report has not yet become fully available. We used preliminary data from this report where available.

2009 study, “the majority of teachers felt that the purpose of EaH is to develop an understanding of the roots and ramifications of prejudice, racism and stereotyping in any society” (p.77).

The UCL Centre for Holocaust Education 2016 study also found that while 83% of students believed in the importance of studying the Holocaust and 81.3% found it interesting, the majority lacked core knowledge and understanding of features of the history, particularly antisemitism (Foster 2016, 1).

One potential outcome that was actually *not* found, despite possible expectations to the contrary, was among the population of Muslim students. Previously, there were hints that Muslim students’ attitudes differed to their contemporaries when learning about the Holocaust (e.g., the 2009 Historical Association TEACH report), but a recent study debunks this (Pettigrew 2020), finding that Muslim students are as engaged and committed to the lessons of the Holocaust as others. The wider question of how the cultural and ethnic diversity of the student body might affect teaching of the Holocaust was also raised in the 2009 survey. Of the teachers who responded to the survey, 23.3% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I find that having students from diverse cultural backgrounds influences the way that I teach about the Holocaust.” Others responded strongly with the reverse, “that the ethnic mix of a class should have absolutely no bearing on how the Holocaust is taught and nor does it affect my teaching in any way.” (Pettigrew et al. 2009, 92). As this report concludes, “A small number of teachers in both the survey and interview suggested that they thought antisemitism and/or Holocaust denial “might be a potential issue among certain groups of students, but very few reported having any direct experience of this” (ibid., 93).

Addressing challenges in EaH in England

As Foster concludes in his 2020 study, “The coexistence of, on the one hand, consensus around addressing the Holocaust and, on the other, inability to determine what this looks like pedagogically, is both a product and cause of reductive understandings of memory, knowledge and education.”¹⁷ This is in part due to the blurred lines between public discourse and collective memory events and educational motivations, given that the educational agenda is set by the state. Foster et al. suggest there are four key contemporary contexts to consider when examining the current state of EaH: The post-survivor era; the rise of antisemitism in contemporary culture and politics; the new “war on truth” or “post-truth” era allowing for the resurgence of Holocaust denial; and the rise of right-wing movements (Foster et al. 2020, 11).

One area of research that has shown significant improvements over the last ten years concerns the knowledge base of teachers. The variation in teachers’ knowledge about the Holocaust was the focus of much of the UCL 2009 study and its 2020 follow up study. One of the concerning findings of 2009 was that over 83% of the teachers surveyed were self-taught (Pettigrew et al. 2009, 9). Between 2009 and 2020 this significantly improved, thanks to an increase in Holocaust-specific

17 Foster et al., 2020, p. 7.

CPD provision.¹⁸ The 2020 study found that “in 2009, 27.4% of respondents had taken part in some form of training in EaH provided by organizations outside of their school since becoming a teacher, 5.7% received formal training in teaching about the Holocaust in their NQT/first year and 22.7% had specific focus on teaching about the Holocaust in their ITT course. By 2020, these figures had grown to 62.9%, 20.8% and 48.3% respectively” (ibid.). The 2020 follow up study found this development to have a directly positive impact upon teachers’ knowledge about the Holocaust.

The findings also showed that high engagement CPD programmes that provide intensive training have contributed to improvements in teacher’s knowledge and consequently their ability to effectively teach students about the events of the Holocaust.

3.2.5. EaH in Spain¹⁹

In 1998, philosopher Reyes Mate wrote: “There are no traces here of what we could call a culture of the Holocaust. Spain has lived with its back turned to this singular event, the most significant of the twentieth century.”²⁰ Along the same lines, Menny (2014) suggests that the official memory of the Holocaust is an appropriation of forms of European commemoration more than a unique national memory. As such, she considers the collective memory of the Holocaust in Spain to be a foreign concept, a sort of delayed memory.

Spain’s incorporation into the transnational framework of a globalized and collective memory of the Holocaust began in the early 2000s (Baer 2011): In December of 2004, the Spanish government declared January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day. In 2006, the Centro Sefarad-Israel was founded in Madrid. In 2008, this centre would represent Spain as a member of the IHRA. From that point on, and for the first time, EaH with an interdisciplinary approach would be included in Spain’s educational curriculum. During the 2008–9 school year, the government declared the Holocaust an obligatory topic in the social science curriculum. In December of 2013, with the “Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality,” the parliament established that the study of the Jewish Holocaust would be included at different stages in the primary and secondary school curricula.

Two questions have troubled Spain’s educational system since EaH became mandatory: First, should the Holocaust be understood as the genocide of European Jews or as the Nazi crimes committed between 1933 and 1945 in broader terms? Second, was the Holocaust unique or was it comparable to other atrocities in the past and present? These two questions have specific implications in the Spanish context: To consider deported Spanish Republicans as victims of the Holocaust might

18 This data is taken from the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education’s Continuity and Change Research Study – Second Data Release (September 13, 2021): [“Improving teachers’ subject knowledge of the Holocaust.”](#) As of January 2023, the full report has not yet become fully available.

19 This section is written by Marta Simó, based on her chapter in the book, Sara J. Brenneis and Gina Hermann (eds.), *Spain, the Second World War, and the Holocaust. History and Representation* (2020). University of Toronto Press.

20 Mate’s original quote in Spanish is here translated to English by Simó.

amount to equating Nazism with Francoism;²¹ to include *all* victims of Nazism under the rubric “Holocaust” would be to ignore the extermination of Europe’s Jews as the central and driving force to that project (ibid., 511–13).

Due to the decades during which Spanish Republican prisoners never had the chance to complete their grieving process, Spain also suffers from what Hartman (2002) calls “memory envy.” In some discourses surrounding Republican memory, this sense of envy has sometimes elicited the notion that the Jewish genocide has been given too much prominence (ibid.). All of these issues are today reflected in the state of EaH in Spain, as we shall explore.

The current state of EaH in Spain

To understand EaH in Spain, it is important to know that as a result of the adoption of the 1978 Spanish Constitution, the Spanish education system became decentralized, resulting in 50–60% of educational decisions being shared by the Ministry of Education and Vocational training (MEVT) and the Departments of Education (DE) of the autonomous communities (Lomle, 2020; Rubio, 2015). MEVT establishes the basic aspects of the curriculum as regards objectives, competences, and assessment criteria while the DEs determine the contents of subjects and fields and periodically review the curricula. Finally, educational institutions also have responsibility for developing curricula, which are then approved by the teaching staff (Eurydice, 2022). As a result, the education system is not homogenous across the country. This means that the approach to EaH may vary substantially from one Autonomous Region to another, especially among the Historically Autonomous Regions (Catalonia, Basque Country and Galicia), but this also allows communities and teachers a high level of educational autonomy and choice.

An important homogenizing agent is Centro Sefarad-Israel, based in Madrid, which is the official state organ that organizes seminars, conferences, workshops, exhibits, trips, and training for teachers both in Spain and abroad. It works with organizations such as Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the Wannsee Conference House in Berlin, the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, and the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum in Poland.

Spain has no specific university department or academic organization for Holocaust Studies,²² resulting in a dearth of empirical studies about EaH in the country. The little research conducted focuses on textbooks and students, with less data collected from the teachers themselves. In a study on Spanish students’ understanding of the Holocaust (Simó 2017; Simó et al. 2017), researchers found that students had minimal knowledge of the historical events related to the Holocaust and that films and literature were their principal sources of knowledge. Open as well as hidden antisemitic tendencies were encountered in some student responses, including a case of Holocaust denial and familiar negative stereotypes about Jews. That said, most students demonstrated their opposition to National Socialism. Some considered themselves to be defenders of equality, arguing

21 See the concepts of literal memory and exemplary memory in Todorov 2000. 38–41.

22 Such an initiative is now being considered by the Catholic University of Valencia in partnership with scholars from the University of Valencia and the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

that differences between human beings do not exist. In explaining how the Holocaust could have happened, some contended that Nazism had been a mental illness and classified the Nazis as insane, savage, and illiterate.

In a comparative study conducted by Jedwab (2015), respondents from various countries were asked to evaluate their knowledge of the Holocaust. Spain had the lowest rate of knowledge about the Holocaust among participating nationalities (57.4%). Perhaps more educationally indicative, a large age-gap was found among respondents: 47.8% of 16–24-year-olds demonstrated knowledge of the Holocaust, compared to 72.9% of 45–54-year-olds, a figure that approaches those of North America. Those with a strong knowledge of the Holocaust were more likely to agree that antisemitism was a problem in society. The study also revealed a relationship between knowledge about the Holocaust and acceptance of diversity: respondents with a higher level of knowledge about the Holocaust believed that ethnic minorities make an important contribution to the national culture.

Two studies on Spanish EaH curricula and textbooks (Carrier 2015; Richou & Simó, in press) found Spanish textbooks to be sorely lacking on many counts. A simplistic didactic approach to issues surrounding the Republican exile and deportation was contrasted to a more nuanced approach to the Holocaust as a consequence of WWII. Among other lacunae, these textbooks did not date the Holocaust uniformly, tended to locate the Holocaust mainly in Germany and Western Europe but not in the East, did not connect Nazi ideology to traditional antisemitism, ignored pre-war Jewish communities in Europe and did not discuss the varied Nazi policies towards different groups they targeted. The textbooks did not refer to the Righteous Among the Nations and omitted the role that countries other than Germany played in the Holocaust. Pedagogically, the textbooks included source analysis, critical reflection, and reflections on links between the Holocaust and present-day ethnic cleansing. They explicitly encouraged reflection on the Holocaust's links to mass violence and genocide, without explaining those links in depth.

Little empirical research has been conducted about Spanish Holocaust educators. From the author's experience with teacher training programmes in Spain, it would seem that after more than fifteen years of experience with EaH in Spain, teachers still exhibit a notable discomfort and fatigue when approaching the topic. There are very high social expectations attached to Holocaust instruction: it is commonly proposed as a useful tool to approach the current debates on Holocaust denial and the extreme right. It is also considered useful as a tool for preventing stereotypes, prejudices, and racism. While there is no doubt about its function, EaH does not always have the desired effect, and this generates further reticence on the part of teachers to teach it and of students to learn about it. Some changes are taking place educationally to counter this situation, as will be described in the next section.

New pedagogical initiatives and materials

In recent years, several new EaH initiatives have taken place in Spain:

Teacher training programmes. The Centro Sefarad-Israel has enabled more than five hundred teachers throughout Spain to receive training at Yad Vashem and also organized courses about the Holocaust for over 200 teachers, educators, and administrative personnel in Barcelona between

2013 and 2019. Distance-learning courses have been taking place at the UNED Foundation, training over ninety additional educators. Additionally, a significant number of working groups of EaH educators exist, although they are not always active.²³ For example, the DEMD (Exile, Deportation, and the Holocaust) working group in Barcelona was launched in 2010 by a group of secondary school teachers, scholars and researchers under the umbrella of the Department of Education of the Generalitat of Catalonia and the Memorial Democràtic. This group organizes the International Holocaust Remembrance Day together with the Parliament of Catalonia and has a programme of talks by descendants at Schools. The group compiles materials for teachers and students and collaborates with the central EaH venues in Europe.

Higher education and EaH. There has only been one elective course on the Holocaust offered at university level since 2012 (at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid). However, several non-governmental organizations have been providing training for students, first among them the Amical de Mauthausen, which organizes activities through Mai Més (Never Again), a network dedicated to the preservation of memory and the prevention of fascism. In recent years new non-governmental organizations, such as EUROM (European Observatory on Memories) have organized specific educational activities in EaH.

Knowledge-building projects. Other projects, while not conducted in the context of formal education, have nevertheless contributed to knowledge about the Holocaust in Spain. One example, a project titled “Persecuted and Saved,” has aimed at recovering the memories of 120,000 people who crossed the Pyrenees to escape the Nazi terror. Many were Jews, but there were also Allied soldiers, pilots, and resistance fighters from various European countries. Another example, driven by civil society and local activism, is the Stolpersteine (stumbling-stones) project, commemorating homes of deported victims of the Nazis – mainly Spanish political prisoners – in cooperation with secondary schools. The most recent project is *Storiesthatmove*, led by the Anne Frank House, which in 2021 has been expanding and translating into Spanish and Catalan the on-line tool against discrimination, which focuses on the Holocaust.

In sum, in recent years progress has been made in the number of groups – personal and collective initiatives – that support more robust knowledge about the Holocaust. Nevertheless, political engagement is somewhat ambiguous and intermittent. This is apparent in the fact that a university-level department of Holocaust Studies in Spain still does not exist, and that the impact of actions to reclaim the historical memory of the Holocaust and the Republican deportation in Spain has not been studied.

Spain’s role in WWII continues to generate controversy. The historical memory of these events has become entangled with political identities and their respective narratives. The Franco regime has yet to be publicly condemned for its responsibility for the deportation of some ten thousand Republicans to Nazi concentration camps and this controversial topic has important implications for EaH. The same

23 There are organized working group networks in Barcelona, Girona, Gijón, Madrid, Oviedo, Trujillo, Sevilla, Santiago de Compostela, and Valencia, among others.

is true for the role that representatives of the regime played in offering only limited aid to groups of Jewish refugees and Sephardic Jews in occupied Europe, the role of the Spanish diplomats as Righteous among the Nations, and the Franco government's direct collaboration with Nazi Germany during the war. Although in recent years these details have been uncovered, their translation to the educational sphere lags behind. Some members of the general public, as well as some teachers, still consider EaH to be less relevant in countries that were not occupied by the Germans and that did not take an active part in WWII. Furthermore, the existence of diverse memories, sometimes causing "memory envy" or "divided memories," represents a challenge for EaH as well. Another problem not unique to Spain but relevant to all countries that were considered neutral is the lack of significant places of memory. In Spain, there has been a recent effort to memorialize the border crossings and the Amical de Mauthausen has played an important role in developing these types of memory spaces, with their memorial journeys to Mauthausen and Buchenwald.

Finally, political and public debates on anti-Zionism – habitually expressed by groups on the left that end up trivializing the Holocaust – also have a direct impact on EaH in Spain. The public domain features frequent comparisons of the Holocaust to the Israel-Palestine conflict, and new forms of neo-Nazism characterized not only by racism and xenophobia but also by banalization and Holocaust denial, can also be found in the Spanish political discourse today. These controversies and "memory envy" make EaH in Spain both critical and difficult at the same time. The *Educashoah* Conference in 2018, in which nearly 150 teachers from across Spain met to share their experiences of EaH, indicates that the Holocaust continues to be at the forefront of educators' minds. Perhaps this is because EaH allows, in addition to an examination of the past – still crucial in a nation such as Spain, which is marked by an absence of memory – an examination of the present and, above all, of the future.

3.2.6. A Comparative Integration of the Literature Review

While the five countries that we examine in this study differ in important ways from one another, the literature reviews presented above highlight some shared themes:

- 1 **Stories of educational changes and reforms.** All of the five countries have initiated and experienced major educational reforms since the end of WWII, the intensity of which seems to be proportionate to the force of their political upheavals. These educational reforms are also reflected in changes to EaH over time. For example, Poland and Hungary, albeit with some differences between them, reformed their educational systems after the end of their Communist regimes, first to reflect more liberalism and later, more nationalism. This resulted first in a shift from Holocaust disregard to engagement with the topic and later in a shift within EaH, to present the country as victimized and/or heroic, during WWII or in the present. Spain has gradually transitioned to a globalized Holocaust memory, while minimizing the importance of the Franco government's collaboration with Nazi Germany. Germany and England both had earlier transition points to mandatory EaH – Germany in the 1960's and England in 1991 – and overall have exhibited less change in the general direction of EaH, possibly reflecting their more stable governmental structures.

- 2 **Educational centralization or decentralization has a defining role in the character of EaH.** Some of the countries, namely Poland and Hungary, have highly centralized and controlled educational systems, while Spain, Germany and England have decentralized ones, shifting decision-making to their autonomies (Spain), federated states (Germany) or individual schools (England). Both forms – control and autonomy – have been criticised by scholars, for different reasons: Polish scholars tend to bemoan the lack of freedom available to Holocaust educators, while British researchers criticize their educational system for the lack of clear EaH policies and educational goals.
- 3 **An increase in EaH research in all five countries.** While Germany and England have been at the forefront of large-scale studies of EaH for several decades, Poland is plentiful in EaH research and Hungary and Spain now have several studies as well. A UNESCO-commissioned analysis of EaH textbooks (Carrier et al. 2015), which has been systematically conducted in all five countries, further informs the picture. Jointly, these studies seem to point to a lack of sufficient knowledge about the Holocaust among students, although the figures also show that EaH is consistently taking place in all five countries. The studies find that History classes are the primary context where EaH takes place, followed by Literature, and then Civics Education. The most common criticism expressed seems to be a lack of complexity and context in EaH. For example, several studies have found that EaH involves more finger-pointing at other countries than responsibility-taking (the notable exception to this being Germany), and others have shown how complex historical processes are being simplified and abridged, perhaps reflecting a lack of deeper knowledge on the part of some of the teachers. Several of the studies bemoan the loss of detail and contextualized information on the Holocaust, in exchange for a focus on visualization, competencies, and contemporary events. Of the five main elements of the educational arena – teachers, students, curricula, educational policies and informal education – one of the least explored seems to be the teachers (with the large UCL Centre for Holocaust Education studies on British teachers a notable exception). Of those who did focus on teachers, few explored their attitudes, experiences and educational narratives in depth; most assessed their level of knowledge and teaching technicalities (e.g., lessons per week) via surveys.
- 4 **Cooperation between major EaH NGOs creates a shared network and common educational language across countries.** Each of the five countries has at least one major professional organization dedicated to Holocaust memory and education. These institutions are the Auschwitz Birkenau memorial and museum in Poland, the Wannsee House in Berlin, the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education in London, and on a smaller scale, the Centro Sefarad-Israel in Madrid and the Zachor Foundation in Budapest. All of these organizations collaborate with each other and with several other major institutions, notably Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris and the Holocaust Museum in Washington. This powerful alliance that involves training teachers and developing innovative educational programmes, is an important force in contemporary EaH, not least because it is a relatively non-political and professional forum in the field.

3.3. Methodology

This study is intended to expound upon several issues raised in the literature review, bring it up to date with current data and address the lacuna in comparative studies on Holocaust educators.

3.3.1. Research questions

As noted in the introduction, this study has five goals, which can be briefly summarised as (1) Identifying the sources of teachers' Holocaust legacies; (2) Mapping EaH goals and practices across countries; (3) Assessing teachers' educational freedom in EaH; (4) Assessing the current state of EaH per country in terms of the challenges and changes it has sustained; (5) Exploring the relation of EaH to contemporary public-domain issues.

To operationalize these goals, we formulated ten sets of questions clustered around topics (listed in brackets are the corresponding goals):

- 1 **Personal narratives:** When considering individual teachers' narratives, can we identify patterns of interaction between the personal, professional and cultural-national memory strands? How are conflicting memory strands resolved in teachers' narratives? (Goal 1)
- 2 **EaH Goals:** What goals do teachers set for themselves in EaH? What messages do they wish to convey to their students and how do these differ across countries? (Goal 2)
- 3 **EaH Pedagogy:** How are various EaH pedagogical tools being implemented in practice and evaluated by teachers? What are their outcomes, according to the teachers? Are there systematic differences in the amount of pedagogical diversity in EaH between the five countries? (Goal 2)
- 4 **EaH Content:** What topics are discussed in EaH? How does content differ across countries? (Goal 2)
- 5 **Commonalities across countries:** In which educational contexts do teachers teach similarly about the Holocaust, despite different national histories, and what explains this similarity? (Goals 1+2)
- 6 **EaH Centralization:** To what extent does state control regarding EaH exist in different countries? How do teachers discuss their educational freedom and autonomy? (Goal 3)
- 7 **EaH Challenges:** What challenges do teachers report in EaH, and how do they differ across countries? Are any challenges related to the percent of students from marginalised groups in class? (Goal 4)
- 8 **Changes over time in EaH:** How do teachers perceive EaH changes over time in their country? (Goal 4)
- 9 **The public domain and EaH:** What sort of impact do public events have on EaH? What filters into the classroom and to what extent does the "outside world" indeed remain outside? In other words, how immutable or dynamic is EaH? (Goal 5)
- 10 **Sensitive issues:** To what extent do teachers engage with the difficult and sensitive issues of antisemitism, Islamophobia, the Israel-Palestine conflict, refugees and immigration when teaching about the Holocaust?

3.3.2. Design

We applied a common design across the five countries, but there were also specific considerations and adjustments for each country.

General (Common) design

This study included 98 in-depth interviews with Holocaust educators.²⁴ To select respondents, we set three participation criteria. We also applied a matrix of diversifying categories to ensure that we were reaching a maximal range of different educational voices.

Required criteria for every respondent:

- 1 Teaches 5th to 12th graders about the Holocaust.
- 2 Teaches more than two hours per year about the Holocaust.
- 3 Has at least 2 years of general teaching experience (for pilot phase: 5 years).

Diversifying (ratio) criteria:

- 1 **Engagement in EaH:** We defined two categories of teachers – typical and best-practice educators – and aimed to include a similar number of each type in our study.

Typical teachers were defined for this study as fulfilling the following criteria:

- Teaches in a typical, public or semi-private school.
- Did not receive public recognition, awards, or produce programmes in EaH.
- Has up to 3-4 years of experience and/or is officially untrained in EaH.
- Does not train other teachers in the field.

Best practice teachers were defined as fulfilling the following criteria:

- Teaches in any type of schools (including private, unique populations, elite).
- Has undergone official training in EaH.
- Has 5+ years of experience in EaH.
- Received recognition in the field: received award(s) and/or produced programmes and/or trained other teachers in EaH.

- 2 **Experience with immigrants and minorities:** We included teachers with high levels of diversity in their classrooms (immigrants, ethnic and racial minorities and low SES – socioeconomic status – populations) and teachers from more homogeneous educational settings, except in Poland and Hungary where immigrant and ethnic minority populations (although not the Roma population in Hungary) are small.
- 3 **Gender:** The sample was designed to include both genders, with a 70:30 ratio or closer between them in each country.
- 4 **Subjects:** We included teachers of at least two of the following disciplines per country: History, Literature, Social Sciences, Philosophy, Civics, Religious Studies, Art.

²⁴ Of these 98 completed interviews, 95 transcriptions were used in the analysis, as we explain in the “Respondent profiles” section.

- 5 **Religion:** In addition to teachers who defined themselves as Christian and as non-religious, we attempted to include 1-3 Jewish teachers per country in the sample.
- 6 **Political opinions:** Acknowledging that left-wing teachers are easier to recruit in EaH studies, we aimed to include at least 2 teachers per country who were centre-right or right-wing in their political tendencies.

Country-level (specific) design

When recruiting, we included **unique diversifying criteria** for each country that were deemed important by the researchers of that country, in order to reflect a range of educational narratives. The diversifying criteria are summed up in Table 1. For full details, see online Appendix 1: [Method details](#).

Table 1: Diversifying recruitment criteria by country

	First set of criteria	Second set of criteria	Third set of criteria
Poland	Size of localities: 1. Large cities 2. Towns 3. Smaller towns	Proximity to Holocaust landmarks & memory sites: 1. Adjacent 2. Distant	Diversity of Geo-graphical regions with their own geo-political climate (see Method details)
Germany	Size of localities: 1. Cities 2. Rural towns	School type: 1. <i>Hauptschule</i> (9 years), 2. <i>Realschule</i> (10 years), 3. <i>Gymnasium</i> (12–13 years-grammar school).	Geographical location: 1. East Germany 2. West Germany
Hungary	Size of localities: 1. Capital 2. Other large cities 3. Smaller towns	School type: 1. High school: 4–6 years 2. Vocational school: 4 years 3. Elementary school: 6–8 years	
England	Geographical location: 1. Capital 2. Other large cities 3. Small towns	School types: 1. Public 2. Private	
Spain	Teacher generation: 1. Transitional generation (into democracy) 2. Pre-transition generation 3. Post-transition generation	School types: 1. Catholic schools (semi-private) 2. Public schools 3. Rural Schools	Geographical location: Various autonomous republics and communities (see Method details)

3.3.3. Tools: Survey and interview

Prior to their interview, respondents completed an on-line survey on Qualtrics® in their chosen language and filled in an informed consent form. (See survey and informed consent in online Appendix 2: [Survey questions](#)). The ensuing interview was an open conversation based on a guided protocol, with standardized introductory and final questions. In it we asked about the respondent's

professional life-story, about their methods, experiences, attitudes and insights regarding EaH, about their own personal connections to the Holocaust and to WWII, and about several specific issues that they might have encountered, such as managing EaH during the Covid pandemic, experiences of antisemitism or lack thereof and other challenges they may have encountered. See the full interview protocol in online Appendix 3: [Interview protocol](#). Interviews lasted between 1–2.5 hours and most were conducted via video conferencing, some due to Covid limitations and others due to distance considerations. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed orthographically, using the Jefferson transcription notation[®]. We note some limitations in our methodology: While the sample size of +/- 20 interviews per country can be justified by its in-depth nature, and while attempts were made to diversify the sample as much as possible, these samples should not be considered representative of the population of educators who teach about the Holocaust. Rather, they represent a wide, although not comprehensive, set of narratives on the topic.

3.3.4. Methods of analysis

We analysed the data first by country, then comparatively. The country-level analysis was holistic-thematic and included the following stages:

- 1 Individual interviews were transformed into summaries.
- 2 All summaries were analysed with the research questions in mind.
- 3 Country-level reports were written and shared with the other researchers, and the team conducted an integrative comparative thematic analysis between countries. Main findings were compared to the educational literature surveys.

Parallel to this, all interviews were uploaded to the mixed-methods digital platform Dedoose[®] and were coded in two stages: For the first 20 interviews we employed a bottom-up, line-by-line coding. This generated 230 codes organized in a code tree with 3800 code applications. Stage 2 for the full set of interviews built on stage 1 to create a top-town coding scheme which included 156 nested codes (of which 146 were based on phase 1 coding and 10 were new codes). This resulted in 3128 excerpts with 9289 code applications. Coding was quality-checked by an additional coder and conflicts were resolved through discussion using the Consensual Qualitative Research method (CQR; Hill 2015, Hill et al. 2005). The mixed methods capability of Dedoose[®] meant that we could cross the coding with participants' survey data and answer questions regarding connections between topics (codes) and demographic attributes (e.g., older versus younger teachers, teachers with or without EaH training).

3.4. Findings by Country

We begin with a short description of the sample characteristics. We then present an analysis section for each country. Each section includes a description of the teachers, students and schools, the main and secondary themes that emerged from the interviews, and an interpretive analysis, suggesting how the themes might be interrelated.

3.4.1. Sample characteristics

The following is a description and table summing up the respondent characteristics by country and overall. While the majority of inclusion and diversifying respondent criteria were met, some were not. The few inclusion criteria that were not met per country are noted, as this may be a source of bias in the study and because these challenges in recruiting certain teachers in themselves inform an understanding of the profile of Holocaust educators in each country. For full details of the sampling, interviewing, translating and analysing procedures of each country, as well as full explanations underlying the unmet inclusion and diversifying criteria, please see online Appendix 1: [Method details](#).

Respondent profiles

98 teachers were interviewed for this study. Of these, one requested to be removed from the study, and the audio quality of two interviews was not of sufficiently good quality to transcribe. Thus, 95 interviews were analysed, as follows (see Table 2):

Table 2: Analysed interviews by country (n)

Country	Poland	Hungary	Germany	England	Spain	Total
# of interviews	20	17	20	18	20	95

Basic demographics. 49.5% of the teachers were male and 50.5% were female. See Table 3 for a breakdown of gender by country. Where other demographic data differed by gender, this is reported. Where a gender difference is not reported, it was insignificant.

Table 3: Breakdown of gender by country, percentage (n=95)

Country	Female	Male
Poland	55.0%	45.0%
Hungary	76.5%	23.5%
Germany	35.0%	65.0%
England	38.9%	61.1%
Spain	50.0%	50.0%
Total	N=48	N=47

The average age of the respondents was 46.1 (SD = 10.2), with ages ranging from 24-62. Female teachers differed significantly from males in terms of age: $t(92) = 2.21, p < .05$. Female teachers ($M = 48.94, SD = 11.52, n = 48$) are on average older than male teachers ($M = 43.98, SD = 10.15, n = 46$).

All of the teachers had at least some college education, with the majority holding Master's degree. see Table 4 for breakdown of education categories.

Table 4: Education level of respondents, percentage (n=95)

Education level	Respondents %
BA	18.6
Professional degrees (JD, MD)	4.1
MA	66.0
PhD	9.2
Some College	2.1

Most teachers (52%) consider themselves non-religious. 27.6% of them are atheists and smaller groups describe themselves as agnostics, humanists, secular, nothing in particular or holding a "civil religion." 17.6% of the non-religious were nominally or culturally religious, that is, they belong to a religious group but consider themselves non-religious at the same time. Of those religiously affiliated, 47.6% define themselves as Christian. Of these, 67% are Catholics, and smaller numbers describe themselves as Evangelical, Reformed, mainstream Protestant, Church of England, or "just Christian." Other religions represented in the sample in smaller numbers were Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and mixed religious (e.g., "Jewish-Christian"). See Table 5 for a breakdown of religious affiliation.

Table 5: Religious affiliation of respondents, percentage (N=95)

Religious Affiliation	Respondents %
Christian	48.4
None	37.9
Jewish	5.3
Mixed (e.g. Christian-Buddhist)	3.2
Question left blank	3.2
Buddhist	1.1
Muslim	1.1

Educational attributes. Our sample is a group of experienced teachers on the whole, with mean teaching years of 19.1 (SD = 10.9). Female teachers differed significantly from males in teaching experience: $t(91) = 2.03, p < .05$. Female teachers ($M = 16.48, SD = 9.2, n = 48$) are on average more experienced than male teachers ($M = 12.84, SD = 8, n = 46$).

Of the teachers, 14.5% teach elementary school students, 41% teach middle school, 83% teach high school and 6% teach all ages in informal education settings such as museums. On average, teachers estimated that an average of 21.2% (SD = 25.7) of their students are of ethnic or racial minority groups, 21.9% (SD = 25.8) are immigrants or the children of immigrants and 22% (SD = 23.1) are of lower socioeconomic status (SES).

Educating about the Holocaust. Respondents' average experience in teaching about the Holocaust is 14.7 years (SD = 8.8). When teaching about the Holocaust, the teachers report an average number of teaching hours per course of 10.7 hours (SD = 8.2).

We asked the teachers in which classes they taught about the Holocaust. 68.7% reported that they teach about the Holocaust in History classes, 28.9% in Literature and Language Arts, 24.1% in Social Studies, 12% in the Arts (Art, Drama, Music, Dance, Film), 18.1% in moral education or life-skills programmes, 7.2% in Religious Studies, 6% in Philosophy and 14.5% in other subjects (including Politics, whole-school projects, and commemoration events). Many teachers teach about the Holocaust in more than one subject.

EaH Training. The teachers were equally divided between those with EaH training (51%) and those with no EaH training (49%). Of those with training, 46.6% attended some Yad Vashem training, 17.7% attended a UCL Centre for Holocaust Education programme, 11% attended Memorial de la Shoah (Paris) training, and smaller percentages attended a plethora of other professional development programmes such as those of the Anne Frank House, The Washington Holocaust Museum training, Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum training, Wannsee House training and others.

Political attitudes. The political opinions of these teachers ranged from right to far-left (no far-right teachers were interviewed), with a skew towards the left side of the political spectrum (67.4% of teachers vote left or far left). On average, their political orientation was 3.98 (SD = .88) on a 1-5 scale, with 1=far right and 5=far left). See Table 6 for averages of political orientation by nationality and for a breakdown of overall political opinions.

Table 6: Average political orientation by nationality; political breakdown overall

Countries	Average political opinion (scale 1–5)	Political opinion	Overall %
Poland	4.11	Far left	29%
Hungary	3.59	Left	48.4%
Germany	4.05	Centre	14%
England	4	Right	8.6%
Spain	4.11	Far Right	0
Total	3.98		

Holocaust legacies. We asked participants about their connection to perpetrators, collaborators, victims, bystanders, resisters, helpers or liberators, to assess what legacy they were carrying into the classroom. The majority of the group (53%) had no personal connection to the Holocaust. For those who were descendants of actors in the Holocaust, participants had the option of choosing more than one group. Corresponding to theories that call for more nuanced distinctions than discrete categories can offer (Rothberg 2019), we found that among those who *reported* a Holocaust legacy of some kind, the majority (36.9%) considered themselves be the descendants of two or more groups, some with complex combinations, such as descendants of Victims and Perpetrators or descendants of “Perpetrators, Collaborators, Bystanders and Resisters.” Table 7 describes the breakdown of these groups.

Table 7: Overall breakdown by descendants of groups in the Holocaust (n=95)

Descendants of... (Holocaust legacy)	Percentage of respondents
None	55.8
Mixed	14.7
Bystanders	12.6
Victims	8.4
Prefer not to answer	3.2
Liberators	3.2
Perpetrators	1.1
Question left blank	1.1

If we were to divide different Holocaust legacies into those considered positive (e.g., victims, resisters), neutral (e.g., bystanders²⁵) and negative (e.g., perpetrators, collaborators), with mixed legacies calculated to generate a sort of average,²⁶ then 53% were predominantly positive, 37% were neutral and only 11% were predominantly negative.

We also asked respondents how closely they aligned themselves with the groups – whether through immediate family (very close), extended family (close) or larger ethnic/national group identification (distant). Table 8 shows how our respondents identified themselves in terms of the various groups. We revisit this topic through the interview material itself in the [categorical analysis](#) of the dataset.

Table 8: Respondents by social role group identification and proximity (n=38)

Group	Overall % of sample	Proximity to this role, % of sample		
		Immediate family	Extended family	Larger ethnic/national group
Perpetrators	7.2	1.2	6	4.8
Collaborators	3.6	1.2	3.6	3.6
Victims	14.5	4.8	4.8	4.8
Bystanders	27.7	13.3	8.4	7.2
Resisters	6	3.6	1.2	1.2
Helpers	4.8	1.2	2.4	1.2
Liberators	6	3.6	3.6	-

25 In contemporary scholarship and on platforms of Holocaust memory (e.g. [the Claims Conference social media campaign #Don'tBeABystander](#) that can be found on the dontbeabystander.org website), being a bystander is considered blameworthy, but in more colloquial terms, being a bystander has a neutral connotation, as being “uninvolved” or being “in-between” victim and perpetrator.

26 That is, if a respondent listed herself as being the descendent of perpetrators and victims, the two cancelled each other out in this calculation to generate a “neutral” status. If someone listed their legacies as those of perpetrators, collaborators and helpers, the ratio of two “negative” labels to one “positive” led us to label that person’s legacy as “negative.”

Unmet inclusion and diversifying criteria, by country

The following inclusion categories were not met, and therefore should be considered as sources of possible bias in our findings:

Poland – Locating unengaged teachers proved difficult, and therefore the proportions of “best practice” versus “typical” educators interviewed do not reflect these proportions in the broader population of educators in Poland. Also, despite numerous attempts to target Jewish educators, the goal of interviewing at least one Jewish educator was not met in Poland.

Germany – All inclusion criteria were met.

Hungary – Locating teachers from the right wing of the political spectrum proved extremely difficult, despite numerous attempts to recruit them over a period of several months. Respondents all tended to be critical toward the current right-wing regime, although a few were more ambiguous about this than others.

England – All inclusion criteria were met.

Spain – There was an over-representation of teachers from Catalonia, the autonomous region, which has more active teacher groups and organizations working on Holocaust Education than other regions in Spain. Also, due to the stress and a workload of Spanish high school teachers during the pandemic, there was a delay in the Spanish sample’s interview period compared to the other countries.

A comment that applies to all locations relates to the nature of the qualitative, long form interview that may have deterred participants with less experience or knowledge about the topics. Although some of the participants we recruited had no training in EaH, nearly all of them displayed enthusiasm for the subject and in this sense may not reflect the full range of teacher voices.

3.4.2. Findings from the Polish sample²⁷

The teachers as a group: Devoted to EaH in spite of the zeitgeist

The Polish teachers we interviewed tended to be an older and more experienced group of educators. Most of them work in public *lyceums* (grades 9-12), but some also used to work in *gimnazjum*—junior secondary schools (grades 7 to 9) until recently, and a couple work in vocational or community schools. Teachers incorporate EaH into the syllabi of History, Polish (Literature), Civics, and in one case Ethics (an elective). For many of these educators, being a teacher is a vocation, showing a powerful convergence of personal interests and professional life. In some cases, becoming a teacher was a family tradition.

Inter-ethnic origins among the teachers in this sample are rare, with nearly all of them ethnic Poles, and two with a half-German background. Their family backgrounds often incorporate WWII-related

²⁷ This section is written by Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and Adam Musiał.

trauma and stories of victimhood (deportation and death at Auschwitz, losing a relative in the war, escapes from ethnic cleansing in Eastern Galicia), and family refugee stories. Many grandparents of teachers were sent to forced labour in Nazi Germany. Nonetheless, the war was often not present as a narrative in family histories and most teachers regret that they did not ask their grandparents more questions. Narratives of family persecution during the communist period rarely appeared in the interviews, but participation in students' underground anti-communist activity before the fall of communism in 1989 was mentioned by a few respondents.

Most respondents had never heard about the history of the Jews when they themselves were school students, nor did any of them attend any courses on the Holocaust at university. Consequently, learning about the history of Jews was their own initiative. Some of them wrote a master's thesis on a Jewish subject, and others had teacher training on the Holocaust. Quite a few teachers participated in seminars offered by a wide range of institutions: Yad Vashem, the Shalom Foundation in Warsaw, the Holocaust Education Summer School of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, the Wannsee Conference House in Berlin, the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, the Jewish Historical Institute, the Galicia Jewish Museum in Krakow and others.

The work of most of the teachers we interviewed in the area of EaH exceeds the curricular framework and also involves commemorative social actions in their local communities. A significant number of teachers defy the curricular framework that provides very little space for EaH and spend more time on EaH than on other topics, which they cover more superficially. Many also teach about the local context of pre-war Jewish history and the Holocaust. These teachers explained that by teaching about Jews from "our" locality, they increase the tangibility and visibility of the subject and enhance feelings of loss and sympathy among their students.

In some cases, teachers' outstanding achievements in the area of EaH go unnoticed by the school authorities and colleagues, as in the case of Stanisław: ²⁸"nobody from my school, nobody congratulated me on the Polin Award or the Irena Sendler Award."²⁹ Nonetheless, the work of the most active teachers is appreciated by the descendants of Holocaust survivors. A sub-group of teachers, due to their archival expertise, have become respected experts for local public institutions and even for Jewish communities. Despite changes in the curriculum, which became more nationalist for significant groups of teachers, it is still possible to implement EaH in Poland using a critical approach, as we will describe.

28 The teacher's name, and all other names the Education section, have been changed to preserve anonymity. Each of the teachers in the study was designated a different pseudonym; when a name appears more than once, it refers to the same teacher.

29 The Irena Sendler Award "for improving the world," presented to teachers by the Centre for Citizenship Education in Warsaw.

The students: threatened but interested

Diversity within a homogenous framework.

Respondents consider their students as diverse despite their religious and ethnic homogeneity. They are described as coming from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, social classes, and types of settlement (big cities, middle-sized and small towns, and villages), although some teachers noted that there are no visibly poor students among them. The students are predominantly Polish Catholic (many of the students only nominally so), with some individual students of non-Polish ethnic origins, mostly Ukrainian or Asian, and hardly any from Islamic countries or mixed ethnic backgrounds. However, students differ in other ways: intellectual potential, the prestige of the schools they attend, mental health and sexual orientation. For example, Jagoda described her students as “very diverse, coming both from the town and the countryside, and from full, single-parent and adoptive families.” She also mentioned students with depression and physical disabilities, as well as LGBTQ students.

Students threatened by EaH but also interested

Respondents reported that their students are generally interested in the Holocaust, although “Holocaust fatigue,” a sense of threat at times, or lack of general motivation can also be observed among them. Most teachers valued their students’ sensitivity towards the subject of the Holocaust. Lena’s students were touched by the subject in her classes, some girls cried, and Lena believed that the message spoke to them. A few teachers spoke of an increase in “brownshirt” sentiments among their youth, with some students leaning towards or fascinated by the far right. A number of teachers also reported their students’ difficulty in dealing with the attitudes of ethnic Poles towards the Holocaust, as demonstrated by one student’s question, “But Poles rescued Jews, didn’t they?” (Anna). According to teachers, issues that challenge the collective Polish conscience, such as the truth about *szmalcowniks*,³⁰ were not received easily by some students, and triggered their defensive reactions.

Most respondents felt that their students inherit their attitudes to Jews and to the Holocaust from their parents. Some also mentioned students who formed their own opinions and seemed not to have been affected by the beliefs of their families. A few students even decided to pursue Holocaust studies professionally. For instance, one of Anna’s students became a guide in the Auschwitz Museum. Władysław’s student chose him as her project tutor, and the film she produced later served as a training resource at teachers’ seminars. A surprisingly significant group of teachers did not experience any resistance or defensive reactions from their students during discussions on the attitudes of ethnic Poles during the Holocaust, which might be attributed to the teachers’ personality, their passion and the EaH pedagogy applied, discussed in the sections below.

30 Szmalcownik is a pejorative Polish slang expression that originated during the Holocaust in Poland and refers to a person who blackmailed Jews who were in hiding, or who blackmailed Poles who aided Jews during the German occupation, putting both the Jews and their rescuers at risk.

Thematic analysis of the interviews: Major themes

We identified five themes as central in the interviews, and also discuss nine additional topics that arose in the interviews and offer answers to our research questions.

Theme 1: The pressure of state “historical policy” on EaH

A majority of respondents mentioned various degrees of pressure on EaH and the teaching of History in general over the last few years. Only a few of those interviewed did not seem to notice any pressure, or be bothered by it, not least because the Holocaust does not appear to be a subject they give sufficient priority to when teaching about WWII. Those who did voice their concerns, however, referred to top-down attempts to shape EaH, implemented not only through specific policies pursued by the government (the Ministry of Education and local Education Boards) and by government-dependent institutions (e.g., the Institute of National Remembrance),³¹ but also – primarily – through official public discourse, which many of the respondents perceive as insistent and strident.

The teachers’ concerns were mostly related to the so-called historical policy of the Polish government and the pro-governmental media. As Marcin explains it, “the priority of this historical policy is to ‘rise from our knees,’ teaching a completely false version of Polish history, for example the ‘cursed soldiers’³² narrative,” and as Janina adds, “the currently ruling party claims that we’ve been practising the ‘pedagogy of shame.’” This term connotes a critical approach to history, including the Holocaust, wherein both glorious and shameful historical events and figures are analysed and studied. Instead, Janina clarifies, in order “to rise from our knees,” only commendable elements of Polish history are to be taught now, while any disgraceful components are to be eliminated from public discourse and education. She is “afraid of the so-called historical policy,” because it “has an influence on Holocaust education”:

If the head of the Institute of National Remembrance contradicts statements about the crime of Jedwabne, made, incidentally, by the Institute itself,³³ then this speaks for itself, doesn’t it [...] I mostly fear politicians interfering with education.

31 The Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) is a state office dealing with Nazi and Soviet crimes committed against Polish citizens during WWII. Over the last decade and especially under the leaders nominated by the current government, the IPN has been propagating an idealised, heroic, and martyrologic narrative of Polish history, rather than looking at it critically and academically.

32 The term “cursed soldiers” refers to the Polish anti-communist underground that emerged from the anti-German underground at the end of WWII and fought the communists after the war.

33 In 2016, Jarosław Szarek, running for the office of the Head of the Institute of National Remembrance, stated that the pogrom against the Jewish inhabitants of Jedwabne on July 10, 1941, was committed by the German Nazis, and not by the Jews’ local Catholic Polish neighbours. In doing so, Szarek contradicted the findings of the 2002 research carried out by the Institute he was about to lead, following the publication of Jan Tomasz Gross’s *Neighbours*, and confirming the facts established by Gross. Szarek’s statement demonstrated how far the Institute had moved away from critical academic scholarship practiced by the Institution at the initial stage of its existence.

Maciej similarly says:

The Polish government is utilising the subject of the Holocaust for political purposes. It is playing it out, forcing a certain narrative through, which is completely groundless today and doesn't match the sources. It is promoting a myth of the innocence of the Polish nation. [...] This is simply a nationalist narrative.

One of the channels through which the pursuit of the government's historical policy has been taking place is the education system – reformed as of 2017 – that introduced a modified curriculum. In an attempt to do away with the “pedagogy of shame” and “rise from our knees,” the curriculum demands *inter alia* that teachers stress the role of the Polish Righteous, rather than present a broad range of the attitudes of non-Jewish Poles towards their Jewish compatriots, as well as avoid or marginalise dishonourable events. Thus, as Paweł explains, not only is the historical policy “very real” and “very strong,” but it also –

[...] has an effect on school, it has an effect on students [...]. For instance, there's no mention of Jedwabne in the curriculum or in general of some negative image of Poles in certain situations. [...] you can see a kind of IPNisation³⁴ of textbooks happening. What you get is a kind of a historical cult within the historical policy, to make everything work.”

The flagship of this affirmative, monumental and uncritical approach to history is the theme of the so-called “cursed soldiers” mentioned above. Referring to the anti-communist underground, the terms “cursed soldiers,” “disavowed soldiers” or “indomitable soldiers” *a priori* glorify the whole group *en masse*, although some of those guerrilla fighters committed crimes against innocent civilians, murdering Jews, and people of other ethnicities. Today, critical approaches to the cursed soldiers in education are seen as unpatriotic. Some of the teachers interviewed sense “the pressure of the curriculum [...] that you should, say, speak mainly about the cursed soldiers” (Janina). Anna confirms this: “sometimes it seems to me that there is pressure—I wouldn't like to call it political, but eh... For instance, instructions appear after all to speak more of the cursed soldiers,” and Paweł adds:

There is a whole display with the cursed soldiers [in my school], and there was a situation when, at a lecture on the Cursed Soldiers Day – there is such an event, a national holiday now – [...] students were greatly indignant at the message being so one-sided.

Indirect pressure exerted on teachers to convey the “official” version of history takes place also at the local level. Maciej gives the example of the Kraków Chief Education Officer: “[She] says, for instance, that the Polish narrative should be presented in Auschwitz.³⁵ But then what does ‘Polish

34 IPNisation indicates a shift to the preferences of the Institute of National Remembrance (the IPN) for educational content and its interpretation.

35 “Auschwitz” refers here to Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

narrative' mean? We can only guess." Marcin adds that even "history competitions [...] are often organised by fellows who previously were activists of the National Radical Camp. [...] I think this is the way that the teaching of history has been changing over the last six years." Zofia describes how the local government has curtailed her extracurricular activities. She was forced to discontinue the Polish-Israeli youth exchange programme she had run in her secondary school for a few years, because "when the government changed, it suddenly turned out there were no funds for the exchange, [...] so it became too expensive, and the schools simply pulled out of it."

Theme 2: The effect of governmental policies on teachers' sense of freedom

Several teachers indicate that large-scale political developments have permeated the school reality. The January 2018 amendment of the IPN³⁶ (known internationally as the Holocaust Law), passed by the Polish Parliament, "has definitely influenced the atmosphere," according to Cyprian. Yet the atmosphere "is terrible not because this law appeared, but simply because it revealed what I thought was there, though others claimed it wasn't, namely antisemitism." Following the passing of the law, Jagoda shares that "explicit comments were made a few times in my school of the kind: 'enough of those Jews, those workshops on Jews, it's time for something else.'" Things took an alarming turn for the worse, when, as Jagoda recounted, her principal, supported by some of her colleagues, decided not to "let into our school a Jew [a Holocaust survivor] because he was a Jew. It was related to the Law, the IPN Law. [...] Yes. Really." Her colleagues claimed their students had

...various views – such an argument was given – and they might not be happy with such a visit. And it was a highly charged period. And I was told [hesitates] something of the kind ... that we can't be so biased. [...] I wondered if we should invite a former Nazi to the school to tell us his perspective!

How do the teachers interviewed respond to the modifications of the curriculum and the pressure of political history? Some teachers carry on working unflinchingly as they have done in the past. Miłosz is very critical of the official curriculum:

The curriculum really contains very little. The content is very vague. [...] it [the textbook] said Jedwabne happened, and the second sentence said, well, that it was just this one case. One case? [...] [The Institute of National Remembrance itself] stated that apparently there were twenty such cases in the Białystok area itself at the time.

However, he does not feel intimidated in any way and believes "the teacher can have a lot of autonomy," while "the political situation needn't affect us very much."

Maciej concurs, claiming that "teachers in Poland still have freedom. They are not, at least for the time being, controlled about what content they convey." Barbara, in turn, admits "an atmosphere of fear has appeared, of apprehension," yet she has not "experienced anything personally." Neither

36 Here and elsewhere, the IPN is the Polish acronym for the Institute of National Remembrance, see footnote 707.

does Kajetan, who claims he does not “feel endangered now, though [...] what is happening in education worries me. I mean I can imagine a sudden situation where someone comes and tells me I’ve been reported on to the Education Board.”

Marcin offers a different interpretation. Although “it is not forbidden to teach about the Holocaust, and nobody is discriminated against because of this, or harassed,” and although he himself is one of those teachers who are most active in EaH and commemoration, he nevertheless believes that most teachers are “conformists, so they do what the authorities expect of them and implement this policy.”

The experience of Milena and Cyprian demonstrates the significance of support provided by the head teacher and colleagues. Though neither of them feels afraid to educate about the Holocaust and teach critically, rather than “heroically,” they were reported by individual students’ parents for teaching against the official political discourse of history. Their principals however, standing by them, decided not to act against them. Moreover, Cyprian, fortunately, has “never had a principal who would object to my initiatives – commemorative, Holocaust-related, anti-discrimination, human rights.”

At the same time, however, Milena is “convinced it will be even worse,” and Anna concurs that “if the political situation keeps on... keeps on going towards the radical right, then it will be more and more difficult.” Anna is also fortunate enough to have a principal who “gives us space.” Yet she adds that “in other schools, teachers have problems with this.” Maciej summarises thus: “Most certainly, you must be careful today.”

The support some respondents receive from their colleagues and principals might in some cases merely enhance the sense of internal freedom those educators feel anyway, while in others it might play a crucial role in letting teachers muster up their courage to resist top-down attempts to impose the official discourse of the so-called historical policy on EaH and the teaching of history in general.

Theme 3: Antisemitism is experienced to varying degrees

Although five respondents claimed they had never encountered antisemitic behaviour in their students and were even certain their students were free of any prejudice, more than half of the respondents emphasised that they had experienced manifestations of antisemitic attitudes in their students, or generally in their working environment. The scale of the phenomenon varies, ranging from having, as Jagoda does, “surprisingly many of those that lean towards the right wing, many people with antisemitic attitudes, despite the fact that many programmes have been done at our school around Jewish culture,” to the awareness, like in the case of Paweł, of having “students who are antisemitic because they preach various ideas,” to just suspecting, like Kajetan, that “students with, shall we say, right-wing views” were antisemitic.

Antisemitic attitudes occur among students from various social, economic, cultural and topographic contexts, attending both highly reputed schools and those thought to be less prestigious, both in big urban centres and smaller towns. However, antisemitic behaviour was mentioned slightly more often by teachers of students who are less academically inclined.

According to some respondents, antisemitism still seems to be a pattern of Polish culture. Zofia notices that “there are no Jews here, but antisemitism has remained” and “it still resonates.” Milena is convinced that “stereotypes in Polish society are so deeply rooted that I’m afraid they cannot be eradicated [...]. Poles are antisemitic. I don’t know how many of them, [...] but I think they are antisemites.” Cyprian states antisemitism is “not [just] a football stadium problem,” and Paweł asserts that “it’s still deep down there. [...] antisemitism has been inscribed in Polish history and Polish culture and the Polish, umm... national thought [...] for ages, and always will.” According to Stanisław, “antisemitism is simply – though it might be unfortunate to say – imbibed at home.”

Acquired through enculturation, students’ antisemitism has various manifestations, according to respondents. It evinces itself through language, which might even be imperceptible to students. Barbara’s students “use a lot of such [antisemitic] language [...]. They are just stuck in this language, and they sometimes don’t realise this.” Zofia adds that antisemitism lingers on in certain Polish adages, “for example, ‘buzz around like a Jew in an empty shop,’ which means to move around hectically.” Stanisław’s students associate Jews with “a beard, side-curls, money, communism, those kinds of very negative things,” though neither they nor anybody in their families have ever seen a Jew. Jagoda was “astounded because I suddenly heard that all Warsaw banks are ruled by Jews and all that, [laughs], and Jews rule Poland, Warsaw and the world.” Such prejudice is likely to lead to dislike and antipathy towards Jews. Some of her students flatly refused to take part in workshops on Jewish history and culture or the Holocaust (“I won’t take part in a workshop on Jews,”), while Zofia added:

When we once talked about culture [...], I showed them, among other things, *kippahs* [Jewish skullcaps] [...] and asked if any of the boys would like to put them on [...]. And the reactions were – absolutely no one wanted to put on a kippah, as if it was somehow stigmatising.

Antisemitism in the teachers’ lounge is related to their more general living environment, as antisemitism is a general problem in some areas (i.e., south-eastern and eastern Poland). Lena states straightforwardly that her “region [south of Krakow, infamous for post-war attacks on Jewish survivors] is so umm... well, indeed, a bit antisemitic,” while Stanisław asserts that the antisemitic clichés of some of his students from the Białystok region in eastern Poland can be heard “in the village,” “in the street” or “in town.” Ziemowit, working and living in the same region, is even more bitter:

I have the impression that we, here in the East, operate in a different sphere when it comes to Polish-Jewish relations, completely different. And that stereotype of the treacherous Jew who denounced people to the Soviets, who sentenced them to deportation to Siberia. Well, it’s stupid and untrue, but it’s so entrenched here that it’s difficult to dispute it.

Even representatives of the local elite, including members of the teaching staff, are not free of antisemitism and some actively perpetuate it. Lena describes her principal’s unacceptable behaviour and blatantly antisemitic language uttered in public, while Ziemowit describes the antisemitic remarks

and attitudes of his teaching colleagues, adding “this antisemitism surfaces at every anniversary [of the Jedwabne crime],” an event that occurred in the community that he teaches:

We have students from Jedwabne. And these discussions about antisemitism are particularly difficult, when you face these students’ knowledge acquired, say, from their parents. “Because my father said this.” And discussions about [Polish-Jewish] relations are very heavy. And contemporary antisemitism... [Pauses]. In our area it’s difficult to disconnect, say, today’s antisemitism, to reject Jedwabne, because it’s interconnected. Well, you hear all the time that Jews do this, Jews do that, Jews rule the world, and such stupidity recurs all the time. [...] sometimes, and I know it, they leave the classroom convinced that I’m not telling the truth and that I’m wrong, because as a teacher I simply clash with and throw my authority on the line against the authority of their parents and grandparents. You understand, don’t you? And it’s very, very difficult for me, also for me. I try to speak about it gently, umm, in a way, engage in a dialogue with them and to get them to read the sources, and this is very important to me.

Indirectly, these quotations seem to indicate the predominantly retrospective character of Polish antisemitism, which draws on and is largely preoccupied with old pre-war stereotypes as well as the pre-war, wartime and post-war relations of the majority non-Jewish population with their Jewish Polish compatriots. “The legacy of the interwar period is, I think, still visible,” states Stanisław.

The very fact that a teacher deals with and educates about Jewish history and culture, as well as the Holocaust, can prove sufficient for them to be labelled a “Jew” (in fact, none of the respondents were Jewish). As Lena describes it, “remarks appeared that [I] must be Jewish” and “have some hidden agenda,” while Anna confesses, “I tell you, living there [in her village] is not easy now, because I’m the ‘Jew and gay woman.’” The most shocking experience in this respect seems to have been that of Ziemowit. As it was reported to him afterwards by a friend, a member of a historical society Ziemowit used to belong to said in his absence, “I wonder if [Ziemowit] is Jewish. It’s a pity he’s not here. We could make him drop his trousers.”

Another antisemitic obstacle for educators is students’ parents’ occasional complaints. Teachers have been accused of “ideologizing young people and [are asked] why they teach so much of it [i.e., about the Jewish past]” (Lena); “informed against for doing politics in History classes, though I don’t know if it was about [teaching about] Jedwabne or something else.” (Cyprian); questioned “if there were no *Polish* places in Krakow to go to [during a study trip focused on Jewish Krakow]” (Miłosz); and reported against for teaching that “Poles murdered Jews during the war” (Milena).

To a greater or lesser extent, all the respondents try to tackle antisemitism. All use the teaching resources stipulated by the curriculum. Literature teachers utilise late nineteenth-century, early twentieth century and wartime literature to show the discriminatory and immoral character of antisemitism (or “the idiocy of antisemitism,” as Lena phrased it). History teachers, in turn, use primary and secondary sources to show the development of antisemitism, its discriminatory ideology and manifestations in medieval Europe, as well as nineteenth and twentieth-century

Europe, including Germany and Poland. Notably, however, the teachers interviewed were unfamiliar with the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

Theme 4: The ethno-centric model of national identity

The labelling of educators as “Jewish” for teaching Jewish history and the Holocaust, parents’ complaints about the content of their lessons or various study tours being “too Jewish” and some manifestations of students’ antisemitism, seem to suggest the prevalence of the ethno-centric (or ethno-nationalist) model of Polish national identity. Based on ethnicity, rather than on civic identity, this model, which is not compliant with the Polish constitution, excludes Jews from the national community, and thus leaves them outside the areas of memory, commemoration and mutual civic obligation. Consequently, Jewish-Polish history, and the history of the Holocaust, do not seem to be regarded by many Poles, in the largely ethnically homogenous Poland of today, as “our” ethno-Polish narrative. This exclusion – from the (ethnic) national community and national collective memory, seems to constitute a major hindrance in teaching about the Holocaust in Poland.

Theme 5: Minimal EaH curriculum concerns educators

Most History and Literature teachers interviewed, complain that the curriculum, and, consequently, textbooks based on it, devote very little space to the Holocaust. One of the causes of this situation seems to be the extensive, rather than intensive, character of History teaching in the Polish education system. Polish teachers are obliged to teach a great many historical topics and themes, typically through a political rather than social perspective. This means a quick run through multiple topics with very little time to pause and reflect on them in depth. Consequentially, History teachers wishing to teach about the Holocaust in a more thorough manner must do it “at the expense of other topics” (Stanisław).

When the content and the instructions of the curriculum and textbooks are analysed against the backdrop of the government’s official historical policy, it turns out that not only are they limited, but also partially geared towards securing a positive ethnic self-image of Poles in their attitudes towards Jews and their extermination. Thus, some of those respondents who have reservations about the Holocaust content of the curriculum and textbooks, decide to expand and nuance or complicate it with extracurricular resources and competences acquired with their own efforts.

Theme 6: Gaps in teachers’ knowledge and their efforts to reduce them

Not all the respondents are familiar with publications of the Polish School of Holocaust Research, which can be said to have developed since the publication of Jan Tomasz Gross’s *Neighbours* in 2000. Yet most of those who consider the Holocaust a crucial topic, and definitely those who are engaged Holocaust educators, are aware of at least some of the publications. The latter, however, admit that the critical findings of Polish Holocaust researchers do not translate into the content of History textbooks. The findings thus simply remain unknown to a great many Polish students, unless their teachers decide to expand the textbook content with this additional knowledge, providing that they have acquired it themselves.

Teachers, however, do familiarise themselves with the critical findings of Polish and international Holocaust researchers on their own or in additional training sessions (Szuchta 2021, 34),³⁷ attended of their own volition during their teaching careers, because a vast majority of those interviewed, both History and Language teachers, stated they had not been trained at university in EaH. Moreover, most teachers claim they were not taught properly, if at all, the history of the Holocaust at university, receiving at most a perfunctory education in the field.

Theme 7: EaH is approached via a local lens

There does not seem to be a single universal approach to EaH among those interviewed. However, more than half of the respondents, most of whom consider EaH a priority, choose to teach about the Holocaust and pre-war Jewish life also through the local dimension. As Ziemowit explains:

My school is located exactly in the heart [...] of the former Jewish quarter, and it turns out the school building used to be the Jewish hospital. So [...] how was I not to tell [my students] that forty percent of the population was once Jewish, and the building where we were studying was a building erected from the funds of the [...] Jewish community?

These educators are convinced that EaH should be conducted, if possible, through the prism of one's own local identity, i.e., through what befell the Jewish community in the town or region students come from. They believe that involving local identity – presenting the Holocaust as a tangible story that took place not only far away, but also in the locality in which students are situated – makes the knowledge acquired more concrete, and thus not only increases students' interest and cognitive motivation, but also positively influences their willingness to include the local events of the Holocaust in the common memory of their town and the former Jewish inhabitants in the shared local identity as their own compatriots.

Some of this group of educators organise regular school outings through which they explore the Jewish past and the Holocaust history of their own localities, preparing this on their own on the basis of their own research or through cooperation with educators from the Forum for Dialogue³⁸ or local activists. A few have prepared their own resources, created guided tours or led groups in the commemoration of the local Jewish community. Not infrequently, their activity has expanded the knowledge of the Jewish past of members of the local community. "They had no idea that a synagogue was there. They didn't know there was a Jewish cemetery," says Barbara of her students' parents, for whom she organised a guided tour of the Jewish traces of her locality with her students.

Regional education is implemented for the most part with positive results, despite rare objections: "It seems to me that if any content arouses the interest of a majority of students, then it's regional

37 These training sessions are mostly organized by NGOs or independent institutions; in other words, they do not take place under the auspices of the Polish Ministry of Education.

38 The Forum for Dialogue (Forum Dialogu) is the largest and oldest Polish non-governmental organisation engaged in Polish-Jewish dialogue since 1998, cooperating with local leaders, activists and teachers, and working with schools through educational projects that focus on the history of local Jewish communities.

history” (Zofia). Regional history is in general unknown to local inhabitants, but usually stirs more interest in EaH among students. It can involve cleaning local Jewish cemeteries or frottage workshops, study tours and educational projects such as “The Traces of the Lublin Region’s Jews” (Zofia).

In some cases, a teacher’s activity may make an impact on the local population, as in the case of Stanisław who organised with his students a commemoration event of the liquidation of the ghettos from Białystok and found that his efforts were sustained:

So, when I come on November second now, I’m no longer alone. I see candles lit. Stones might not be put there, but people bring chrysanthemums.³⁹ And you also see that people bring flowers throughout the year.

Theme 8: Teachers practice social activism in their local communities

Pedagogically, respondents do not often implement EaH within the framework of human rights education. However, this does not mean that they do not teach and practice social activism. Respondents were often active beyond the school environment and undertook initiatives aiming to educate the local community, not only about the Jewish past of their localities or by commemorating the former Jewish inhabitants of their towns and regions. Indeed, some of them are also active in the fields of human rights, anti-discrimination and current social developments (for instance, working to counter the government’s homophobic propaganda), as well as culture and the humanities broadly understood. This activism indicates a high level of social sensitivity to diversity, discrimination and the need for the inclusion of minorities, which is notable all the more given that all the teachers in question are members of the ethnically Polish and Catholic (or post-Catholic) majority group.

For example, Marcin, self-taught in the field of the Holocaust, has led the official commemoration of the extermination of his local Jewish community: plaques were inserted into the platform of the train station from which local Jews were deported to death camps, a ceremony – attended by the municipal authorities – was organised and an academic session was held in the town hall. He has also established co-operation with the fan club of a Bundesliga football club, which is active in educating its fans about the dangers of hatred and exclusion.

There are many other examples: Ziemowit operates tours displaying the Jewish past of his town not only to his students, but also to local inhabitants, and co-organises commemorative events in his locality. Stanisław has been taking care of the maintenance of the Jewish cemetery for several years and has convinced his town authorities to commemorate the old, now non-existent Jewish cemetery. Lena co-operates with a local activist on educating her students about the Jewish past in the space of her town, and is also active in other fields, co-organising an annual culture festival in her town every summer. Anna co-operates with a local Jewish centre as an anti-discrimination educator, teaching school students and adults. Karolina co-operates with a theatre in a city near her town to organise theatre classes and workshops for her students. Kalina has co-written a graphic book about

³⁹ Chrysanthemums are flowers traditionally brought by Poles to cemeteries.

an important local rabbi and has co-recorded audiobooks for children about refugees. Barbara has held tours of the Jewish past of her town for the local community and commemorated the now non-existent Jewish cemetery with a plaque. Jagoda is active in organising events commemorating the Jews of her town under the auspices of the municipal authorities. Zofia, Lena and Maciej have co-organised Polish-Israeli student exchange programmes.

Some of the respondents feel alone in what they try to do, receiving support only from a small community of like-minded activists. “In fact, I work alone. I only have my students as allies,” said Stanisław.

Theme 9: Educational goals focus on personal responsibility and anti-authoritarianism

Several teachers, like Marcin, view EaH in a larger context, in which its goals include understanding the value of democracy, the rule of law, civil liberties, human rights, and the significance of the realisation “that any form of discrimination may lead to the same crimes as those that occurred in the twentieth century.” Those teachers believe good education about the Holocaust must also comprise the analysis of the causes of the genocide of the Jews, the examination of the mechanisms of hatred that led to it, efforts to shape open and tolerant attitudes in students as well as raise their awareness of the dangers of prejudice. The educators in question consider education to be crucial for preventing authoritarian developments in society.

A number of teachers aim at acknowledging the presence of Jews in the history of Poland and the Jewish history of their localities, including the Holocaust. They attempt to show the complexity of history and oppose simplification, the glorification of the in-group, and rigid dichotomies. One of their principal goals is to inculcate in young people the conviction that Jewish history is an integral part of Polish history and Jews are an important part of Poland (Lena). For Karolina, the most important thing –

...seems to be not to forget that we have such a past and for them to have, to arouse their cognitive curiosity to make them quest, begin to ask questions, begin to wonder, and for them to be able to see the analogies that, for instance, Turski⁴⁰ speaks about, of the possibility of it happening again, something which recently, after all, seems all the more important to speak about.

Teachers emphasised that EaH is not only about facts, but about conveying values and shaping attitudes. Some respondents believe that by means of teaching about the Holocaust, certain social and political mechanisms can be illustrated that can lead to mass murder. These processes start at the attitudinal level that should be formed by education. Thus, what is of great significance is shaping

40 Marian Turski is a Polish historian, journalist and activist. He is also an Auschwitz survivor. In 2020 he gave a speech at the ceremony for the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, in which he stated: “Auschwitz did not fall from the sky. It began with small forms of persecution of Jews. [...] That is why human rights and democratic constitutions must be defended.” Marian Turski, [Wystąpienie Mariana Turskiego: Auschwitz nie spadł nagle z nieba](#), *Polityka*, *Temat tygodnia*. Odc. 4, January 28, 2020.

students' attitudes in an attempt to open their minds and help them be "citizens of a democratic state," because "dates and facts will be easily forgotten by students in a few years, and attitudes will remain." (Maciej)

Some goals were more implicitly indicated, among them raising indifferent students' interest in EaH, bringing right-wing students round to open-minded and inclusive thinking, and in particular the emotional impact of teaching on their students (Paweł). As Milena stated, "I would like to be remembered as a teacher who told them not to follow any radicalism; that you must be very careful, that if the crowd goes one way, you go the other way. Never follow the crowd." Several teachers referred to Marian Turski's speech, e.g., Ziemowit:

I want students to take away what Marian Turski said – that "Auschwitz didn't fall from the sky." [...] I want them to leave with the message that what happened didn't happen suddenly. No. [...] It was a process, step by step, that led to this. This is what's most important to me. Definitely.

Theme 10: Pedagogies are highly diverse to engage students

According to some, the Holocaust is a topic that requires a dignified setting and thus an overuse of digital methods should be prevented. A few connect the topic of the Holocaust to the lives of their students. Paweł, for instance, explains to his students that young Jews of their age would be a normal part of their lives in Krakow had it not been for the Holocaust. The analysis of documents/primary sources was often used by teachers. Stanisław tells his students the personal story of his family, who sought refuge once and were helped to escape war. Teaching through the presentation of dilemmas was seldom mentioned.

Much of EaH in Poland takes place outside of formal classes. As Lena says: "I teach mainly outside regular classes." In addition to local activism noted above, teachers have also organised study trips to places of Jewish history and culture, including Holocaust and memorial sites (among them Auschwitz, Chełmno/Kulmhof, Bełżec, the Stutthof Museum).⁴¹ The importance of preparing the students before, during and after the visit to killing sites (Auschwitz) was emphasised (e.g. Anna), and one teacher, Milena, said she had not taken her students to any of the former camps, as she did not feel confident in handling the emotional load of a study tour to a former concentration and death camp. A few teachers organised or co-organised meetings with Israeli students or even Polish-Israeli youth exchange programmes. One of the positive outcomes the teachers observed in such undertakings was a reduction of antisemitism. Polish-German exchange programmes also took place.

Teachers organised meetings with survivors and eyewitnesses, with the help of technology when needed (e.g., Skype meetings with a Łódź Ghetto survivor). They often used biographies, excerpts

41 Sztutowo, or Stutthof in German, within the borders of the Free City of Danzig until 1945, is a village where the Stutthof concentration camp was established in 1939.

from testimonies or individual stories showing survivors' lives and fate before, during and after the Holocaust, produced films or theatre plays with their students and mentioned some innovative and attractive methods and resources available today: various films, comics and audio-visual resources. Some screen shorter movies in class or ask their students to watch them at home, followed up by discussion in the classroom. Students of the most active teachers took part in the School of Dialogue projects. One of the projects was the creation of a map of Jewish historical monuments. Zofia's students hosted the "Museum on Wheels"⁴² and published a brochure on the history of Radzyń Jews.

The teachers interviewed were seldom in favour of drama within the EaH framework. Nonetheless, Kalina uses the drama method with students who enter the roles of the family members she teaches about, in the hope of rousing her students' empathy for the victims.

Theme 11: Additional challenges in EaH

The preface "additional" refers to the fact that the main, almost overwhelming challenge is the one detailed in Themes 1-4: The nationalist zeitgeist and its pressures on EaH. However, four other main challenges were identified by the participants:

One of the issues that recurs most frequently in the interviews, especially those with History teachers, is *insufficient space in the curriculum* to teach the Holocaust in a meaningful way. Due to insufficient space and time allocated to EaH in the curriculum, teachers who consider the Holocaust an important subject devote every opportunity at their disposal to the topic; for instance, when substituting for other teachers and/or form periods.⁴³ Some teachers "smuggle"⁴⁴ the topic of the Holocaust into Polish studies in various contexts.

Another challenge expressed by the teachers relates to the *low level of initial interest* among students. They ponder the difficulty of affecting students emotionally and stimulating them intellectually with their teaching. The Holocaust feels like a distant part of history, and many students are indifferent to it (Paweł). According to Anna, one of the biggest mistakes in Polish EaH, is related to how badly teachers usually prepare their students for visiting Auschwitz and how they close such visits, without conducting any summary or discussion afterwards. According to Milena, students cannot understand the magnitude of the Holocaust.

One of the curricular challenges stems from *the incompatibility of the History and the Polish curricula*. The historical time period covered in Polish class is different to that taught in History class (e.g., Jagoda) and as a result, the content related to the Holocaust is scattered.

42 A travelling exhibition prepared by the Polin Museum.

43 In Polish schools Form Teachers, or Class Teachers, or tutors in charge of a class/form, have one such lesson at their disposal per week.

44 This term was used by Lena but withdrawn by her almost immediately.

Finally, among the challenges is the *Covid* pandemic, which left an indelible trace on EaH, as it forced schools to shift to distance learning for long periods during 2020-2021. According to all respondents, distance learning greatly hindered communication, particularly its non-verbal and emotional dimensions. As Kajetan phrased it: “the whole discussion part of teaching was very poor.” He believes “the presence, being in the same room, talking to and hearing each other, looking each other in the face, is in my opinion much more valuable,” yet this proved impossible.

Distance learning also negatively impacted the content of EaH, as certain topics, best done through workshops or discussions, proved difficult to carry out. “Those classes were limited in scope,” stated Karolina. Teachers who previously took their students on study trips to remembrance sites or to explore the Jewish history of their local spaces, could not do so during the Covid period.

Theme 12: Making use of existing support networks

The teachers did not mention the Ministry of Education as a source of support. Among state institutions they have successfully cooperated with, the teachers listed the International Centre for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. Many teachers have cooperated with the Forum for Dialogue, carrying out projects that aimed to (re) discover and commemorate the Jewish past of their localities and the stories of people who lived, went to school and worked in places all the students know very well. Others have pursued educational and commemorative initiatives on their own or with local activists. Commemorating the anniversary of the liquidation of the ghettos in various towns, which is often instigated by local teachers, requires lobbying and involvement of the local authorities. At the core of such grassroots activities, which incorporate the crucial pedagogical strategy of involving students, lies the belief, as in the case of Stanisław, that since Jews lived in the town, contributed to its history, and “developed it socially and economically,” the anniversary of the ghetto liquidation “should be included into the list of official town events.”

Teachers have cooperated with and felt supported by various NGOs (such as the Centre for Citizenship Education in Warsaw)⁴⁵ and cultural institutions (such as the Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre).⁴⁶ EaH in cooperation with such creative NGOs was valued: “Repeating the slogans like ‘Never again Auschwitz’ or ‘May we never repeat this lesson’ are not useful anymore. What is needed is grassroots work” (Anna).

Numerous teachers, e.g., Anna, noted the importance of teacher training at Yad Vashem. She felt that her visit to the institution, where she learnt an entirely different approach to teaching, changed her completely. She established a follow-up working group with the other participants of the Yad

45 Centre for Citizenship Education is an NGO whose main goal is to improve the quality of the education system, disseminate civic knowledge and promote practical skills and attitudes necessary to build a democratic state of law and civil society.

46 A cultural institution based in Lublin, housed in the Grodzka Gate, also known as the Jewish Gate, which historically used to be a passage from the Christian to the Jewish part of the city. The Centre focuses on issues of cultural heritage and the memory of the city’s Jewish inhabitants.

Vashem seminar to share knowledge and resources. The Centropa organisation was also mentioned as valuable for its digital teaching tools.

Teachers are also supported by commemorative days and projects. The Holocaust Victims Remembrance Day and the Daffodil Campaign are held in selected schools. The Daffodil Campaign is a commemoration and education campaign carried out by the Polin Museum, in which students all over the country are encouraged to prepare yellow paper daffodils and hand them out to pedestrians on April 19, the date when the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising broke out in 1943. Another commemorative project is the Crocus Project, initiated by the Holocaust Education Trust Ireland in 2005. Its Polish coordinator is the Galicia Jewish Museum. As part of the project, students plant yellow crocus bulbs in autumn so that the flowers bloom in early spring. The yellow crocuses are meant to commemorate the child victims of the Holocaust. Planting the crocus bulbs is prefaced by lessons and extracurricular activities, during which the participants learn about the tragic events of WWII and the Holocaust.

Theme 13: Current events in the classroom – using comparative elements

Two current developments are mentioned relatively often in the classrooms of teachers interviewed: the discriminatory official discourse and policies aimed at the LGBTQ community and the place of refugees, the latter mostly concerning the 2021 refugee crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border. In the public sphere, LGBTQ individuals have been dehumanised as promoting an alleged “LGBT ideology,” while refugees are described as savage invaders threatening Polish national security. Almost half of the respondents mentioned bringing up the anti-LGBTQ developments in the classroom and discussing them in relation to the Holocaust, while under a third did so in relation to refugees, discussing with their students the vilification of minority groups as enemies of Polish traditions and families.

The teachers who addressed these two developments in their classes pointed to the analogies in the mechanisms of discrimination, dehumanisation and exclusion of Jews by historical Nazi Germany and of LGBTQ people and refugees in the Poland of today. Stanisław believes the Holocaust is “not a closed subject, because the Jews can be replaced by refugees, can’t they? [or] by LGBT people.” Jagoda concurs: “The issue of and the attitudes towards the LGBT community now is the same thing to me. The same mechanisms of exclusion are at work, and this is unbelievable to me. And I think it is important to speak about it.” Karolina says:

I complete this whole cycle of classes [on the Holocaust] with that speech of his [Marian Turski], “Auschwitz did not fall from the sky.” [...] Suddenly their eyes open up [...], because actually there might be something to it, to, say, an LGBT-free zone popping up.⁴⁷ There are a lot of such situations around us, sadly, where they can find such analogies. And the finale is Allport’s Scale of Prejudice...

47 She refers to a series of resolutions passed in 2020 and 2021 by various local self-governments, aimed at the alleged “LGBT ideology.”

Many teachers focus on the ideological and psychological causes and mechanisms of the Holocaust, using it to segue into comparative teaching. Some draw parallels to the ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia, some relate EaH to the struggle against hate speech and different kinds of discrimination: antisemitism, anti-Roma, homophobia and islamophobia. They also connect EaH and pro-tolerance training.

Most teachers do not teach about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The few that do are those who teach Advanced History and Advanced Civics, as the conflict is part of the curriculum for these subjects. They emphasise and try to show the complexity of the conflict. On the one hand, they indicate how Netanyahu's "nationalist" government "inflamed the situation by pursuing "unreasonable policies towards the Palestinian minority," while on the other hand they discuss the role of " Hamas, which took over the power in the Palestinian Authority, which actually contributes to the fact that this conflict cannot be solved." Yet they stress that they do not directly link the Palestinian-Israeli conflict of today with "the history of the Holocaust, the history of antisemitism, or Polish-Jewish relations before and after WWII," as "the history of Polish Jews" concerns "Polish citizens" and thus should be taught "for its own sake," without mixing "the contemporary State of Israel into it." In any case, students' interest in the conflict is minimal: "They are not really interested in this, the Palestinians and the State of Israel. Well, this is too distant for them."

Summary: Thematic integration in relation to previous studies

A majority of the respondents are independent, experienced teachers who do not follow the official curricula and/or the official educational policy too closely and express their attitudes in a straightforward manner. Nearly all of them were not adequately prepared for EaH at university and completed their training independently. They feel that there is not enough time and space in the curriculum to teach the Holocaust in a meaningful way. In his research, Szuchta (2021) established that only 0.8 to 2.8% of various twentieth-century History textbooks in Poland are devoted to the subject of the Holocaust. This was reinforced by most History and Literature teachers interviewed.

Some educators noticed positive changes in EaH since 1990, such as new methods and resources available, which in fact they use abundantly, but most underscored the negative modifications to EaH in Poland following 2015, as it has become increasingly politicised, nationalized and distorted.

We identified several connections between the themes and teacher and student attributes, which we summarise in Figure 1.

Almost all of the teachers are conscious of the pressure exerted on EaH and the teaching of history in general over the last few years, in particular, the historical policy of the Polish government and pro-governmental media. They feel the pressure to convey the "official" version of history, in which Poles are either heroes or martyrs, despite objecting to this narrative. They also feel the effect of this policy in changes on their extracurricular activities.

Many of the educators interviewed devote a lot of time to the topic of the Holocaust, usually determining the content themselves. They believe that it is important to make history tangible through making it personal and local. Therefore, they use any opportunity offered by their projects with students, such as cleaning local Jewish cemeteries or city walks, to convey knowledge about

the history of the Jews, particularly in their localities. Some of them may have learnt about the significance of the local dimension in seminars held by institutions that believe it to be one of the key tenets of their educational philosophy.⁴⁸ Others may have embraced it through collaborating educationally with the Forum for Dialogue. Still others have come to understand it on their own. This theme echoes the findings and suggestions of social psychologist Michał Bilewicz, who explains:

POLAND - Sample characteristics:

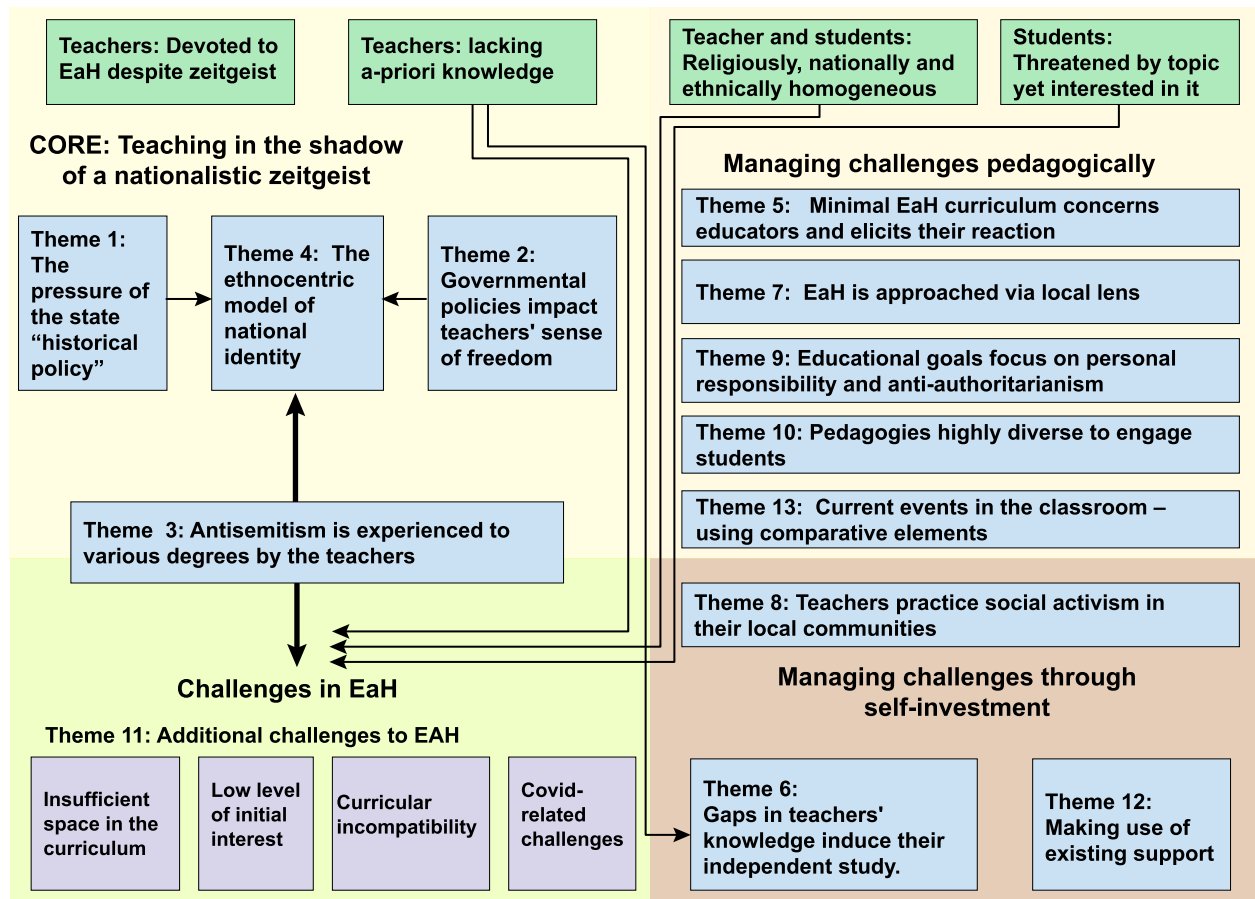


Figure 1: Thematic integration of Polish teachers' interviews

In most of the current Holocaust education programmes, the main focus is put on several key historical locations, such as Auschwitz and Treblinka death camps or the Warsaw Ghetto. Such an approach does not engage local identities and leads to the perception of the Holocaust as a geographically distant event, especially for those students who live in the places where numerous Jewish communities existed prior to WWII and their historical presence and destruction remains unacknowledged (Bilewicz et al., 2017, 186–187).

48 See for instance the instructions and guidelines of Yad Vashem. "Using Testimony in Holocaust Education - A Learning Environment," Yad Vashem.org website (accessed February 2023); and the Museum of the History of Polish Jews Polin, "Zalecenia i wskazówki dotyczące edukacji na temat II wojny światowej i Zagłady", polin.pl website (accessed February 2023).

Respondents' justifications for this again reflects the scholarship on this issue. As Bilewicz clarifies: "The Holocaust may become personally significant to students only after they are able to properly understand the scale of the historical losses endured by their community, as well as by their local culture (ibid)."

The type of school, usually found to be a major determinant of EaH, did not play a very significant role in this study, while the teachers' passion and integrity seemed to have a significant impact on students' attitudes. This confirms other empirical studies in Poland demonstrating that the state of EaH depends on engaged, genuine teachers, their personalities and charisma (Ambrowsicz-Jacobs 2020).

More than half of the respondents experienced antisemitic attitudes professionally. They share the conviction that antisemitism is deeply rooted in Polish culture and language and is connected to a model of Polish national identity that is defined through ethnicity rather than civic identity, thereby excluding Jews from taking part in the Polish "story." We can deduce that teaching that Jews were citizens of Poland allows students to understand that EaH does not have to threaten Polish nationality or challenge the heroism of the Polish Righteous.

Our findings confirmed those of the 2010 EU study, "The role of commemoration sites, original sites and historical museums in Holocaust education and human rights education in the EU."⁴⁹ The FRA (Fundamental Rights Agency) study revealed that EaH and human rights education are rarely present together at memorial sites and museums in Europe, despite politicians' statements. The outcomes of this study regarding Poland did not differ significantly from the findings of the comprehensive IHRA (2017) study, "Research in Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust (2017)," which demonstrated the lack of a set of precisely formulated educational goals and, as a consequence, no evaluation as to whether the goals had been achieved. Yehuda Bauer (2008) advocated that EaH should be about dilemmas. Unfortunately, this approach was hardly found in the educational goals or pedagogy of the respondents.

Our findings highlight those teachers who share a critical approach to the mainstream educational policy regarding EaH and their crucial efforts to overcome political constraints and teach a more accurate history of Polish Jews and the Holocaust. Due to lack of pre-service training for teachers in Poland regarding EaH, this is a relatively small group of highly motivated and well-trained teachers and, although this is an important group to explore, it may not represent the larger population of teachers in Poland.

49 The Role of Commemoration Sites, Original Sites and Historical Museums in Holocaust Education and Human Rights Education in the EU (2010), Vienna, Fundamental Rights Agency.

3.4.3. Findings from the Hungarian sample⁵⁰

The teachers: Diverse but committed

The teachers we interviewed belonged to different age groups, from novices in their twenties to teachers approaching retirement in their sixties. However, their age seemed to have little impact on the way they approach teaching generally or EaH, more specifically. Some generational differences are evident between those with teaching experience before or during the first decade of the regime change and those who started their career well after the collapse of the Iron Curtain. Those seven teachers whose teaching career had begun before the regime change had learned things “on their own” because little material was available on EaH during Socialist rule and at the start of the new era. Some of them considered this to be a challenge. Melinda summarized:

I think there are a lot of us in my generation- my generation is in their 40s. So, we didn’t get it [this teaching]. And I had a very good history teacher in high school. But there was no knowledge that they could have passed on to us and that is really up to us, it was left to us. On our own [pauses], really up to our inner conscience, I think, whether we make the effort to process it and pass it on afterwards.

In contrast, those who started teaching well after the transition already had some knowledge on the topic “prepared” by older colleagues and they had greater access to international materials as well. Teachers of German (or Swabian) origin,⁵¹ were overrepresented in our sample: four teachers mentioned that their families had been relocated to Hungary after WWII, during the population exchange. Regionally speaking, this sample was diverse; some were from towns in the countryside, but the majority originated in the capital, Budapest. Religion was not an important part of the identity of our respondents, who reflected Hungarian society in this regard. Some of them were of Jewish origin but they were not religious and some of the ethnic Jews did not even consider themselves as Jewish.

Most respondents were History teachers, but others taught Ethics, Hungarian, Geography, Latin, Media, Homeland and Ethnographic studies or a combination thereof. Respondents were also diverse in their level of focus on EaH but all of them thought of EaH as somehow important. Almost all had “something to tell” in relation to that. However, when it comes to the actual teaching methods, the group varied greatly in attitudes and pedagogy.

A uniform critical attitude towards the current educational system

We will later discuss the teachers’ tendency to be critical towards Hungary’s current government and educational leadership. However, the fact that we could not locate a single teacher who supported Hungary’s education reforms or expressed clear right-wing political attitudes and was

⁵⁰ This section is written by Anikó Félix.

⁵¹ The German minority is around one percent of society in Hungary.

willing to be interviewed for a study on EaH, begs an explanation in terms of the framing of this sample. An enormous amount of effort over many months went into locating the respondents, and the fact that they were hard to locate (we eventually did manage to interview two teachers with some affinity to the right-wing discourse) is a notable finding of its own. By nature, EaH tends to be discussion-based and includes more interactive ways of teaching with the use of various alternative sources that are in opposition to the current reforms in the education system. Thus, it would seem to draw a disproportionate number of teachers who oppose the regime. It is also possible that those who are more supportive towards the current regime do not want to criticize its reforms, even in the form of an anonymous interview. Due to the controversial messages of the current regime regarding the Hungarian legacy of the Holocaust (as discussed in the political discourse analysis) it is also possible that they are reserved towards or even oppose EaH and prefer not to divulge such attitudes in an interview. The fact that this study is led by an Israeli university may be another cause for disengagement of teachers with right-wing attitudes. All of this also indicates how great is the divide that currently cuts through Hungarian society.

Pál shared his attitude towards those teachers who think “differently,” illustrating how politically divided Hungarian teachers are: according to him, there might be teachers with different ways of thinking, for example in the “Hunyadi” camp (a right-wing, pro-government summer camp for students)⁵² where the main organizers distort the Holocaust. He consciously avoids these circles.

Due to the centralized education system, teachers required the principal’s permission to be interviewed. It is also possible that teachers who received permission may be the ones who work in a less centralized, less “rule-follower” environment.

Three types of teachers: initiators, well-trained and free spirits

In terms of involvement with EaH, three types of teachers can be discerned in the sample:

The initiators. These teachers were not only interested in EaH but were actively involved in related initiatives and creating new materials. One of these is Szabolcs who initiated the first Holocaust education package. His innovative mentality was expressed elsewhere as well: he founded the first association of History teachers and organized the first conference about the Roma. Klára, another initiator, advised several EaH-related NGOs on how to improve their activity and suggested expanding their scope to elementary school students. Both teachers are also “influencers,” who share their thoughts and opinions in conferences and on social media with a relatively large following.

The well-trained teachers. Teachers of this group did not initiate new materials and were not opinion leaders in EaH. However, they participate in training related to EaH, are particularly interested in the topic and pay extra attention to it in classes. They use creative methods to teach and can be considered involved and conscientious educators about the Holocaust. A fourth teacher, Pál shares some attributes of an “initiator” and others of a “best practice teacher,” having attended several

52 The name of the camp, and all other identifying details, has been changed.

training programmes and being quite active in the field of EaH but not creating new materials or influencing a large number of colleagues on how to approach the topic.

The free spirits. The majority of the teachers did not participate at all in any types of training related to EaH. This does not mean, however, that they are not interested in the topic. Rather, it indicates their dislike of being “trained” and their strong preference for working autonomously. As Kálmán explicitly said, he “avoids” these trainings, but tries to independently locate and bring to class many sources that he thinks are appropriate and uses several kinds of alternative toolkits. Csaba was the only one who admitted that he is not particularly interested in the history of the twentieth century (including the Holocaust) but even he offered more on the topic than what was required by the curriculum, adding aspects of the Roma genocide that were of particular interest to him.

The students: A homogeneous group with some unique characteristics

Most respondents reported that the majority of their students come from an “average” socio-economic background (One teacher teaches in a school with disadvantaged students and three work in “elite” schools where students have privileged socio-economic status).

In terms of schools, religiosity was mentioned only in the case of two Catholic schools, but for the most part, this characteristic was absent from the school descriptions. Religion did not play a role in the description of the students either. While quite a few teachers shared stories about Jewish students, their origins were often unknown to teacher, students and sometimes even the Jewish student themselves. For example, Klára described how one of her students unexpectedly learnt of his Jewish origins during a Jewish cemetery cleaning that she organized: only then was he told by his parents that his grandparent lay in that cemetery. As Klára phrased it, talking about origins is a sort of “taboo” in Hungary, so to manage the situation she brought up her German origins. Klára also said that sometimes Jewish students start to talk about their identity only when some “related topic” arises, such as the Middle East conflict. The fact that often neither the teachers nor the students are aware of their Jewish origins reflects the way this topic is handled in Hungarian society, for various historical and sociological reasons.

In terms of engagement with EaH, teachers described their students as located between two ends of a scale. At one end are classrooms where only a few students are interested in any kind of topic including EaH. Teachers of such classrooms feel quite pessimistic about what can be achieved with education. Gyula and Sára, who have been teaching for more than 30 years, exemplify this attitude. As Sára said, sometimes she feels they are “trying in vain.” On the other end of the scale are engaged and motivated classrooms whose students were eager to learn about the Holocaust. The majority of the teachers located their students somewhere in the middle and described having more and less active and interested students.

Three teachers said that students are more interested in the twentieth century than in previous periods and some even said that they are especially interested in learning about the Holocaust. Others felt that everything can be interesting if the teacher uses “interesting sources” as Gusztáv

put it or if he or she can “create an attitude” as Melinda noted. Tamás also said that students’ interest is piqued once a conversation begins:

One student argued that he thought hiding was a good idea, a good solution, and there was like a quick response, maybe without raising their hand, by another student, that that’s not the case, as it can only worsen the family’s situation if they are found, so that their fate would become even worse and maybe suddenly I couldn’t react to the situation, so that okay, arguments and let’s discuss, because I think the goal was to go through the story of fate. But it was good, for example, to see that they were interested in the whole thing. If they weren’t interested, they wouldn’t have said anything about it.

Students of today are more digitized, less rebellious

Many teachers made some comparison between the students today and how they were years ago. The main difference that they highlighted between “then” and “now” was digitization. Nearly all teachers felt that it influenced the way students relate to some topics. On the one hand, the more pessimistic educators felt that digitization had a negative effect on students. As Sára explicitly phrased it, they are less interested in things “nowadays” than before: “In particular, in the current generation, there is a very, very high reduction in attention and concentration. Interest as well. Problems with comprehension.” Other teachers said that today’s students are a “digital generation” who “prefer watching things, clicking etc.” One of them even said that they like violence due to the “brutal video games” and that is why they find the figure of Hitler and the topic of “dictatorship exciting.” Other teachers noted the changes caused by digitization in students but did not see it as a problem. Szabolcs felt that the ratio between interested and less interested students has not changed over time and that digitization had no impact on it, while Csaba explicitly said that he doesn’t like these kinds of comparisons. However, he did notice some change in students who today are, to his eyes, “less rebellious” than they should be.

Thematic analysis of the interviews

Since 2020, organizational changes in the Hungarian school system significantly increased the central control of school staff and principals and the new core curriculum introduced in 2020 was the subject of criticism for changes directly impinging on EaH. At the same time, some educational activities related to EaH have been implemented, such as the compulsory Holocaust Memorial Day in schools and governmental support of certain extra-curricular initiatives such as teacher training sessions at Yad Vashem (for a full overview, see the literature review section). The thematic analysis of the interviews reflects this duality.

Theme 1: Two main EaH goals, one historical, one social

Respondents described two main goals for EaH:

1) **To contextualize the Holocaust by describing the “big picture.”** Nearly all of the teachers think that the most important goal is to describe the process that led to the Holocaust, within its full historical context. This contextualization, however, was differentially interpreted: Some took it to

mean teaching the history of the Jewish people, the discrimination and antisemitism they faced throughout history, while others considered the context of the Holocaust to be the story of modern antisemitism and the specific path that led from discrimination to the genocide. For example, Szabolcs tries to explain to his students that Jewish people were not allowed to buy land and Gyula teaches about the discrimination against Jewish people in the Middle Ages to show that “it was not a Nazi invention.” Others describe how the concrete process of discrimination started in Hungary after the First World War. Pál summarized it thus:

I always want to show them that this is a process. It was a step-by-step thing that was made up of many small things. If this was still possible, then the next step can be taken. If that is the case, then comes the next one.

Sára commented:

For me it is the way we get there and how society can be convinced to – to assist in doing so. How to do so. How to understand that.

2) **To decontextualize the possibility of genocide.** The other recurring goal of EaH that teachers elucidated was the wish to illustrate that genocide can occur with any kind of group under any circumstances, to anyone and at any time. Melinda and Csaba quoted the well-known saying that we must learn history in order to avoid repeating it. Melinda mentioned the refugee crisis that has the potential to foster discrimination, “because they can incite hatred on that level.” Csaba also said that history has to be learned in order to make good decisions in the present. Similarly, Tamás said students may react differently as adults to “warning signs,” if they learn today what they are and how to recognize them. Klára tries to illustrate that it can happen with anyone when she puts her black-and-white childhood picture next to pictures of Holocaust child victims and challenges the class to figure out which one is different from the others; the “correct answer” being that there is no real difference between the photos, something that hugely surprised the students.

Theme 2. The impact of family stories and their relation to levels of interest in EaH

Except for Gyula, who said that “nothing” interesting happened in his family, almost all the teachers shared some stories of persecution from the twentieth century. Interestingly, only a few of them connected their special interest in EaH directly to these family stories. In some stories the male teachers’ ancestors fought or were in captivity in one of the twentieth-century wars. One female teacher mentioned that her grandmother had to hide from Soviet soldiers to protect herself from sexual assault. Teachers of German origin described their family’s deportation stories but did not portray them as traumatic or as an essential part of their family identity. One teacher had a family member who was deported to the Gulag and some teachers had a personal family story of Holocaust victims, due to their Jewish origin. In short, these teachers were “up close and personal” to the traumatic events of twentieth-century history.

Different legacy stories in relation to the Jews and the Holocaust also appeared in the interviews. Sára shared that her father would tell stories about his good relationship with Jewish forced labourers at the front, but that he also held a position in the Horthy government that put the family in a difficult position during Communism. A bystander story was described in the interview with Melinda, who was speculating whether her grandmother could have known about the deportation of the Jewish people in her town and concluded that she did not. Pál thought it important to emphasize that his grandparents bought a house from a Jewish man after he returned from Auschwitz, in a legal manner and paid for it a “fair price.” With this story he tried to prove that his family were not like many others, who confiscated the properties of those deported. Another vignette of his family narrative was of Jewish forced laborers who rested for a while in their garden, among them the famous Hungarian poet, Miklós Radnóti. As he summarized, the Holocaust had been part of his life “first unconsciously, later more consciously.” Pál relates his interest in the Holocaust, an interest which began back in kindergarten, to these family stories. Many of the respondents mentioned that they use their personal stories in teaching to bring the topic of the twentieth century closer to the students. However, as Pál noted, this requires a “safe space”: if there is, for example, an antisemitic headmaster, it won’t be a safe environment for sharing such stories. And Sára concluded: “I think that the twentieth century is very interesting. In practice, one teaches one’s own life.”

Tamás summarized the impact of family stories of everyday twentieth-century life in Hungary and also pointed out his “mission” as a teacher:

I think a Hungarian feature is that victims and sinners can appear together at the dining table on a Sunday [pauses]. And there are those who are both. If we think about it, in the twentieth century we experienced a lot of the fate that befell Hungarian Jewry and the reign of terror of the ‘50’s because of the Communists. And I’m saying that we have to start doing something about it, but perhaps the best thing is to clean this wound and then bandage it up and then say yes, so in the future we will try not to inflict such a wound on ourselves.

Theme 3: Teachers are critical of textbooks and new national curriculum

The majority of the teachers we interviewed were critical of the current curriculum and/or textbook reforms. Only three educators did not see the textbooks as problematic, and one had an ambiguous perspective (noting their “pros and cons”). Most respondents also criticized the systematic and content issues in teaching in general and specifically as regards EaH. Consequently, or possibly as its cause, many of the teachers were explicitly and generally critical towards the current right-wing regime.

Szabolcs and the association of history teachers that he founded criticized the new textbook in EaH both for its content and for its authorship by pro-government historians. He also raised topical questions about current textbooks and curriculum, for their whitewashing of Hungarian responsibility in the Holocaust and in general, and for inaccurate teaching about the history of Jewry. General critiques of the new textbook from other teachers include that the textbook’s language is too political, the textbook is not well structured and there are not enough sources attached.

In relation to EaH, three teachers criticized the discontinuity of the older textbooks in terms of the story of the Jewish people. As Klára described it:

I teach, that is to say, on the one hand, aiming to have content related to the Jews from even earlier, not only obviously from the ancient times, or the state of Israel, King David and the Torah, and the religion in a nutshell, because very often it is about them in ancient times and then wow, look suddenly in the twentieth century and mass murders. So, then, what is this then?

Another problem is the unbalanced way in which different topics are discussed. Two teachers said that the history of the Huns has become overrepresented in the textbooks in recent years.⁵³ Kálmán noticed that somehow *Trianon*⁵⁴ and the crimes of communism are much more emphasized than the Holocaust in the textbooks.

A recurring criticism of all the textbooks is their coverage of Roma and the Roma Holocaust. For a long time, this was not part of the curriculum and only recently has the topic received attention. István researched and analysed how the Roma appear in textbooks. He found that despite some improvements, they are still very much underrepresented, and this is supported by other teachers' experiences as well. Some compared the current situation of the Roma to the historical situation of the Jews at the level of discrimination. Most of them feel that the two genocides cannot be compared because the annihilation of the Jewish people was more systematic.

Theme 4: Enhancing the curriculum with creative pedagogies, local angles and additional resources

The teachers put in extra effort and try to find their own strategies to handle the problems with the textbooks and the curriculum. Many of the teachers correct the “shortcomings” of the current textbooks by bringing extra sources and doing other activities to provide balance. As Gyula put it, however the curriculum changes, he won't change the way he teaches about the Holocaust:

I will not change. It is therefore certain that I will not teach anything other than what I think is a fact. Therefore, neither NAT⁵⁵, the new NAT, will influence me, nor the ways in which certain politicians express themselves. [Pauses]. I have seen many films and many documentaries. I have been to Auschwitz, that is, I have seen it, I have gone through both camps – there is nothing to argue about.

53 There is a historically incorrect theory that Hungarians are related to the Huns. In right-wing circles this theory is gaining popularity. Recently, some conferences have been organized about the Huns, using public money.

54 After World War I, about two-thirds of Hungary's land was taken away by the Allied forces and handed over to neighbouring countries. The peace treaty was signed in the Grand Trianon Palace in Versailles, France in 1920 and has been considered a national tragedy ever since.

55 NAT is the abridged version of the Hungarian National Core Curriculum.

To counter the tendencies of textbooks and curricula to shorten the topic of the Holocaust, respondents add sources, lessons and topics of their own. For example, some try to overcome the discontinuity problem described above, by finding various occasions on which to discuss the history of Jewry.

Almost all of the teachers mentioned additions they make to the compulsory curriculum of EaH. Five of them mentioned the trip to Auschwitz that they organize every year as an optional “extra” programme. Pál described it as a “defining experience” for the students. Gyula remarked that those students who decide not to participate are at an educational disadvantage later on.

Xénia said that she uses group work and interactive methods, while Kálmán asks the students to create their own family trees, which is the “most prominent” way of “sensitization.” Many teachers mentioned that they use personal stories during EaH as a “toolkit.” As they described, this is an effective way to generate student interest in the topic. Most of the teachers report using the diary of Anne Frank for this purpose, noting that students become very connected to her story, partly because they are almost the same age as she was. Some even make comparisons to their own life. Tamás describes them as “emotionally involved” rather than intellectually cognizant of “names of the concentration camps.” In his example, some of the students identified themselves with the situation of Anne Frank so “successfully” that they made comparisons between the then current pandemic lockdown and ghettoization – in which case he needed to clarify the difference between the two.

Pál uses extra resources such as video testimonies, movies, photos, urban walks or visits to exhibitions. Klára uses interactive tools, visual art, and literature. She also usually invites Holocaust survivors or initiates project-based learning that make the students more eager to learn about the topic:

The truth is that I am not an advocate of the Prussian teaching method. I use experience-based pedagogy, gamification. I focus on learning with objects and interactive things because I observed that if we stimulate children’s senses, then certain information may be retained better. [...] So, from fifth grade I start to build a connection with the history of Jewry. Not just in lessons. I have a very enthusiastic study group and I give them tasks. There is a wonderful synagogue in Szombathely, which is straight across from our school. It can be seen from all classrooms. So, it is self-explanatory.

Finally, some teachers mentioned that they use the local Jewish heritage in their teaching activity: they visit the synagogue with the students or take them to a thematic tour in the city. István was the only teacher who mentioned that he uses the stories of Roma Holocaust survivors as well due to his special interest in Roma history and culture. He also screens movies that thematize the Holocaust, to be discussed with the students afterwards.

Theme 5: Antisemitism among students a “manageable” problem, less so among colleagues

Antisemitism is a constant presence for the teachers we interviewed. Among students they described it as being at a “manageable” level. Kálmán even compared it favourably to the level of anti-Roma feelings that he thinks are more well-embedded into their thinking and therefore more difficult to handle. Most said that students do not have well-grounded arguments or solid knowledge, rather they “hear things” at home and just repeat them noncommittally.

Melinda shared a story of a student whose family was deported because of their German origins and according to her, as a result the whole family became right-wing. She said she could fully understand his reasons:

For example, I have a student in whom this, this has caused such a political deviation because he traces his family tragedy back there. And his family, for example, came back later. Well, they took everything from them, and he was very strongly right-wing. Politically right-. He became a right-winger in terms of his political orientation. He is a fantastically valuable kid and very-. And understand-. And I absolutely understand what the reason is. They were never Nazis or anything like that, but they were moved completely unjustifiably.

Sára gave some examples of the kinds of arguments usually made by students: “why do we need to learn about such things” and why not about “national traditions or Hungarian history?” “It’s been discussed to death,” “we talk about it too much,” or “it’s all over the news.” Many of the teachers said that when these kinds of statements occur, they try to create a comfortable atmosphere where things can be discussed, or as István describes it, “confront them in a non-aggressive way” and this usually works. Gusztáv described it as the teachers’ responsibility to teach “that there are statements, there are suggestions that are beyond a certain limit.”

At his previous school Pál experienced “antisemitic, homophobic, racist attitudes” among the students, which he felt were “brought with them” from home. To counter these attitudes, he used to invite NGOs offering informal education sessions on these topics. When students once said to him, “we should be talking about it for sure, but let’s just make it clear that Auschwitz is a lie. It did not happen,” he suggested some books and documentary movies to alter their way of thinking. However, he believes that not everyone can be changed: “only those who allow you or who want to change.”

Csaba offered two examples of confronting the antisemitic statements of his students. His responses teach us as much about his own prejudices as those of his students. When one student asked him why Jewish people are “more influential,”

I explained to him that New York is the centre of world economy and one tenth of the population of New York is Jewish, so that the group is clearly more influential than if-, that it’s logical in itself, there’s no world conspiracy or anything like that.

Note that Csaba did not confront the argument as much as he offered an “explanation.” Later in his interview he spoke of the historical reasons for overrepresentation of Jews in the Soviet Republic:

I also mentioned the injustice, even within the nation, that the rural Jews, the ordinary merchants and milkmen, were taken to Auschwitz, while those accused of the traditional stereotypes of harming the country and such, the big capitalists of Budapest were not taken away because the governor stopped the deportation of the citizens of Budapest, so from then on, it didn't work out, not even in its own logic. It's those people being destroyed who have truly never harmed anyone.

By calling it “injustice” and by saying that rural Jewish people “have truly never harmed anyone,” Csaba seems to be suggesting that urban Jewish people did harm people. This demonstrates how powerful the old stereotypes of the “urban Jewish people” are, even in the case of someone who is otherwise not antisemitic at all.

Many teachers shared stories of colleagues from their closer or wider circles who think differently about the importance of EaH or who are antisemitic. Kálmán noticed a tendency in his Catholic church school towards the re-emergence of a right-wing, distortion-based rhetoric among his colleagues. Melinda described how one of her colleagues was openly racist and proudly shared his racist and antisemitic posts on his social media profile. More covertly, Klára's colleagues said to her that they do not understand why she wants to deal with such a “sad topic” as the Jewish cemetery, especially during Covid when many lost family members in the pandemic.

Compared to the antisemitism among students which they know how to manage, the respondents did not find antisemitism in the teachers' lounge as easy to navigate. It seems that confrontation is uncomfortable, and they prefer to avoid communication about this issue.

Theme 6: Teachers experience control from “above” in EaH

As mentioned above, all the teachers who accepted our invitation to take part in this research required permission from the director of the school, who sometimes also requested permission from the school district head. One teacher who first accepted our invitation withdrew her participation after we conducted the interview with her. We can only assume that the centralized education system that made her feel unsafe in an interview situation, played a part in her decision.

A majority of the teachers mentioned that they noticed some kind of external pressure and control in their work in general and in relation to EaH specifically. Teachers shared these stories only when they were assured that the interview would be anonymized. Szabolcs cannot benefit from such anonymity. As a leader of the History Teachers' Association, he shares his criticism of the education reforms in the media and on other platforms. For this, he and his association are almost entirely discredited by the current political leadership. He even shared a story of a teacher who was questioned by KLIKK (The Centre for Education in Hungary) the morning after she shared one of Szabolcs' social media posts.

Pál noticed that his school district centre does not welcome the idea of inviting human rights NGOs (e.g., Amnesty International) to school, nor do they encourage informal education about Judaism, the Jewish community or the Roma. Eventually, he described how a kind of self-censorship set in due to this “chilling effect.” Klára also shared a story about the ban of Amnesty:

Because they do not just talk about the Holocaust, but all kinds of minorities and imagine this, I wanted to invite them. They also provide free classes for students, but also for teachers and parents. And I have indicated this to the head of school that I very much want to request the “Hate”⁵⁶ lesson from Pest and they would do it. He said that he is okay with it, but that he had to indicate this to the KLIKK [the Centre for Education in Hungary]. And imagine that the Deputy Director of the KLIKK wrote to the head of the KLIKK of Szombathely, who was not willing to do it. He made a call to Budapest, to the KLIKK, who put us on a blacklist immediately. This was about one and a half months before the new little law,⁵⁷ which banned everything from schools. So, it does not matter that I did not want to have a lesson on gender change or lesbians, but I wanted the “Hate” lesson. They blocked it completely. This cannot happen. That is the situation today in Hungary.

In another case, Klára and her students joined a campaign related to Holocaust remembrance by posting a photo on her own public social media profile that was later published in a journal as well. The very next day, someone from KLIKK called the director of her school to reprimand her for not asking for permission from the director of the school to do this.

Kálmán, who teaches in a Catholic school, said that the school itself would disagree with him if they would know how he teaches about the responsibility of the Catholic church in the Holocaust. As he put it, he “might be left without the job.” In the case of Xénia, neither KLIKK nor the school but the municipality “suggested” removing a Holocaust exhibition she curated, although as she explained, it was not because of its content.

Theme 7: Teachers’ specific educational settings are relatively supportive

Most of the respondents work in a school that is less centralized and in which the principal and the school leadership support their work. Melinda even said explicitly that she is working in a “very liberal” school, István and Csaba used the word “open,” Gyula also highlighted that the teachers and the principal are pretty much “alike.” A rare opposite example is Kálmán as described above.

56 These lessons focus on hate crime and what to do when a minority becomes marginalized.

57 In July 2021 a new decree was accepted by the Parliament according to which the only NGOs permitted to conduct informal education about sexuality in schools are those approved by the government. In this interview Klára refers to this decree.

Theme 8: Covid restrictions negatively influenced EaH

Most of the teachers said that the pandemic had a negative effect on EaH, which was partly related to the negative consequences of online teaching in general.⁵⁸ Three of them mentioned that their study trip to Auschwitz was cancelled due to the restrictions. Many said that during online lessons the biggest problem was that they did not see the reactions of students, which are especially important in EaH. A majority of the teachers saw digital education as a challenge but some of them found it extremely hard. As Sára put it, she lost the “connection” with the students because oral conversation was not possible. Gyula called digital education a “complete disaster.” These were the two teachers who highlighted the differences between students in the past and present and expressed negative attitudes towards digitalization in general.

Secondary themes in the interviews

Competitive comparisons between the Holocaust and other historical trauma.

Some teachers mentioned that the revisionist tendencies in EaH reflect a wider problem that is not restricted to the field of education. Most of the teachers referred to the highly politicized attitude to the Holocaust in relation to other historical traumas in the public discourse and the consequences of this for education. As Szabolcs noted:

Well, I would say that in the public discourse, too, there is this very unique question about whether it is Trianon [the 1920 peace treaty] or the Holocaust that hurt Hungary. I believe that this is Hungary. This is the question. [...] Why should it be one or the other? Why should this question even arise?⁵⁹

Kálmán mentioned the emphasis on *Trianon* and the crimes of communism over the Holocaust. He also referred to a “common” antisemitic statement that because people of Jewish origin were overrepresented in the Soviet Republic, they “caused” *Trianon*. He tried to solve this apparent contradiction by saying that “for most of the Jews *Trianon* was as painful as for anybody else.”

Melinda also discussed the question of the ratio of different topics. She feels that it can be counterproductive if the Holocaust or the history of the Jews is discussed too often: “It will awaken resentment in people after a while.” She added a rhetorical question: “Why do we not talk, for example, about the Kurdish genocide?” With this, she herself to some extent took part in the competitive victimhood discourse.

58 Teachers in Hungary have been striking against the decree that deprives them of the right to strike. They are protesting for an increase in their salary as well as for reduced teaching hours.

59 This quote was slightly modified for style and clarity, while preserving the meaning of the original statement.

Emotions expressed by students considered a measure of success

Attitudinal changes are not easily detectable. To assess success in changing their students' attitudes, teachers tended to search for immediate emotional reactions, admitting that "long-term" effects are unknown. Tamás said that there was once "complete silence" in the room when the Holocaust was discussed, and he could not decide if it was a good or a bad sign. Later on, he figured out that they were so moved that they could not react. Pál told of a trip to Auschwitz when a skinhead student started to cry when he saw an old female Holocaust survivor lighting a candle:

A person appeared from the fog like a ghost. She walked down the stairs, knelt down, lit a candle and started praying there. And then, at that time, it became extremely silent and when we were leaving, I saw that that boy put his hood up, so that I did not see him crying. And at that time, I thought that my work was worth doing and worth continuing."

Pál also told of a time when the son of one of his antisemitic colleagues attended Pál's class. Pál once invited students from a nearby Jewish school to meet his class, and this student started to talk with them. Later, this student said to his father that it was his best day in school.

Klára also shared a story from a visit to Auschwitz when a student kept asking her how it could happen; and because he realized that the Hungarian nation was also responsible, he was even "ashamed" of being Hungarian. Gyula also shared a story from one of the Auschwitz trips when some of the students said at one point that they could not enter any more gas chambers, because they were so emotionally exhausted. Although the long-term effects of these types of interventions cannot be measured, these stories were told as indications of the efforts that teachers make to speak to students' hearts and not only to their minds.

Summary: Thematic integration in relation to previous studies

We identified 8 major and 2 secondary themes in the interviews with Hungarian teachers, as well as several attributes of the teachers and their students. We summarize them in Figure 2.

The main thematic core in the interviews was identified as the conflict between the educators and their surroundings, which include popular opinion regarding "outsiders" and Jews, the nationalistic government and its restrictive policies, and the highly centralized and controlling educational system. Many teachers reacted to the attempt at central control by avoiding EaH training (considering it another way of "forcing" them to act and teach in a certain way) and developed self-taught expertise in the subject. A few directly oppose the government by creating alternative programmes for EaH and still others do participate in training, but are critical of governmental policies, nonetheless. From this core theme of "teachers versus the system," we organized the other themes as either explaining where the teachers come from (their family stories, their EaH goals and ideology), how they react to their surroundings and what pedagogical principles they adopt in response; or as describing the public sphere, which reflects a xenophobic sentiment, a nationalist leadership and a centralized controlling educational system. To these we added one conducive element (the relative support of the local educational leadership), and one constraint (Covid, which seemed to exacerbate the unengaged attitudes of today's digitized youth).

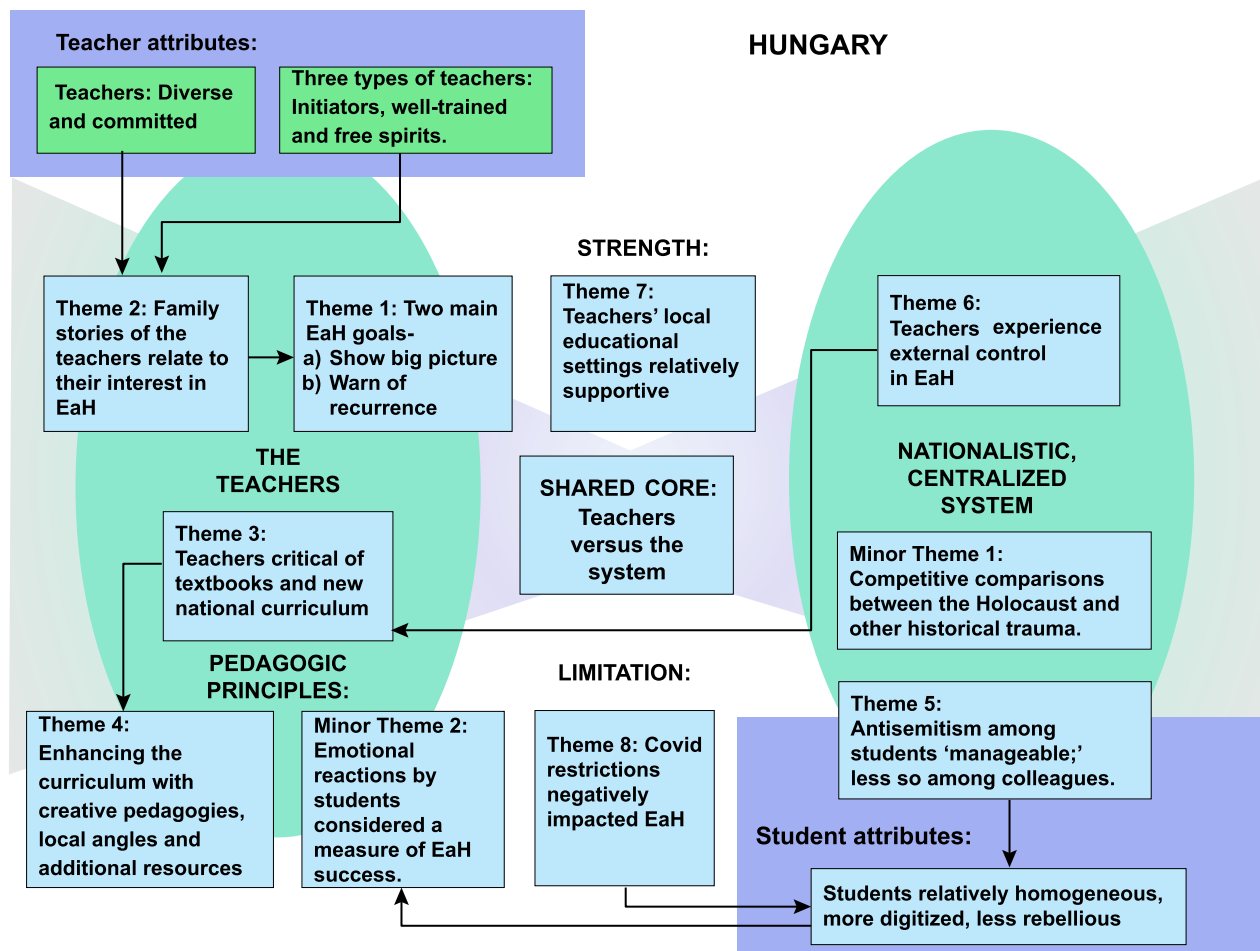


Figure 2: Thematic integration of Hungarian teachers' interviews

How do these findings compare to previous studies on EaH in Hungary? The main trends of educational centralization, government-controlled curriculum (Bálint et al. 2020; Benzinger 2017) and prevalent victimhood discourse (Félix 2021, Pető 2016) have been well-documented in recent years. In this sense, the teachers are reflecting what it is to live and teach in a society that is shifting in these directions. Most respondents emphatically oppose these trends, in favour of a humanistic style of EaH.

In the literature review, a global form of Holocaust memory was attributed to governmental initiatives as well but the teachers don't experience it that way. They experience themselves and the government at opposite ends: one defending democracy and the other promoting nationalism. It is possible that the teachers read "between the lines": while the Hungarian government wishes to be considered a promoter of cosmopolitan Holocaust memory, it is less interested in its underlying values of democracy, freedom and equality. This means that the IHRA version of EaH is paid lip service but not deeply applied. Interestingly, our study differs from the study of Forrás-Bíró (2016a), in which 33% of teachers experienced unsupportive or hostile school environments as regards EaH. Our respondents enjoyed the local support of their schools, in an otherwise challenging climate.

Previous studies have explored EaH teacher training in Hungary, attributing the dearth of trained teachers to limited access to training programmes among some teachers and to the incomplete institutionalization of EaH (Kovács 2016b). Our study uncovered another possible motive for lack of formal training: Many teachers we interviewed were loath to “receive training” from institutional bodies, perhaps equating them with governmental messages (although in fact the training is highly professional). On the positive side, though, these teachers seem to have worked hard to self-train and are no less committed to EaH or creative in their pedagogies than those teachers who have undergone EaH training.

3.4.4. Findings from the German sample⁶⁰

The teachers: Focused on an ethical mission

The German teachers interviewed vary in terms of age and experience, gender, religion, culture and political attitudes. The sample included East- and West-German teachers; migrants from Turkey and Russia; Christians, Jews and atheists; conservative, social-democratic, and left-wing voters. Their teaching context varies in terms of school type and funding (private/public), as well as regional and milieu structures.

Their family backgrounds often incorporate WWII-related stories of bystanders and perpetrators, but also some victims and family refugee stories. The narratives within the family histories were diverse. In some, a Nazi past and persecution of the Jews was present, and respondents actively debated and reflected about this within the family. In other cases, this issue was absent, and this occurred in all types of families (e.g., with a history of perpetrators, migrants, Jewish, etc.) Some teachers described unsuccessful attempts to discuss the Nazi period in depth with their parents or grandparents.

Most respondents kept their personal and professional experiences separate, in the interviews as well as in their teaching practice. They defined themselves as professionals and tended to skip the personal aspects of their stories, including personal family history in relation to the Holocaust. Only when asked further about their own family’s involvement and handling of the issue were respondents willing to talk about it. The Jewish teacher in our sample, Ruth, was an exception in that she addressed her personal history of her own volition and linked this personal history to her teaching in the classroom.

Most teachers do not remember what it was like to study as students about the Holocaust, nor do they recount those classes as having had a great impact on their own teaching. Their preoccupation with the Holocaust tends to have been influenced by key biographical experiences and encounters, often with family members, who sparked their thinking about the Holocaust. For some, this also took place during their own political socialization in their youth or during their studies.

60 This section is written by Claudia Globisch and Maximilian Hauer.

Among one group of teachers without perpetrator or bystander legacies, we observed a special form of appropriation and preoccupation with one's own identity through dealing with the Holocaust. For example, Erdil, a teacher with a migrant, non-perpetrator background, for whom the Holocaust had no family significance, assimilated into the German majority society by dealing with the Holocaust and adopting its relevance. Ruth, a migrant-Jewish teacher for whom the Holocaust is a story of suffering that shaped her identity and the history of her family, embraced Jewish particularity and re-appropriated Judaism after migration to Germany from Russia, where she experienced forced Soviet assimilation. Gabriel, of German American-Jewish origins, takes a universalistic perspective, rejecting the denial of responsibility in general and doesn't insist on the singularity of the Holocaust.

Despite the very different contexts in which they live and work, all teachers report a predominantly supportive atmosphere at their schools for teaching EaH. They report good relations with their colleagues and supervisors, ample support and opportunities for extra training. The teachers are generally satisfied with the curricula and materials available and accept the resources offered to them gladly and without reservation. There is very little tension between teachers and state institutions, and we heard no reports of teachers feeling oppressed or patronized by "official bodies." The current media and educational landscape are perceived in such a way that the hegemonic understanding is an enlightened one.

Although teachers do report with criticism a lack of time for the complex topic of the Holocaust, this lack of time is perceived more as a technical issue than as an ideological-political conflict with "the system." Too little time for History as a subject, too many important other topics or requirements for the final exams ("Abitur") seem to be the culprit. Most teachers then look for niches, points of connection to general subject blocks, such as media literacy, prejudice or dictatorship, and use general subjects to deal with the special topic of the Holocaust.

Apart from the limited time frame that some teachers mention, they describe their approach as very free—in terms of methods and content—to teach EaH and free from state control. Some teachers report a critical problem with classroom materials and knowledge about Israel-related antisemitism among their colleagues, and a handful of teachers described outlier colleagues expressing some sort of antisemitic sentiment – such as one who described the trip to Auschwitz as "a vacation" or used the term "*Auschwitzkeule*" (Auschwitz club) and devalued the importance of their work.

All teachers are of the opinion that EaH is important and must be taught both because of Germany's National Socialist history, due to current antisemitic and racist incidents in Germany (Hanau, Halle) and due to the involvement of the far-right AfD party in national politics. However, there are also isolated sceptical voices that implicitly lament the dominance of Holocaust memory in German society and in the study of history.

First and foremost, however, our interviews display acceptance of past guilt, not as personal but as ancestral guilt, linked to a sense of responsibility for the present and future. Here, working through the memory of the Holocaust and keeping it alive is seen as a necessary precaution against a shift to the right. For some respondents, making things better in the here-and-now also implies

raising awareness of Israel-related antisemitism, a locus where dissatisfaction with colleagues and institutions is voiced.

At the level of one's own family, the admission of guilt vague; we hear stories of victims, expulsion, and helpers; less of perpetrators from within the teachers' stories. The stories told are not politicized (in the sense of a discourse of exoneration), and their impact somehow remains diffuse.

The teachers we interviewed reject any kind of relativization, even the comparison with other violent crimes (e.g., colonialism or Stalinism). This should be considered against the backdrop of a broader German discourse, in which, especially in recent years, there is a dispute between positions that advocate the singularity of the Holocaust and those that ascribe a comparable significance to colonial crimes, also known as "*Historikerstreit 2.0*" (Historians' Dispute 2.0).

Finally, we noted that all teachers fashioned for themselves an educational mission with an ethical dimension: Students should be educated ethically and develop an awareness of human rights violations. Holocaust education for these teachers is not only about imparting knowledge, but about achieving goals of character, virtue and value education, and educating for democracy. Depending on their primary goal and on their own understanding of the Holocaust, teachers used various methods that went beyond intellectual mediation and strongly emphasized empathy and experiential mediation.

Students' profile: Range and variety

School diversity levels vary. There was a great deal of diversity among the students and the schools that the teachers discussed. Our sample included schools in rural areas, as well as in medium-sized towns and major cities. Some of the institutions are located in Eastern Germany, others in Western Germany; some in prosperous regions, others in parts of Germany that have suffered economic and demographic decline over the last few decades. Within big cities, some schools are located in well-off neighbourhoods, others in rather stigmatized areas. School types ranged from prestigious grammar schools to vocational schools, with many gradations in between. Three of the teachers work at fee-paying private schools.

These educational settings vary in terms of their religious and ethnic diversity. In general, there is a tendency towards less diversity in rural areas, in Eastern Germany and in high-profile grammar schools. Conversely, markers for schools with high levels of diversity are low and medium level schools and being located in big cities and in Western Germany. The term "diversity" itself ranges in meaning: Some of the students with a "migratory background" have parents or grandparents who came to Germany decades ago, while other students immigrated to Germany themselves only recently. Immigrant students (or their families) come from Southern Europe; Eastern Europe and Russia; Turkey; the Middle East (Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Afghanistan); Asian and African countries. Only two teachers report experiences with Jewish students. One additional source of diversity is that two of the schools are run by the Protestant church.

Students are typically highly interested in the Holocaust. Most of the students express a high level of interest in the Holocaust, National Socialism and WWII. In most cases, they have many questions

and pay attention in class when it is about the Holocaust, especially compared to other topics. Kerstin reports that the Holocaust is a topic

that the students are *extremely* interested in. [...] I have generally observed that students have a very, very, very great interest in... Hitler and um... Nazis, [...] so I guess all the things Hitler did, um, no other person has done that, so [laughs] [...] they are often very, very impatient to finally find out what this is actually all about.

A similar sentiment was expressed by Erdil, who works at a school with many students from an Arab background, whose parents emigrated from Turkey:

I experience the atmosphere, you know, and I experience that they are calm, they are attentive, they are interested. They want to understand how this could happen. Why? And it is not like – I mean, this constant media representation when you look at certain reports, you must almost feel like a hero if you somehow address the topic of National Socialism or Israel. But the latter are the hours where I have the least problems. I have more problems when I discuss French absolutism, than I have ... simply because the topic is more boring for them, no reference to the present, no personal point of reference.

Amongst younger students in particular, interest in the topic is sometimes blended with an ambivalent “fascination.” Kerstin and Reinhold told us that their students display “a fascination with the horror.” Kerstin reasons this might be because they are shocked that ordinary people could commit such crimes. However, she also notices a certain fascination towards the military aspects of the topic, especially among young boys. Thorsten adds that it might be the extreme nature of National Socialism that fascinates young people in particular. Melina thinks her students are fascinated by the self-confidence and vitality that an SS officer represents in a photograph she uses in her classes. Holger and Lukas think that students are somehow attracted by “the forbidden,” the taboo connected to National Socialism in Germany.

This fascination is linked to a very vague pseudo-knowledge about National Socialism. Typically, the Holocaust is taught in 8th or 9th grade in History lessons, but teachers report that students already have heard about the topic much earlier, from their parents, or, more often, from movies, social media etc. Due to these popular fragments of knowledge, students often have the feeling of already being familiar with the topic, Andreas says. Holger, another teacher, agrees. However, he states that, in reality –

Very few students have knowledge about the Holocaust. I would almost go as far to say many do not know the term. Um, but because... most, already by fifth grade, uh- very much follow this personalization of “Adolf Hitler.” So, his name is always present, and a student has asked me, this happened two years ago, and the quote stuck with me, in fifth grade he asked: “When are we going to deal with Adolf Hitler?” [Interviewer laughs] And that is of course, that is of course a problem, um- those who know this, they know this person, they also know somehow this, this apparent myth about it, about National Socialism. They have certainly heard something about Jews, but that is all half-knowledge, false knowledge, if not

dangerous knowledge. And we as a school are perhaps too late [in approaching this topic] in eighth grade.

Several teachers report that students are “touched,” “shocked” or even “shaken” when they learn about the violence of the Holocaust. They seem to feel empathy and connect to the topic. Indeed, the majority of teachers reported an overall curious, concentrated and respectful atmosphere in the classroom, allowing for meaningful teaching and learning about the Holocaust. However, this was not the only set of attitudes to EaH, and in some places it wasn’t even the central one, as we discuss in the following section.

Some students experience Holocaust fatigue and resistance to the topic. Many teachers also shared experiences with defensive attitudes expressed in single incidents or by individual students. In fewer cases, such attitudes were prevalent in certain classes or even reported as common. There were various terms for this: Holocaust fatigue, resistance to EaH or disinterest.

Several teachers report that “Holocaust fatigue” is widespread amongst their students, who voice a weariness with the topic in class. They claim that they have already dealt with the topic repeatedly in the past, though their teachers doubt this given their level of knowledge and the actual curricular framework. Christian, who works at a provincial vocational school in Western Germany and earlier described the AfD-like atmosphere in his school, highlights a climate of Holocaust fatigue:

The students are often overwhelmed or rather sick of it. Uh, and don’t have any interest to hear about this topic in class, yes, this negative attitude is sometimes also very scary. They are sometimes not so open towards this topic. Uh... “Why do we have to deal with that?” “It happened 80 years ago”; “What do we have to do with it?” “Can’t we leave that finally behind?” Uh, these are the usual comments, and that’s within the classes of the upper business school, that lead to the A levels.

Sometimes this weariness is explicitly connected with a nationalist worldview. Other times, a mixture of disinterest and defensiveness can reflect a sense of unwelcome proximity to the events, threatening students’ national identity and presenting as a sense of distance from the events. Victoria, a young teacher who is particularly sceptical of using “emotional” methods in teaching (see Theme 1) observes that some of her students use their emotional “vulnerability” and sensitivity in a defensive way, as a pretext not to get involved in the topic of the Holocaust:

Just lately I notice that the number of students who say something along the lines of: “You don’t need to remember” is increasing. Especially like the Holocaust or the Shoah. Um, that’s the past, we no longer have anything to do with it today.

Another type of defensive Holocaust-fatigue-like comments come from contrarian “taboo breakers”: individual students who play with Nazi rhetoric or symbols in order to provoke moral authorities (noted by six teachers). It is also possible that teachers tend to interpret some incidents in such a way, in order to make them seem harmless and less political.

Among teachers, Holocaust fatigue was rare. One conservative teacher presented remembrance of the Holocaust as a threat or a burden to him and his compatriots, stating that he felt “bombarded” with the topic when he was a student etc. Several other teachers reported similar attitudes among their colleagues but distanced themselves from this attitude personally. Further examples of Holocaust fatigue among students border on antisemitism and will be discussed in Theme 4.

Student politics: Expressions of right-wing attitudes. We heard some expressions of right-wing tropes amongst students described by the teachers in our sample. For example, this, from Christian:

There are very clear comments, that... one connects to the AfD-jargon. Uh well, you can feel... also kind of a shift to the right in the school not only with the students, but also with some colleagues... Uh ... yes, this is just a mirror of society. If the AfD has 94 seats, the 3rd strongest party in the *Bundestag*, well then, the voters have to be somewhere. And they are found in the classes and within the teaching staff as well. [...] well, I guess I will not be the only one to report this but, uh, also many others.

Stefan too notices what he calls “new right-wing thinking”:

You know, what strikes me is that we have students who no longer pass as obvious neo-Nazis, with obvious symbols and blatant statements and an unambiguous right-wing rock music taste, but... that there is rather some sort of tendency to New Right thinking... In other words: patriotism and even nationalism are of major importance, identity or supposed identity is of major importance. So for instance what I noticed recently in this context was that around our school there were quite a few stickers of the *Identitarian Movement*⁶¹... umm... and that’s just the way they argue, so it’s no longer “Foreigners out” but “For a Europe of Fatherlands,” so everyone should return to where they were born and... and in the context of this New Right thinking, which presents itself as a bit intellectual [...] there is also already the danger that antisemitic stereotypes also become more frequent again.

Such examples were not uncommon: 11 of the 20 German teachers mentioned encounters with students who express radical right attitudes, but most referred to individuals rather than to a shift in the political climate. It was much more common to hear about students’ genuine interest and active participation than of their refusal to deal with the Holocaust due to their nationalist worldviews. Also, contrasting cases exist as well. For example, Holger reports that his suburban school in Eastern Germany has become more liberal and tolerant recently, and he describes this as a shift away from a Neo-Nazi subculture.

We did not come across stories about extreme left worldviews among the students. Simon, who was active in antifascist self-defence groups in the 1990s thinks that today’s youth is relatively apolitical,

61 The Identitarian movement is a pan-European nationalist alt-right political ideology that asserts the right of European ethnic groups and white peoples to Western culture and to territories claimed to belong exclusively to them. See in Wikipedia: [Identitarian movement](#).

*Fridays for Future*⁶² notwithstanding. Many teachers implicitly confirm this opinion. Debates around colonialism and racism, which are conducted quite passionately in the public discourse and social movements, do not seem to enter the classroom, especially not through the students and not in the context of EaH.

Thematic analysis of the interviews

Theme 1: EaH provides an occasion to convey different values and pursue various goals

For the majority of teachers, the Holocaust is not a topic like any other. Rather, it holds a high significance for them. This status becomes clear from the extraordinary amount of time that many teachers spend teaching the topic, often actively looking for additional opportunities to include it in their teaching. Some teachers report that they take extra time for EaH at the cost of other topics. Spending time on the topic not only serves to promote knowledge about historical facts. Rather, EaH offers an opportunity (or entails an obligation) to convey key values and instil basic virtues that students should adopt as decent human beings and democratic citizens. In this way, learning about the past is viewed as shaping the present and future.

Although all of the respondents share such a commitment in one way or the other, the specific educational goals pursued beyond transfer of knowledge vary greatly. Four of the teachers in our sample set intellectual goals. In the context of the Holocaust, they wish to endow their students with the capacity for critical, methodically guided reasoning. They try to instil in their students a cautious attitude towards their own cultural and religious traditions (Reinhold), visual and digital representations of the Holocaust (Victoria), Nazi propaganda (Gabriel) and perpetrator narratives (Melina). By learning how to detect and decipher ideological narratives, the students will hopefully develop a capacity for autonomous judgment, which makes them less susceptible to manipulation and demagoguery. This requires critical reading of cultural documents – requiring media competence and historical source criticism – in order to deconstruct their inner structure and logic.

Another sizeable group of teachers aim to reach students emotionally by evoking a purposefully solemn atmosphere. Ruth, a Jewish teacher, structures a complex choreography of a movie screening, followed by five minutes of silence and shared insights into her personal story in order to create a unique experience of commemoration in class. Other teachers who work with emotions acknowledge the difficulty with such pedagogies yet justify their choice. Tatjana, for example, says:

It is about their emotions, and it is about them asking questions and they always have many, many questions. [The interviewer asks about students' reactions to watching difficult movies about the Holocaust] – Yes, um, they are indeed...yes, how can you say, they are shocked in parts. There are also students, eh, that leave the room during the movies for example. [...] they cannot bear it and say: "I can't do this now" [...] they do dare to communicate that they

62 *Fridays for Future* (FFF) is a youth-led and -organised global climate strike movement that started in August 2018, initiated by 15-year-old Greta Thunberg's protests. It has a large following among German youth.

are youth after all. Well, one does not ultimately want... they should not feel responsible, but just should be emotionally touched by it in my view.

Some teachers use EaH in order to raise a universal awareness for human rights violations. Kerstin says: “To me it is very important, in history classes, and social science, such a focus on human rights is very, very important and I always try to include it somewhere, um, as far as this is possible.” In her teaching, she offers a detailed account of the concrete steps in which the German Nazi regime deprived Jews of their rights. Kerstin also encourages her students, many of whom come from migrant and refugee families, to imagine the impact these stigmatizing and excluding measures had on the every-day life of Jews after 1933.

A fourth group of teachers emphasizes the particular importance of antisemitism and related ideologies of National Socialism and try to educate their students about the present dangers and transformations of this ideology (see Theme 4). These respondents also tended to refer to Israel (and Israel-related antisemitism) in their interviews.

A smaller group of teachers wish to convey a republican ethos when educating about the Holocaust. In their narrative, the key lesson of the Holocaust is to defend the democracy inscribed into the post-Nazi German constitution of 1949 (*Grundgesetz*) against totalitarian threats from the political margins. Interestingly, all proponents of this state-centred narrative in our sample were male and active in party politics of the major parties of the centre-left or the centre-right.

Finally, many teachers share a key educational goal of educating towards ethical choice and responsibility, which are available to all even in times of terror and war. They reject any victimhood narrative, taking time and care to discuss options such as resistance, to analyse the immoral choices of the German perpetrators and to offer the message that humans always have choice. It is interesting to see how easily most teachers seem able to accept the perpetrator role of their nation and to integrate it within their identity. This acceptance of a guilty past only seems possible because it is often linked in some way to the idea that while you cannot change the past, you can and must improve the present. In Theme 3, we expound upon this educational goal in terms of historical-educational content.

Theme 2: Pedagogy is experience and skill-oriented; less knowledge-oriented.

One shared goal of all teachers in our sample was to preserve a lively history experience even after all eyewitnesses pass away. They regret that working with eyewitnesses will soon not be possible, as it was a formative experience for their own education about the Holocaust as students.

Eyewitness experiences are apparently being replaced by experiences with the places of the events in relation to the Holocaust or with recorded witness stories (“experiencing the experience”). These must necessarily take place outside of the classroom and usually feature as extracurricular educational work.

Teachers try to make history tangible using three different approaches: experiential, competence-oriented and knowledge-oriented, the latter being less relevant in our sample.

The teachers promoting an experience-oriented strategy organize students' experiences within local or virtual spaces, through city walks and memorial visits or digitally by using apps and videos with contemporary witnesses, by arranging intercultural encounters in Germany (e.g., a Jewish cafe and a kosher workshop, in the case of Simon) or abroad through field trips to Auschwitz, memorial sites, Israel and other locations.

The competence-oriented teachers focus on handling sources. Perpetrator documents are critically analysed in order to develop skills of reflexive media and image analysis. Some teachers incorporate and facilitate creative productions as well.

The knowledge-oriented teachers embed National Socialism in a larger historical story (such as the process leading from disenfranchisement to persecution to deportation) or try to mediate explanations of the Holocaust. This was a minority tendency; see Theme 3.

In sum, there is a broad range of methods employed in teaching practices, making this a diverse, creative and extracurricular educational field.

Theme 3: Teachers rarely embed the Holocaust in larger narratives

In our interviews, we probed the broader historical frameworks employed by teachers in order to embed or maybe even explain the Holocaust. Using a diachronic perspective, we wished to learn where in history teachers locate the starting point to the story of the Holocaust and which crucial long-term trajectories finally led to it, in their eyes. Surprisingly, few teachers offered coherent narratives about the specific dynamics of German society, which led its members to commit the singular crimes of the Holocaust. We begin with a somewhat unusual sub-theme of what is *not* being taught, and end with some content that is highlighted.

What is *not* being taught? Few accounts linked the rise of National Socialism to the decades preceding it. Teachers hardly referred to the process of German nation-building (1848–1870) the subsequent period of the German empire (1870–1914), inner-imperialist conflict and genocidal violence committed by German colonial troops in this era (e.g., in Namibia 1904–1908). The latter is an interesting omission when considering current debates on post-colonial historiographies in the public discourse. Towards the end of the interviews, we asked some teachers about such omissions. Thorsten explained:

Well, the problem is, if we as academics are having this discussion, that's as it should be [but] if you teach in a secondary school, you are glad if the students know that National Socialism was from '33 to '45. So, this orientation knowledge, that's what they call it in the area of competence... We're glad when *that* works. We are happy when the student is not in 10th grade and says that the GDR was led by Hitler. That is to say, we start at a completely different level, and all these debates that are going on simply ignore the realities of school.

The brutalization of German society in the First World War (1914–1918) and the nationalist grievances connected to German defeat are absent. In fact, teaching about WWII was only important for about half of the teachers. Kerstin suggested one reason for teachers to bracket WWII:

So, actually, yeah, now that sounds clichéd in such a stupid [laughs] but I think that is also because it is so distant from me, since I grew up in a home so removed from the German Army and the military... and I hardly know anyone in my own circles who: was in the armed forces, so I'm especially surprised when someone says "wow, the Second World War and... what was it again with that battle over here and that battle over there..." and then I am usually... yes, I cannot satisfy that.

There were no references to the period of the German democratic-socialist revolution (1918-1923), despite their explanatory power in understanding the period of the violent crackdowns by right-wing paramilitary groups. The two severe economic crises in 1923 and 1929 were missing as well. Only one teacher noted the link between anticommunism, antisemitism and the German war against the Soviet Union. While the concrete history of German society was largely absent, some teachers offered a long-term but decontextualized perspective on antisemitism, which they trace back to the Middle Ages. For Georg, this is a way to establish a sense of historical continuity: "When it is about the Jews, this has been the case since the Middle Ages, right, it is like a red thread through history and not only German history, because in the Middle Ages, Germany did not even exist yet." Reinhold explains that he presents the origins of antisemitism in the way that Jews were presented in major Christian texts. In general, many accounts centred on ideology, especially antisemitism (see Theme 4), rather than on historical context.

What do teachers focus on? First, there were no subversive narratives among our respondents. All teachers seemed in line with the curriculum and the historical narratives they offered. They tend to highlight the Jews as the main victims of National Socialism. While this might seem self-evident, older teachers still remember a period when the Jews were not the focus. Reinhold, a teacher in his sixties from Western Germany, recalls that his father's war injury was at the centre of concern and remembrance during his childhood and youth. Tatjana, who used to teach in the GDR (East Germany), remembers a narrative in which European Jews were but one victim group among many, especially Soviet and Eastern European citizens, communists and other political activists.

In line with the goal of promoting responsibility and ethical choices (see Theme 1), teachers avoid teaching about Germans as victims or German suffering in a broader sense, (although some told us private stories of family members who were killed in bombings, were war casualties and or suffered injuries, hunger, exile and forced resettlements). Rather, there seems to be a consensus among the teachers that large segments of the population supported National Socialism and that many people took part in some way or another in its crimes. Several teachers distance themselves from (older) narratives that focus on the figure of Hitler and the inner circle of committed Nazis, while excusing the ordinary German soldiers and the population by implication. As many deal with the National Socialist ideology of the "Volksgemeinschaft" and antisemitism in particular, Germany's aggression against its neighbours and the Jewish minority is presented as being in line with the general make-up of German society and the self-promotion of the regime, so there can be no doubt that people knew what they were supporting. Notably, quite a few of the teachers affirm the crucial importance of working with the perpetrator perspective as well as that of the victims. While focusing on perpetrator biographies, we noticed that teachers don't include their own Holocaust biographical

experiences or family history in their teaching. Only one teacher includes her family history, and that is her victim experiences as part of a Jewish family, since she feels that her Jewishness was made invisible in the Soviet Union and now tries to make Jewishness more visible.

Teaching about the Resistance is important as well (especially for the religiously devout Christian teachers). Teachers discuss Christian resistance, bourgeois resistance circles and the “salvation resistance”: people who hid Jews and other persecuted people. They do not focus on resistance in order to paint a picture of Germany as a nation of innocent resisters, but rather to present political alternatives, and highlight the space that existed for individuals to make ethical decisions even in such times of terror.

The final topic that is discussed at length by teachers is antisemitism, to which we devote a theme of its own.

Theme 4: Notions of antisemitism and its expressions

It is interesting to take a closer look at how teachers understand and teach antisemitism, which concepts they use and how their function and role in the Holocaust vary according to their definition. We divide this section into two sub-themes: Understanding antisemitism, and experiences and expressions of it among the teachers and students.

Notions of antisemitism depend on teachers’ general worldviews. Most respondents were unfamiliar with the IHRA definition of antisemitism. Several teachers indicated that discussions of specific definitions of antisemitism were too far removed from the realities of educational practice. However, Ruth, a Jewish teacher, takes the time to establish a complex definition of antisemitism with her students, using perpetrator documents and the works of Jewish philosophers on the topic. Quite a few other teachers display a theoretical interest in the concept and expressed a sophisticated analysis of the concept that goes beyond a general notion of prejudice. Melina connects the rise of antisemitism to the crisis-ridden structure of modern capitalism, drawing on the work of the Marxist thinker Moishe Postone. Erdil distinguishes substantially between the semantics of antisemitism and racism, which articulate different modes of constructing the tropes of the nation’s enemy. Thorsten suggests that it is not enough to think of antisemitism as scapegoating, because fear and a feeling of powerlessness are psychological realities that lie at the heart of antisemitic conspiracy thought.

We also found that notions of antisemitism linked to broader worldviews among the teachers. For example, in the worldview of Georg – an upper-class teacher presenting himself as a classic liberal – autonomy and self-responsibility of the individual are key values. This makes him sceptical of leftist positions arguing for a strong welfare state. His understanding of antisemitism fits neatly into this logic, because for him, antisemitism is an ideology for weak characters who try to put the blame for their own misery on others, instead of trying to take their life in their own hands:

One is responsible for one’s life oneself. [S]ome people- not all, but some people who are not doing well also have to partly blame themselves for their condition. The state is not to blame for everything. The Jews are not to blame for everything, nor are the migrants, nor are the

refugees. [Today] you have many opportunities to develop, to seek what you want. You have your life more in your own hands than you had before.

Conversely, for Thorsten, who is proud of his working-class background, a committed social democrat, union member and fierce defendant of the welfare state, antisemitism is welded to “social Darwinism” and other elements of the Nazi ideology targeting supposedly “unproductive” members of society, like the disabled. In his case, a rejection of antisemitism is linked to his worldview, which centres on the idea of an egalitarian solidarity.

Antisemitism is experienced and expressed. We did not encounter manifest antisemitism amongst the teachers, nor an affinity for conspiracy thought. As we noted above, one teacher felt there was too much focus on the Holocaust, but that need not be interpreted as antisemitism.

One left-wing teacher alluded repeatedly to her caveats regarding Israel, referring to a very pro-Palestinian account of the conflict which she identified with, but did not develop this sentiment further in the interview. Andreas and Melina, who are very committed to educating about Israel-related antisemitism, report that they encounter many prejudices and little competence among their colleagues regarding this aspect. Melina is very clear about that problem:

So, I would say that so much went wrong at this school in that regard. I think it's crazy. I mean, it also shows. Um, it also shows that the students often think they find open ears when it comes to Palestine. [...] Antisemitism, that's not a problem, yes. But when it comes to anti-Zionism, even extremely aggressive anti-Zionism, my colleagues are totally in a bad position, and I have to say that I am too, actually. I also find it difficult, um. But that's why I think we should really focus more on anti-Zionism and of course also on conspiracy theories, but especially on anti-Zionism. Yes, there is way too much of it passing through. So that is the huge, huge, huge, huge topic for the youth, especially for the migrant youth.

Several teachers report antisemitic incidents on behalf of the students at their schools. To take one example, Kirsten relates the following incident:

Last year, right, on... ironically enough on January 27 [Holocaust Memorial Day], there was that sentence discovered on a desk... umm... “Fucking Jew” ... and umm... Exactly. And the very student who was sitting at the table is Jewish, so that was... severe in a double sense. We still don't know who wrote it there.

In an extreme example, Thorsten, a social democrat with academic aspirations who teaches at a provincial Protestant grammar school in Eastern Germany, tells of a student who denied the Holocaust. Thorsten did not reject the student as a person, but followed a zero-tolerance strategy, making use of various institutionalized disciplinary measures. Melina goes even further and admits that she is ready to attack and personally humiliate any students who spread antisemitic hate speech or lie in class and is willing to apply all the disciplinary measures available. Stefan once had to deal with a student who ferociously defended Wehrmacht general Ernst Rommel as a freedom fighter.

In addition to subversive, sophisticated statements voiced once in a while (e.g., the Swastika is an old Indian religious symbol and not Nazi-propaganda etc.), there are some examples of anti-Jewish aggression, especially when “Jew” is used as a slur amongst students. This seems to be a term of deprecation and contempt integrated into the slang in certain milieus. Three teachers spoke of a Muslim context; one spoke of a German right-wing context, and Andreas said: “Apparently somehow it became a swear word in the youth language. [...] Seemingly, it is not always connected to narratives about the Holocaust or a full-fledged antisemitic worldview but is used rather unconsciously.”

Teachers also report that students may sometimes relativize the Holocaust by equating Israel’s actions with the Nazis. During periods of heightened tension in the Middle East conflict, antisemitic memes were shared by students and Israel was predominantly portrayed as the aggressor. This leads to our next theme:

Theme 5: The Holocaust and Israel-Palestinian conflict are not systematically combined

We found that the Holocaust and the founding of the state of Israel are not systematically related to each other, either in the curriculum, or in the practice of teaching, or in the teachers’ narratives.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is most important in schools with ethnically and religiously diverse student bodies and results from felt oppression and strong emotional identifications and interpretations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict of primarily pro-Palestine students. Teachers try to rationalize those feelings and interpretations, but rarely described preventive strategies in fighting Israel-related antisemitism or discussions on the antisemitic propaganda of Arab states.

Some teachers teach about the Holocaust without reference to or interest in Israel or Jewish culture. Among those who refer to Israel or Judaism, such references are motivated by religious beliefs, by a political-theoretical occupation with antisemitism or by personal contacts and travel experiences. We observed that politically extreme teachers (religiously or left-wing) are the ones most concerned with Israel in their class teaching.

The reason for the limited discussion of Israel, antisemitism and the Holocaust seem attributable to teachers being afraid of a faux-pas, or having too few competencies:

I think there is also a great fear of doing something wrong, and then also of being criticised. Also, on the part of the ... education authority. And I also see that there are very great fears among colleagues, yes. To bring a very conflict-ridden topic into the classroom. So, once we organized a topic day on antisemitism where information packages [were distributed] to classes and teachers with instructions to implement them. And colleagues refused to cooperate because they said: “I have so many Muslims in my class, I can’t discuss Israel with them right now.” (Andreas)

As for missing competencies, Andreas said that the basic competence of recognizing antisemitic symbols is lacking for many teachers. At the same time, generational differences in dealing with the topic of Israel and antisemitism are evident; the younger generation adopted a more pro-Israel

position (see quote), while the older teachers tended to adopt an anti-colonial perspective that construes Israel as an apartheid state.

Israel is a- I would even say- the best functioning democracy out there. It is not stable, you can see that in the frequent change and coalitions, but it is the greatest democracy down there. It's a democratic country. And I think that's also quite important when you see that in the context.

Theme 6: Challenges in the German EaH system

The main challenge troubling this group of teachers is the heterogeneity in knowledge or **low knowledge level** of the students (some are even unfamiliar with terms such as “ghetto” or “Holocaust”), especially in schools with a lower educational level and high percentages of migrants. For some, a low level of German language skills among the students makes it difficult to practice reflective methods.

Teachers also criticize the fact that teaching the Holocaust **begins too late**, since popular but often inaccurate information on the Holocaust, Hitler and the Jews is available to the children long before they are taught about them in school.

The **Covid pandemic** functions as another constraint, and teachers described it as problematic for such a complex and emotionally laden subject as the Holocaust. Many would have liked to push it off to another semester. However, advantages were also confessed, e.g., the possibility of one-to-one exchange (e.g., a Jewish student opened up in a one-on-one conversation) or the possibility to look at additional material at home and to deal with it asynchronously for longer.

Two other challenges relate to working with minority students in EaH and managing the sense of distance from the events of WWII that many students experience. Due to their scope, each of these is discussed as a separate theme.

Theme 7: EaH in Germany is rich in resources

Enriching support networks. Teachers noted many strengths of EaH in Germany, including the myriad extra-curricular institutions, the development of sophisticated educational materials, excellent and plentiful further training options, accessibility to museums and memorial sites, Jewish communities, etc., all available to the teachers. All of these educational networks are described as very enriching. But in part, the delegation of EaH to extracurricular experts is seen as delegating the “difficult” subjects to external experts, removing this important role from the educators themselves.

One of the more powerful environmental enablers of EaH in Germany is that **state control and intervention are not experienced** by the teachers. Although shortcomings in education policy were noted, there was no talk of a repressive climate at all. In fact, one teacher spoke of the clear expectation that he will be creative and inventive in his teaching on the Holocaust. These form some of the criteria upon which he is judged by his superiors.

The one caveat to this sense of freedom is the founding of a central hotline to report antisemitic incidents, for students and teachers. This was discussed ambivalently, as something that may be helpful in fighting antisemitism but that might also impose restrictions on an open system. Andreas says:

In North Rhine-Westphalia we have free choice of schools and there is high competition between schools. This is one reason why such an event won't get to the Ministers of Education. Because you don't want to be the school with the antisemites. That is why it doesn't exist. And it will always be like that. [...] currently North Rhine-Westphalia is considering establishing a reporting point like RIAS⁶³ [...] and there is a lot of resistance from the school sector because they say they don't want to have an information platform. Such a platform would be an information and research centre. And colleagues are not there to denounce."

The reporting office for antisemitism in Germany was criticized for having to pass on reports of antisemitic incidents to the head teacher, and for the fact that schools are faced with the conflict of wanting to clarify antisemitism on the one hand and not wanting to be tarnished with an "antisemitic stain" on the other. Another source of critique is the danger of stigmatization. Erdil, who teaches Muslim students, is very aware of the assumption that Muslim youth are antisemitic, and so he voices doubt when it comes to the idea of establishing a centralized register for antisemitic incidents at schools. He fears this will lead to the branding of certain "problematic schools" by racist media outlets and reinforce mutual animosities.

Theme 8: Teaching EaH to minority students – challenging, enlightening

Refugee students who did not grow up in Germany may not share the vague preconceptions of the Holocaust that "local" students have. When they learn about the Holocaust at school for the first time it can lead to experiences of shock and trauma. Sophie told us about her trip to the memorial site of KZ Bergen-Belsen:

I had a student, a Lebanese, who had to break it off, the tour there. He started shaking and crying, and I didn't even see it at first. A fellow student came and said, "Here, Ahmed is not well." But he didn't tell his classmates why. And then I accompanied him out. And then he said he couldn't do it, because he and his family were also locked up in a camp like that, and it was terrible for him. So, he couldn't go on at all, and later he showed interest in school and asked for a book as well. So, it wasn't a lack of interest, but he was simply-. And it was very difficult, I was completely swamped. I didn't know how I was supposed to comfort him.

Only two teachers report experiences with Jewish students. Interestingly, these students were very hesitant to express their religious identity openly, also in the context of EaH. One of Victoria's students says she dislikes the common equation of Jewishness and Holocaust, because the event is quite far away from her own experience as a young person.

63 A Berlin-wide network for reporting antisemitic incidents.

When connections and comparisons between the Holocaust and other instances of ethnic, religious or politically repressive violence are drawn, it is often by Muslim students. The three main points of reference seem to be the conflict between Israel and Palestine (discussed by 7 of the respondents), China's repression of the Uyghur minority (discussed by 2) and anti-Muslim racism in Western countries (discussed by one). Some tropes include the equation of suffering, "whataboutism" and the accusation that yesterday's victims have become today's perpetrators. Sometimes this resentment is associated with aggression against German Jews or Jewish institutions in Germany, Jews in general or accompanied by fears, for example of Jewish doctors. These reactions do not seem to be linked to a general anti-colonialist framework (like the debates in academia), but rather centred on a religious identity as Muslims. Erdil, who spoke most about antisemitism among migrant students – mainly from Arab countries – that he works with, follows a different strategy than Melina's and Thorsten's, which we described above. He organizes trips with his students to Israel, where they get to know the complex reality of the country beyond simplistic stereotypes and narratives that they grow up with. Erdil tries to foster and maintain dialogue with his students and conceptualizes the classroom as a radically democratic safe space, in which students are encouraged to express their views, which is a pre-condition to convincing them to change their minds through conversation.

Theme 9: Educationally countering a feeling of distance from the Holocaust.

Although most teachers felt the students were deeply involved in EaH, some observed that their students feel quite detached from the Holocaust in a way that they had not known in their own generation and did not encounter when they started working as teachers. Reinhold for example, a teacher in his sixties who lives in a middle-sized town in Western Germany remembers that National Socialism felt closer when he worked in West-Berlin in the 1980s, for reasons related to time and space.

However, my impression is that now this is the generation after the next one. It's much further away, it's a horror and they're horrified and so on, but it's somehow as far away as the 30-Year-War or something. It's already a very distant past. Unlike Berlin, for example, where it was still closer. But those were students who could still ask their grandparents, you know, who could still hear a lot from their own experience. And in Berlin it was still closer. Also, in the city of the Wall, a lot of things had been left behind. Many testimonies, silent testimonies, were still there. All the dead rail lines. And when you stand at one of these tracks and then you see that this is the ramp where it happened. It was still completely preserved; nothing had been done to it. Then it was simply closer than it is today.

When the memory is fading in this way, dispositions change as well. This is especially true for the feelings of shame and guilt. Kerstin reports the difference between her own personal relation to the subject and the reactions she observes with her students:

Well, this personal... I find it very important in that regard, simply that... that... this emotional connection is not... they don't have feelings of guilt... they don't, so... what affected me when

I was in the Netherlands and I didn't dare to speak German at the memorial for the dead... that does not burden them, not in that way... that... they cannot understand...

Even Melina, a teacher who is only in her thirties, witnesses this shift in affective intensity between her own generation and the next one. However, in her opinion this is not necessarily bad, because today's students are much more able and willing to develop a sober and realistic account of the role the German population played than her own classmates 20 years ago, as they do not have the urge to protect and defend their own identity.

How are such feelings of distance countered? Simon, a teacher of German Literature and Theatre, who lacks a formal teacher's education, refers to very general human experiences of loneliness, exclusion etc., in order to build a bridge from the Holocaust to the students' experience.

So that one comes somewhere as a stranger and is perceived as a stranger. Into new contexts, new groups, new social groups or so. That goes a bit in that direction. And that you make it about that. And that doesn't necessarily refer to the Holocaust or to Judaism, so to speak. However, that someone somewhere enters a group in which he or she is first perceived as a stranger. And he or she also first arrives in a new place. And then, yes, these are the experiences that students regularly have. Or make more or less often. And they can do something with that. That was my starting point.

Summary: Thematic integration in relation to previous studies

EaH is well established in the German educational system, though the relations between the Holocaust and Israel, as well as contemporary Israel-related antisemitism are not dealt with much (something critiqued by a few best-practice teachers). We note that most respondents separated their personal and professional experiences in the interviews as well as in their teaching practices (with the exception of the Jewish teacher). Linked to that division, the interviews reveal the acceptance of past guilt, not as personal but as ancestral guilt.

In Germany's public domain of recent years, the official state culture of remembrance, which emphasized the singularity of the Holocaust and granted Israel special status, coexists with two opposing narratives. The first is a narrative of multidirectional memory and the recognition of other non-Jewish victims during National Socialism and in the present. This narrative recently went so far as to call the memory of the Holocaust in Germany a "catechism" (Moses 2021).

The second narrative – originating in the far right – suggests that there is a guilt cult and a quasi-religious exaltation of the culture of remembrance of the Holocaust. It regards the Holocaust as far too present and destructive, thereby damaging national identity. For example, the radical leader of the right-wing party "Alternative for Germany" (AfD), Björn Höcke, stated publicly: "These stupid politics of coming to grips with the past cripple us. We need nothing other than a 180-degree reversal on the politics of remembrance" (Chase 2017). How do teachers' educational narratives correspond with and compare to these public narratives and disputes?

In contrast to the disputed public discourse, we found that schools cannot be described as a contested field of historical interpretation. Neither the debate about multidirectional memory nor a Holocaust-relativizing discourse from the right play a significant role among the teachers. One teacher (Gabriel) expressed a universalistic approach to the history of violence in modern times but did not engage in a perpetrator-victim reversal with regard to Israel, nor did he relativize the Holocaust based on the “whiteness” of the victims. One teacher mentioned an overemphasis on the Holocaust, while foregrounding a family history of German victims, but she also made a strong plea for democracy later in the interview.

In short, we did not find a new, critical or subversive discourse of German history in the educational field. The teachers are broadly satisfied with the curriculum. Rather than complaining about lack of time and budget for EaH, their narrative tends to focus on individual opportunities to integrate EaH as much as possible within the curriculum. There are different approaches to doing this, including working with places or traces, (e.g., city walks, intercultural encounters, memorial visits, etc.), working with digital and media testimonies (e.g., video apps with contemporary witnesses), expanding to other topics and engaging students emotionally.

Methodological differences notwithstanding, all of the respondents seem to share the goal of “keeping history alive” and managing their students’ identity in relation to this history. This goal is very often linked to the desire to maintain a certain experimental nature of the topic, to allow it to be adaptable for the generation after Holocaust witnesses have passed away.

We summarize the themes in Figure 3, which highlights two related core issues: identity management and an uncontested, republican narrative. We relate these to two national opposing trends – a pull to the left, with its anti-colonial discourse, and a pull to the right, with its Identitarian politics at its extremes. We indicate that while students, at least in some locations, are shifting to the right, the same is not true of their teachers, who vehemently oppose the right-wing voice, but equally do not relate to the extreme left narrative. Since both of these extremes can promote antisemitism (of different flavours), and since educating against antisemitism is one of these teachers’ goals, this is not surprising. The shared core somewhat overlaps with a set of themes centred around diversity, and with a set of pedagogical principles. Three final sets of themes are issues of content, challenges, which were relatively minor, and two powerful environmental aspects .

How do our findings relate to previous research? In reflecting on our interview material, we considered not only “what is discussed” but also the absent parts of the puzzle that might have arisen in such conversations. We must suppose that the respondents do not attach much explanatory value to various historical approaches to the Holocaust. There were also topics that simply seemed to provoke less interest among teachers. We noted, for example, that some teachers were not particularly interested in WWII. This might reflect a broader cultural trend that historian Dan Diner (2003) has noted, according to which war and genocide have become increasingly decoupled in the public memory during the last decades.

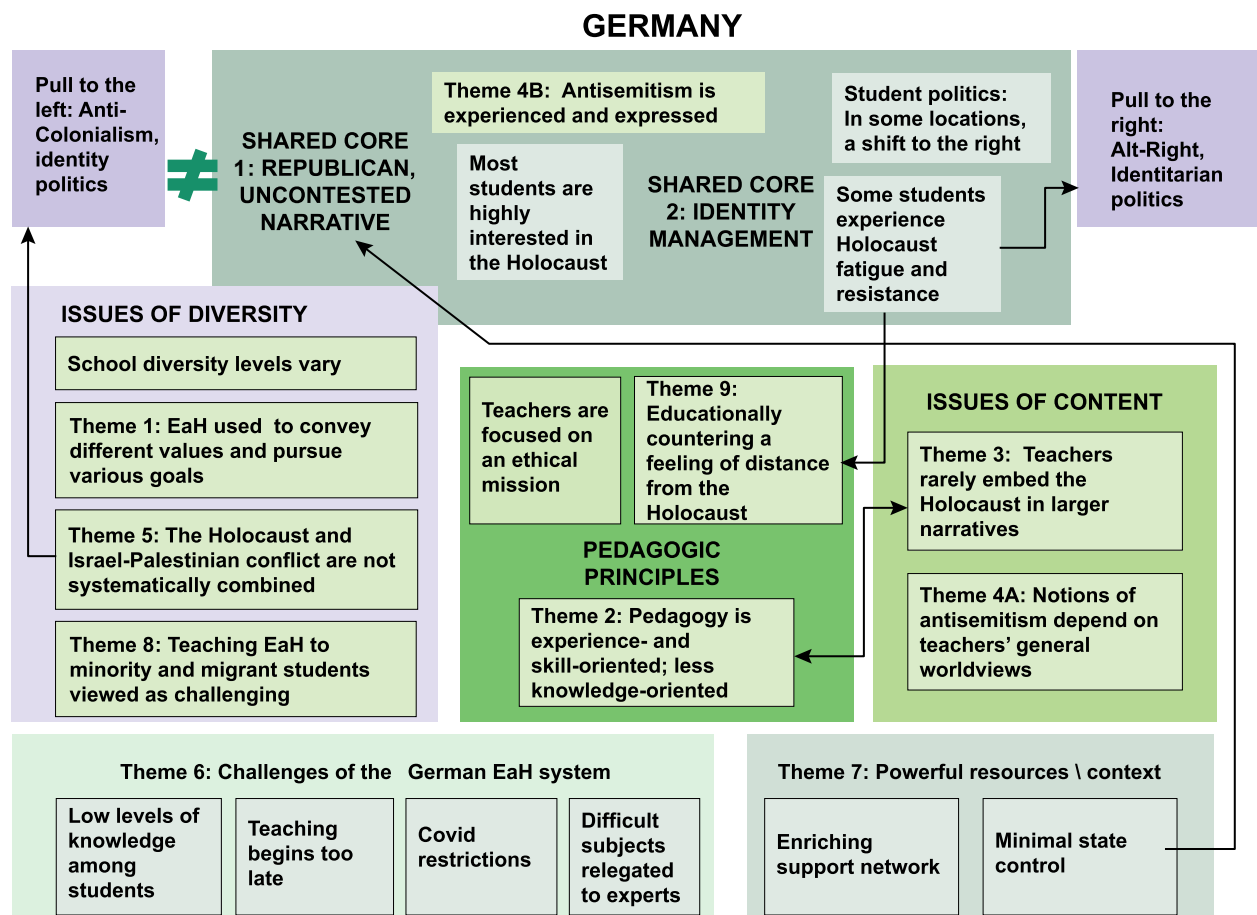


Figure 3: Thematic integration of German interviews

We also noted topics that loom large in the curriculum. For example, teachers focus on the Jews as the main victim group of National Socialism. While this might seem self-evident, it was not always the case in German society and is the result of profound cultural shifts towards an empathic “victim-orientation” (Assmann 2020) and the emergence of the Holocaust from the shadow of the war experience and cold war frameworks. This shift has been completed to such a degree that the younger teachers in our sample didn’t even mention it but took it for granted.

We also noted that some teachers were not particularly interested in Jewish history or in Israel and were teaching about the Holocaust without reference to either. One of the reasons for this missing connection was offered by teachers themselves: educators may fear a *faux pas* in teaching such a sensitive topic and may lack sufficient competencies for teaching these topics.

A rather contradictory set of themes emerged around the question of student identity and how closely they identify with and take responsibility for the Holocaust and Germany’s role as perpetrator. While issues of student interest are of universal importance to teachers who wish to teach a subject, in Germany this question is of importance to the students themselves as it is closely aligned with their sense of national and moral identity. The fact that three themes related to this issue led us to designate it as a core theme in the German sample. We noted that some teachers experienced high

levels of student engagement, while others experienced disengagement and fatigue. The first trend corresponds to the results of recent studies showing that the interest in the Holocaust is actually growing amongst the younger generations today, even as connections drawn to their own family histories are getting weaker.⁶⁴ However, the second trend is less present in previous studies and should be further explored.

Working with migrants and minority students was another theme in our findings. In the literature review we noted that Georgi (2003) suggested four types of relations between migrant students and EaH: They either identify with the victims; take on the German burden of guilt in order to fit in; retort with competitive victimhood; or adopt a universalist human rights perspective. We found indications of the first three, but we also found a fifth response: Shock. These students, as opposed to native Germans, may be entirely ignorant of the topic and are deeply shocked by the information they learn for the first time, and also dismayed to discover this black mark in the history of their new country. We found no indication of Kößler and Schmidt's (2020) finding that teachers distinguish between the morally superior Germans, who have drawn lessons from the Holocaust, and the ignorant migrants. Their suggestion of connecting EaH to colonialism did not seem to fit our respondents' frame of reference either.

In previous studies, teacher training in Germany has been deemed insufficient (Sigel 2012). While we did indeed find that many historical aspects of WWII were omitted entirely, we still felt that the level of knowledge and expertise of these teachers was high. However, teacher proficiency notwithstanding, we too found, in line with findings from previous studies, that general competences are currently being emphasized, rather than detailed knowledge-acquisition (Geike, 2015). Similar to Geike's findings, we too found that the context of WWII is becoming less important, and that Jewish victims are highlighted above and beyond other groups. However, contrary to his findings, we note that perpetrators constitute a rather major theme, as it relates to the process of national self-reflection. Our respondents discussed perpetrator stories with their students quite often, and while the rationale of promoting ethical self-reflection makes sense, this focus on a critical self-investigation of the mechanisms and motivations for becoming a perpetrator might not be in line with international standards of EaH. Another pedagogical practice, which we noted relatively often, was working with emotions. This may also bring teachers into conflict with certain pedagogical standards, namely the interdiction of overwhelming methods (elsewhere we term this "shock pedagogy").

Our bottom-line matches that of the literature review: EaH is well established in the German educational system. It should also be noted, however, that within EaH, the relations between the Holocaust and Israel, as well as contemporary Israel-related antisemitism, are not dealt with much and, due to their sensitive nature and the teachers' uncertainty, are minimally addressed. A few best-practice teachers in our sample were exceptions to this rule and reported the difficulties many of their colleagues have with this topic.

64 Christoph David Piorkowski: Junge Menschen interessieren sich mehr für die NS-Zeit als ihre Eltern. Tagesspiegel, 25.01.2022.

3.4.5. Findings from the English sample⁶⁵

The teachers: Strongly connected, deeply invested in EaH

The group of teachers from England that we assembled is quite diverse, and includes male and female, Catholic, Anglican, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and non-religious teachers; teachers in their early twenties and teachers in their late sixties; heterosexual and LGBTQ teachers; teachers from large cities and teachers from small towns; some with and others without EaH training; teachers of Art, History, Literature and Religion, and so on.

Moreover, many of the teachers have composite identities, religiously or ethnically. As David, of Catholic-Jewish-Buddhist background, says: “while I was a teenager, we did have a Christmas tree that had a little Buddha on top and a Star of David.” Others have a multi-ethnic identity such as Spanish-British, Pakistani-British and British-American. Despite this diversity, which we attempted to capture, two related attributes emerged. Firstly, that the teachers tend to feel strongly connected to the subject of the Holocaust and secondly, that they are often deeply invested in teaching the subject.

The teachers we interviewed felt personally invested in the subject of the Holocaust in various ways. Three of these ways highlight the role of previous experiences in shaping teaching choices: early encounters, experiences of being an outsider, and visits to Auschwitz. Yet another expression of personal investment in EaH stemmed from teaching the subject, pointing to an opposite causal trajectory. Here are some examples:

Early encounters

Almost all of the teachers in our sample had a formative encounter with the topics of the Holocaust or WWII in their youth. Only for some did this encounter involve a personal family history. Five teachers had grandfathers who fought in WWII (two were POWs, one a war casualty), one teacher’s grandfather visited Bergen Belsen as a soldier after the war, one teacher’s grandparents experienced WWII in Spain, and one Jewish teacher had relatives who were murdered by the Nazis. Other teachers had a meaningful encounter with Holocaust memory as teenagers, through various venues: a family, school or university trip to a Holocaust site, or hearing a survivor speak. A parent or family member with a passion for history influenced others. Some teachers grew up near a site connected to WWII. Early meaningful encounters with the Holocaust/WWII often fuelled a lifelong engagement with the subject. Emma, a Muslim of Pakistani origin, who heard a survivor speak when she was in university, explains how this affected her: “That day has stayed with me, like, to this day.” Often a formative experience led to efforts to expand knowledge. For example, on a trip to Prague while in university, Lisa saw children’s drawings from the Terezin (Theresienstadt) ghetto, purchased a book about it (“I Never Saw Another Butterfly”) “that stayed with me a long time” and developed a longstanding fascination with the subject of art and the Holocaust.

65 This analysis is written by Nurit Novis-Deutsch, with contributions by Jason Hall, Yair Manas, Abby Zucker, and Tracy Adams.

Connection through the feeling of being an outsider

Seven of the teachers describe a background in which they did not fully “fit in” to British society. Four of the teachers describe themselves as immigrants, or descendants of immigrants. Two moved from country to country in their childhood. Ellen says, “Moving between cultures meant that you always – The reason I have a very English accent is because I got teased. [...] So, I know what it’s like to feel like an outsider.” As a Jew, she also felt uncertain about sharing her Jewish identity. She remembers when she was younger seeing a family openly wearing *kippot* (yarmulkes) and wondering: “Do you want to be Jewish and outwardly Jewish?” Dean grew up in poverty as part of a Traveller community (an Irish ethnic minority group who traditionally lived nomadically) and was discouraged from seeking an education. He says, “I wasn’t part of any group. Uh, mainly because, um you know, when you come from a Traveller background, you’re not part of the mainstream. [And although] I was intelligent and good at school; I wasn’t part of that background either. I almost felt like I was between the two [...] I always feel like I belong to one part, but that part doesn’t feel like it belongs to me.” Such experiences of not fitting in might also be related to empathizing with the plight of the victims of the Holocaust.

Visiting Auschwitz as adults

Several teachers felt that the event that changed their sense of connection to the subject and their way of teaching it was a visit to Auschwitz as adults. Lawrence’s trip to Auschwitz led him to re-evaluate how he taught the Holocaust: “I really don’t need to see the room that they were killed in. And it’s almost like, I felt that it was kind of almost intruding on their last moments, to go and stand there and see that.” From this experience, Lawrence realized “that you need to absolutely make sure that you teach that every single one of the Jewish people who went through the process was an individual person and had their own life story and have their own thoughts and dreams and aspirations and feelings and everything else. And all of that was brutally cut short.” This became his teaching goal. Anita says, “So you go round, and everybody is quiet ‘cause you just, you can’t imagine the reality of what you’re seeing, and then it’s like everybody reaches that threshold when everybody starts talking at once, um, because it’s just, it’s too much.” She describes this as a formative moment for her.

Such personal encounters with the Holocaust may have led teachers to focus on EaH as educators.

Becoming involved through teaching

The opposite direction also occurs: Having been required or asked to teach about the Holocaust, some teachers actively sought to connect to it. For example, David is gay and identifies with the plight of homosexuals during the Holocaust. Steph suffers from mental problems and connects to the Holocaust as a space where it is OK to express emotions of being overwhelmed. Anita believes she has Jewish roots (she is unsure) and has volunteered on a Kibbutz. She connects to the Holocaust as part of a search for her roots. Thus, it would seem that the desire to connect does not require a historical connection to the Holocaust.

In line with this second trajectory, it is worth mentioning that for seven of the teachers, teaching is a second career, and for some, an unexpected one. Ellen says that upon graduation “I said, no, absolutely not. I’m not going to be a teacher.” This suggests that even those with intimate encounters with the Holocaust/WWII did not automatically decide that EaH was their path in life. Eric, a teacher who arrived at teaching as a second career, echoes this point: “It has enabled me to say to the students: it doesn’t matter if you don’t follow an exact straight path of GCSEs, A Levels, degree, graduate profession, that there’s different ways of getting to places. [...] You know, you can change, change your life direction.”

Either way, the teachers we interviewed are exceptionally devoted both to the topic of history, and to teaching the Holocaust. Seven of the teachers explicitly expressed their fascination and passion for history, stemming from early interest in the subject, to early reading on history, to parental influence, to an “exceptional history” programme in their own schools or to living near historical sites. Words like “fascination” (David), “passion” (Dana and Nicola) attest to this involvement in the subject.

A significant majority of teachers work hard on their EaH lessons. They adapt the lessons to include additional content and remove what they think is unnecessary. They offer personal family stories, stories about survivors, and expand to topics they feel are not adequately presented, such as antisemitism. A number of teachers realized that they were not teaching the Holocaust properly and sought out further training. All of this shows a dedication to teaching that goes beyond teaching what is on the curriculum.

The students: Highly diverse, not especially involved

The teachers we interviewed teach in a variety of school settings. Three of the teachers mention that their school consists of predominantly white, middle, or upper-class students; five teach in multicultural schools with four of the teachers noting that their school has a high proportion of Muslims in the student body and one noting that her school’s population is 25% Jewish. Two teach at single-gender schools (one all-boys and one all-girls school), and one teaches at a school which he describes as serving a deprived area. One school has Beacon school status.⁶⁶

In the schools with white, middle, or upper-class students, two of the teachers mention some type of issue with race. Nicola says she experienced antisemitic incidents at one school in which she taught. Her response: “I was so shocked, and I didn’t – didn’t know how to handle it!” Dean says that about 90 percent of the students accept what he says, and 10 percent do not. He shares a story of a student that made a racial comment. In two out of the four schools with high Muslim populations, there are certain tensions around the Israeli – Palestinian conflict.

⁶⁶ A Beacon school in the UK is a notably successful school whose methods and practices are brought to the attention of the education service as a whole, in order that they may be adopted by other schools. (Collins English Dictionary).

Overall, the teachers feel well-supported by their heads of school, in general and in relation to the EaH programme, with only one teacher mentioning having issues with the head of the school (Tom says, “I had quite a lot of pushback on the amount of time we spent on the Second World War by um, the then head of department.”)

Similarly, teachers mentioned very few behavioural problems with the students around EaH. Two of the teachers mention bad behaviour by their students or former students in general, but not necessarily in the context of EaH. For example, David says

A lot of these kids have backgrounds that – it’s so hard for me to understand – like why they have so much apathy, why they don’t care, why they lash out [...] We probably will never understand [because] we didn’t go through the experiences they’ve had.

There is somewhat more dissatisfaction among the teachers with regard to the previous knowledge students have about the Holocaust. Five teachers said that students today have many misconceptions on the topic. Correcting these misconceptions seems to offer these teachers a sense of purpose and a clear goal in teaching this subject.

Not many of the teachers speak about their students’ interest in the Holocaust. Nicola says her students are interested in learning about WWII, but most other teachers did not talk about the students’ level of interest in this topic.

Overall, the attempt to recruit a very varied group of teachers seems to have produced diversity also in terms of the schools in which they teach. This makes it even more meaningful to identify shared themes, to which we turn next.

Thematic analysis of the interviews: Major themes

Theme 1: Seeing and teaching about the Holocaust as complex on many levels

Seeing the Holocaust and its complexities as useful for understanding contemporary events and for understanding moral complexity overall was a shared theme among a majority of the teachers (13/18). A repeated idea is that to understand the present one must understand the past, or as Lawrence puts it: “I think a lot of the answers to things that are happening today are found obviously in the past.” Some also suggest that to improve the future one must learn from mistakes of the past. The idea that the Holocaust was a very complex set of events is repeated throughout the interviews of the best-practice teachers and relates to their criticism of the simplistic way the Holocaust is often taught in schools today. As Declan notes, “one of the biggest dangers in EaH is to flatten out its complexities,” something which occurs when it is taught as a stand-alone event rather than contextually and comparatively.

One example of demonstrating the complexity of the Holocaust is teaching about the complexity and ubiquity of violence. This leads students to begin to ask themselves about their own role in violence that occurs in various parts of the world. Another is helping students realize the complexity and moral dilemmas of decision-making, through examining leaders’ decisions in the Holocaust,

thus helping students to better understand contemporary decision-making processes of the British government. Examples include the persecution of Uyghur Muslims in China. Lisa considers an understanding of the complexity of the Holocaust as nurturing a more nuanced self-perception: “everyone says, well, I would resist or I’d be a rescuer, but we’ve got to look at, it’s not black and white, there’s very grey areas.” Peter suggests that increasing complexity is his main goal in EaH:

I hope what they take away from learning about the Holocaust is that they should resist easy narratives or easy answers about why terrible things happen, why tragedies happen... and just keep in mind the fact that the more you delve into history, the more you’re able to grapple with complex things. I hope that’s a good enough thing to take away from EaH.

Lawrence explains that history shows that things are complex and “there are shades of grey, but that’s the point, isn’t it, that everyone is, is a mix of different things. And that’s what we need to recognize.” He connects this to the contemporary polarization in England:

And it just seems that we’re in a country, in a society, in a time where everyone is becoming more polarized, and no one is interested in that nuanced debate, in that kind of grey area, it’s just all becoming very black and white, um, you know, you’re with us or against us, you’re a goodie, or a baddie or whatever. And it’s a shame.

Theme 2: Instilling moral lessons about choice, responsibility and kindness

A second major theme in teaching was trying to instil moral values and lessons through EaH. The main moral virtues espoused were accountability, choice, responsibility, social justice, empathy and kindness. There seems to be a gender split here, with a tendency for female teachers to focus on kindness, helping and empathy, while male teachers seem to focus on choice and responsibility. Here is how Emma explains her choice to focus on kindness: “We have so much emphasis on results and academics, but we just need to strip it down to [how] we need to be kind and respectful and not judge people and not be, um, you know, unkind to them.” As an example of educating for choice consider Peter’s explanation:

The normal reaction of people is to go along with things... but when you encounter stories of people who made very active choices to resist, people who questioned what they were told, who questioned the ideologies they were indoctrinated with in school, the more of those stories you encounter, um, the more you are able to deconstruct the idea that, that everybody had no choice, and no agency in participating in the Holocaust, and that I think is really valuable for young people because it tells them that their choices matter.

Although the tendency to use EaH to transmit moral lessons was very common, some teachers are critical of “moralizing” the Holocaust and prefer to keep its lessons historical. Declan says:

I think with the Holocaust, I worry that it becomes taught for the bad reasons [...] for a moral lesson. Students get taught this by saying, well, you know, divide these people into

perpetrators, bystanders and um victims, ooh, don't be a bystander, don't be a perpetrator, and I really, I... I hate that [laughs], I hate that so much.

Theme 3: Emphasizing the personal and individual aspects to the Holocaust

As noted above, many of the teachers search for and find a personal connection to the Holocaust, regardless of whether they have a prior family historical connection to it. Relatedly, many of them believe that for their students too, personally connecting to the Holocaust through family stories of students or staff makes for a stronger emotional connection to the topic. This is not always easy in England, but the teachers manage to find these connections and are even willing to share their personal stories for this reason. Anita talks about her experiences on kibbutz while Peter shares his Jewish identity when teaching about the Holocaust. There are other ways to make the connections more personal. For example, some teachers connect the story of antisemitism to places students are familiar with (e.g., they'll mention York when teaching about the Clifford Towers massacre). Emma teaches about the Windermere Children and her students write a letter to one of the children, explaining what they learned "about life after the Holocaust." Teachers are eager to turn the large numbers of Holocaust victims into a small set of personal stories, in line with the direction in the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education textbook and the recommendation offered in CPDs, as mentioned by several of the teachers. For example, Lisa brings the topic to life for her children by teaching about the lives of children in the Holocaust, thus connecting it to her students' world and concerns.

Theme 4: Grappling with Britain's role and national memory of the Holocaust

A common theme was grappling with, criticizing, or complicating Britain's national memory as it relates to WWII and the Holocaust (discussed by 11 teachers at some length). The teachers tend to feel that the role of Britain in the war is more nuanced than previously believed, directly critique the "UK as hero" narrative for being unjustifiably self-righteous and some even set a goal of debunking this.

Some teachers are at the questioning stage, and grapple with the best way to teach Britain's role. Nicola wonders, "Maybe I'm part of the problem by only teaching the Kindertransport. Am I making it look like Britain's a heroic country when it came to the Holocaust, when actually, that's not entirely the case?" Others have made up their minds and consider the national memory narrative to be wrong: "I do try and disrupt that narrative as much as I can," notes Steph. Ian says he's "happy about [how] in the past few years we've moved away from this narrative, which I've always thought was awful." For example, teachers criticize the inflated view of Britain's role in winning WWII, while in fact Britain's contribution in terms of soldiers was a fraction of that of the U.S. and Russia. Declan goes so far as to argue that the main reason the Holocaust is taught in Britain is to moralize the role of Britain in the Holocaust.

While some teachers take issue with the memory of the Holocaust in Britain, others are critical of Britain's historical actions before, during and after WWII. They mention various issues as problematic. The history of fascism (the British Black Shirts) in pre-war Britain is one of them. Ian tells the story of Oswald Mosely, "and they're amazed by the fact that a guy in Britain thought the same things

and did the same things and got so much support.” The fact that Britain did little to help Jewish refugees before the war is criticized too. Britain’s decision not to bomb the train tracks to Auschwitz is criticized, as is the role of Churchill and his personality including “aspects of his past” and his racism. The days of glorifying Britain’s heroic past seem to be over, as several teachers mention, and this reflects not only on interpreting the past but also in relating to the present.

Some of the teachers link the role of Britain during the Holocaust to the passive role that Britain plays with regards to contemporary ethnic cleansings and mass killings. Others connect it to the UK’s colonialist past: “How did Britain make all its money in the Industrial Revolution? Slaves. Products,” says Ian. Declan criticizes the Holocaust monument currently being erected outside parliament: “to sort of set up a congratulatory thing outside Parliament, is a really bad idea.” Dean voices an even stronger criticism: “the public narrative, how the Holocaust gets viewed, that that wouldn’t happen in England because we don’t have that small evil party. Whereas actually it’s, you know, is on the verge of happening.” Nicola thinks that the “newer national curriculum, it’s- is a quite a nationalistic focus” and adds: “I do think it can be quite dangerous to just have a very nationalistic focus on your history.”

This tendency to critique Britain’s role or memory of its role in WWII is not shared by all. Some are reluctant to imply that “Britain is an evil force in the world” (Tom) and consider this to be a contemporary political agenda that is being put forward by the school system. Lawrence, the grandson of a POW and grandnephew of a war casualty of WWII says, “you should be proud of things that have happened here in the past, and you are the next generation kind of from here.”

Others resolve the patriot-critic conundrum by adopting a complex view of Britain’s role, highlighting both the good and the bad. This relates directly to the theme of complexity (Theme 1). Dean says: “We can come to a point where Churchill can be a racist, and can be a really effective Briton, and those two views can coexist at the same time, they’re not contradictory.” Nicola says: “I think we need to accept as a nation that while there were many good deeds that happened – [we] probably could have done a lot more, as well.” Richard, whose two grandparents fought against the Germans, says: “I’m not really a flag waver at all. But there is an element of pride.”

This theme reveals the freedom in England to question historical narratives, which may not exist elsewhere and relates to Theme 8 (Teachers value their freedom and agency in EaH). It also reveals that British teachers have, by and large, not found a curriculum that they feel is fully suitable for British remembrance of the war.

Theme 5: High pedagogical sensitivity and reservations about using harsh materials

There seems to be a pedagogical consensus that blunt information—harsh images or texts—are not a good way of teaching about the Holocaust. Ten of the teachers spoke directly to this issue. Some criticize traditional textbooks on this account and others prefer recent textbooks such as UCL Centre for Holocaust Education’s books that have largely replaced horrifying (“graphic”) images with personal stories. Other teachers replace harsh photographs with pictures that children drew during the Holocaust, which have a powerful emotional effect without the trauma of seeing or reading

harsh details, which, Peter notes, can be traumatizing. Some note that for sensitive children this can be especially difficult. David says,

I remember showing clips um from like Sophie's Choice for example, and then over time, I've tended to be a little bit more subtle about it, um, just because we don't need to hype it up, it's-it's shocking enough just telling it in very simple ways [and] because the kids can't look away.

Similarly, Lisa notes that making children cry, using simulations and role-playing are all bad pedagogical practices. Lawrence describes the use of graphic images as "trying to shock children into feeling bad about it," adding that since students play gory video games anyway, the "images don't shock them anymore... and it doesn't have the impact that the people who teach that way would hope it would have anyway."

This theme relates to teaching about the Holocaust sensitively and protecting the feelings of students. The adjective "sensitive" was used repeatedly in the interviews, and related to the entire endeavour, but also specifically to "sensitive communities" (i.e., the Jewish students) and to "sensitive children." The goal of protecting the students from the harsher implications of the Holocaust is translated into pedagogical decisions. For example, Nicola stopped screening emotionally wrenching movies such as "The Pianist," explaining that she prefers to teach about the Holocaust "as sensitively as possible." Dana, who uses Problem Based Learning pedagogies, asks students not to go into too much detail about how the Jews died, in order "to be sensitive to other students," and because "some students find this particularly emotional." Michael criticized his own previous "uncritical use of, of um, atrocity images," prior to his obtaining further education about teaching the Holocaust. Teachers tend to find alternatives, and they teach either about contemporary antisemitism, about the daily lives of children in the Holocaust or about the diversity of Jewish life.

This practice of censoring gory information is not without dilemma since the Holocaust itself was gory and did not spare anyone's feeling. For this reason, Nicola voices a concern about whether she is "being a bit too sensitive." While common, this tendency was not shared by all teachers in the group. Ian, for example, prefaces his lessons on the Holocaust by telling his students: "you're going to see pictures of dead bodies [...] see all this stuff." Interestingly enough, he explains that he went into EaH because "the main thing that interested me was the Nazis."

Theme 6: Use of creative pedagogies

Perhaps related to the previous theme of the avoidance of atrocity images and graphic information, teachers described quite a few creative lessons, methods and topics that they use, and have even developed themselves, in teaching about the Holocaust. These include: teaching about the lived experience of the Holocaust through children's art (Peter); Going on historical trips all around Europe (Declan); analysing a radio broadcast of the liberation of Bergen Belsen (Anita); analysing art about Nazis; encouraging students to do personal projects (Dana); forming a school club on genocide; analysing emails sent by Holocaust deniers (Michael); creating school exhibitions; connecting with survivors (Emma); developing an Art and Holocaust curriculum (Lisa) and more.

Some of the teachers highlight the importance of diverse or creative pedagogies in this field: “written stories, images, video clips, try to make it interactive” (David); “do something to respond creatively to hearing a survivor story that had moved a lot of them to tears” (Lisa). Richard explains his pedagogical style thus: “It’s almost like discovery, questioning, inquisitiveness, um, developing thinking skills. And based on people.”

The way teachers discuss their creative pedagogies reflects the sense of agency and expansiveness that this provides. Dean for example refers to “the pedagogy that I’ve developed and knowledge that I’ve developed, and I think the textbooks, they’re quite limited.” This sort of curriculum development is ongoing, and Dean notes that, “we constantly rework that unit.”

Such creative pedagogies also allow the community-at-large to be involved in the topic. Anita says, for example, “We looked at the impact on kids of war, and we created some artworks which went on display in the city centre.”

Theme 7: A plurality of attitudes among teachers on details of EaH

The diversity of attitudes and opinions on EaH among this group of teachers is a second-order theme, especially when contrasted with the educational homogeneity elsewhere. This diversity was expressed in differences about the goals of EaH, historical understanding of the Holocaust, teaching methods, and curriculum. Here are some examples:

Peter and Anita are both in favour of categorizing actors in WWII by their social roles (e.g., perpetrators, bystanders, victims) while Declan entirely rejects this categorization. Steph sees EaH as a tool for social justice and social-emotional learning, while others see it as an end in itself rather than a means for other goals. Anita considers the Holocaust as unique; others highlight parallels between the Holocaust and other genocides. Dana sees the Holocaust as a chance to do some emotion and empathy training; others prefer sticking to content. Michael opposes the tendency to connect the Holocaust to modern-day racism, while other teachers see them as the same. Lisa works creatively on this topic; others work cerebrally. Paul loves the book, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* for its literary merits; others reject it for its historical inaccuracies. The list continues, with some of the teachers taking the functionalist side and others taking the intentionalist side in the historical debate; some seeing Britain as heroic and other seeing its actions as highly problematic, some believing that the Holocaust should be linked to the Israeli story and others believing the subjects should be kept apart.

What might we learn from this? First, that there is a plurality of opinions in the British educational system on EaH, and secondly, that this is not at all a problem for them or for the system. In fact, it seems to be a point of strength as it allows each teacher to take ownership of EaH in his or her own personal way. This leads us to Theme 8: Valuing freedom.

Theme 8: Teachers value their freedom and agency in EaH

Not only were diverse opinions and practices on EaH evidenced in the interviews, but so were – often, although not always – high levels of knowledge, proficiency and engagement. The combination of

these attests to these teachers' high levels of training, professionalism and, perhaps more than anything, autonomous reasoning on what to teach. There seems to be little intervention nor state-dictated policies in England, except for the *prima-facie* injunction to teach about the Holocaust. Ellen compares EaH in England to other countries, noting, "You can be a lot more honest, perhaps, and more straightforward about what you're teaching." This freedom is a source of pride and gratification among the teachers. Dean says he values "the ability to shape the national narrative." Michael comments, "if you say: right, let's do this, let's teach this particular topic – we're lucky we have a lot of freedom."

A lone dissenter, Tom, acknowledges having complete freedom himself as head of department, but warns that new teachers are not enjoying that privilege:

The teachers that are really passionate, fresh out of university, have loads of new ideas, they have the most up to date training, things like that, have got these incredibly full timetables, and they have no chance to really show any, any of that passion and refreshed thinking. [...] they're being completely snowed under with this; they're not given the freedom to really express themselves.

As is often the case, teacher autonomy comes at the expense of external control and supervision. This means that teachers may teach topics or use methods that experts do not encourage. A case in point is the use of the book or movie, "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas," which historians agree does not reflect the reality of the Holocaust, but which is used by five of the teachers (two others object to using it). There is, however, no easy way to hand autonomy over to teachers and at the same time to curtail their choices. The option of increasing their knowledge through CPDs, is a popular one, and is described in Theme 10.

Theme 9: Antisemitism is a contested and minimal part of the curriculum

There is little space devoted in the curriculum to contemporary antisemitism in England. Tom says, "There's not specific lessons focused on it [...] if, say, it doesn't come up naturally in a conversation, it might even not come up at all." Despite this, many teachers address contemporary antisemitism, or address historic (pre-Nazi) antisemitism, but it was difficult to find teachers who addressed both. Six teachers discuss contemporary antisemitism, without discussing historic antisemitism. Four discuss historic antisemitism without discussing contemporary antisemitism and only one teacher discusses both. This theme connects to Theme 8, the freedom to choose what is being taught. When Labour Party antisemitism was mentioned, it raised ambivalence, with some viewing it as problematic, and others as legitimate. Some noted that they are Labour Party members, which puts them in a difficult position when discussing this topic. Richard says, "It's difficult for me because I'm a Labour voter. And I suppose for me, it's 'what's the alternative?' So, I mean, it's simplifying that just a bit, but for me, the greater danger is from right wing extremists promoting antisemitism." Lawrence critiques both sides of the political finger-pointing cancel culture: "I would try and steer clear of always associating them with a political party and saying, because you are a Conservative you are,

therefore racist and Islamophobic in the same way that if you're a member of the Labour Party that you're antisemitic and so on, I think that's a fairly ridiculous argument."

Theme 10: Attesting to the importance of CPDs in EaH

The importance of good CPD is a shared theme both among teachers who have attended CPDs on the Holocaust and can attest to their worth, and among those who have not yet done so and feel their absence. CPDs on EaH changed the way teachers thought, taught and engaged with the subject of the Holocaust. Many of the teachers describe moving from shallow knowledge to deep interest and insight through CPDs. Richard describes how his teaching was very circumscribed when using the textbook and only after a good CPD did he become innovative as he can now "move away and sort of create [...] knowledge that I've developed."

Those teachers who have not had the opportunity to attend EaH CPD consider it a lacuna. Paul says he uses "a predetermined set of slides and resources" to teach the Holocaust and acknowledges that he is "not really speaking from a place of knowledge, but just kind of sharing what [is] on the slides." In addition, Nicola says, "I've been teaching 12 years; I would massively want some training on it...I would definitely want some training on teaching the Holocaust." The most endorsed was the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education training programme, which Peter describes as a "turning point" and Michael evaluates as "easily the best CPD I've done in my career." Other training programmes, such as Yad Vashem and the Imperial War Museum training were also mentioned as being helpful and influential.

Secondary themes in the interviews

We identified four secondary themes, which characterized some of the teachers but not all of them:

EaH in a location with a large immigrant population is perceived as challenging.

At times, teaching immigrant or minority students can be challenging, says Dana, and Richard, whose school is predominantly Asian-Muslim, concurs. He says it was harder to teach last year because of disruptions related to the Muslim population: "Through the Israel-Palestine sort of conflict that came to the fore around March, that was a little bit more of a challenging time [...] a lot of our students were getting their ideas from social media." As a result of conflicts in that school, a major goal of the teachers became to oppose "any discrimination in terms of religion, or belief, or indeed race in other contexts" among students. Muslim populations tended to clash with the Jewish ones, according to Peter and Declan, who adds that the movements of Anti-Colonialism and Black Lives Matter become part of this conflict, though Tom believes his students connect more with the Black Lives Matter movement than the Israel-Palestinian conflict. One teacher mentions that some students participated in pro-Palestinian protests. Others such as David and Emma, who is herself Muslim, feel differently about the challenge, arguing that Muslims and immigrants share anti-prejudice sentiment and are thus committed to the topic. Still others feel that they have found solutions to this challenge. For example, Lisa uses the universal language of empathy and universally themed imagery in teaching about the Holocaust in order to speak to immigrant populations too.

Discomfort among Jewish teachers when discussing Israel.

The four Jewish (or half-Jewish) teachers in this sample seem to be particularly ill-at-ease in raising the topic of Israel-Palestine. Some non-Jewish teachers also evade the topic (we counted four), but their reasoning seems to be different. Whereas the Jewish teachers see the topic as tension-fraught, complicated and likely to cause strife in class (“I’m glad that I’m not, I don’t teach that as a sort of a specific thing. [...] I think it is really difficult because of the entrenched opinions. [...] it is quite difficult because people feel so- it does make people feel vulnerable,” argues Ellen, a Jewish teacher); the non-Jewish ones offer more content-related explanations. For example, Nicola says she does not want students to think that the Holocaust was “good because it led to the state of Israel.” While among the non-Jewish teachers, three teachers see this as an interesting and pertinent topic (and use materials offered by the organization Solutions Not Sides in their teaching), overall, the teachers in our sample don’t usually take a stand one way or the other on the Palestinian-Israel conflict, with some, such as Steph, saying clearly: “I don’t feel I have enough of an understanding of it myself.”

Ambivalence about the mandatory nature of EaH.

As some teachers note, the fact that the Holocaust is the only required topic in the entire British history programme makes EaH teachers feel special, necessary and reassured. Some teachers support this choice as they feel that EaH occupies a unique space as a key event in History. David even uses this unique status to ask students why this is a required topic. On the other hand, others have reservations, feeling that it causes a reaction among some teachers, who teach about the Holocaust because it is required, and as a consequence, dislike this topic. This relates to criticism voiced by some of the teachers, about the expertise of other Holocaust educators. For example, Declan says about teachers, “they don’t have the subject knowledge to engage with it.”

Time constraints

A number of the teachers note that there is not enough time to teach what they want to teach. For example, one of Michael’s biggest challenges is not having enough time to teach the Holocaust. Anita comments that there is less time now to teach about the Holocaust than there used to be. Dana does not teach about post-Holocaust challenges for the surviving Jews, due to lack of time.

Summary: Thematic integration in relation to previous studies

The British educational system of today is quite different from the traditional, formal and conservative educational system of the past. A “knowledge turn” has taken place over the past few years, aimed at diversifying what used to be a homogeneous narrative, or, as Eric put it, today’s question is: “how can we diversify and get rid of this kind of white British story?” Teachers are called upon to focus on diversity, the history of minorities, and the harms of colonialism. The enormity of the change is not missed by the teachers and Eric comments: “I’m very much aware that the curriculum has massively changed in the last two or three years in terms of diversity.”

Alongside a focus on diversity, other changes have taken place: a readiness to self-critique Britain’s own colonial past and misdeeds and forgo some of the patriotism of the past; pedagogies have

become more diverse and creative, and schools are encouraged to relate to their communities at large. Professional training is key in enabling such changes, allowing teachers to delve into topics that interest them and feel that they are part of the reform. Nicola comments: "I just think it's really important for teachers to update how they're teaching things and realize maybe you were doing things because that's how it was done in your school, and maybe you need to re-evaluate how it's done."

The Holocaust is now the only mandatory subject in history, which means that it too has a part in the general educational reform that is taking place. All of this should be seen as the backdrop against which to interpret the ten major and four secondary themes that emerged from the interviews with the British teachers.

We identified several connections between the themes, teacher and student attributes, which we summarise in Figure 4.

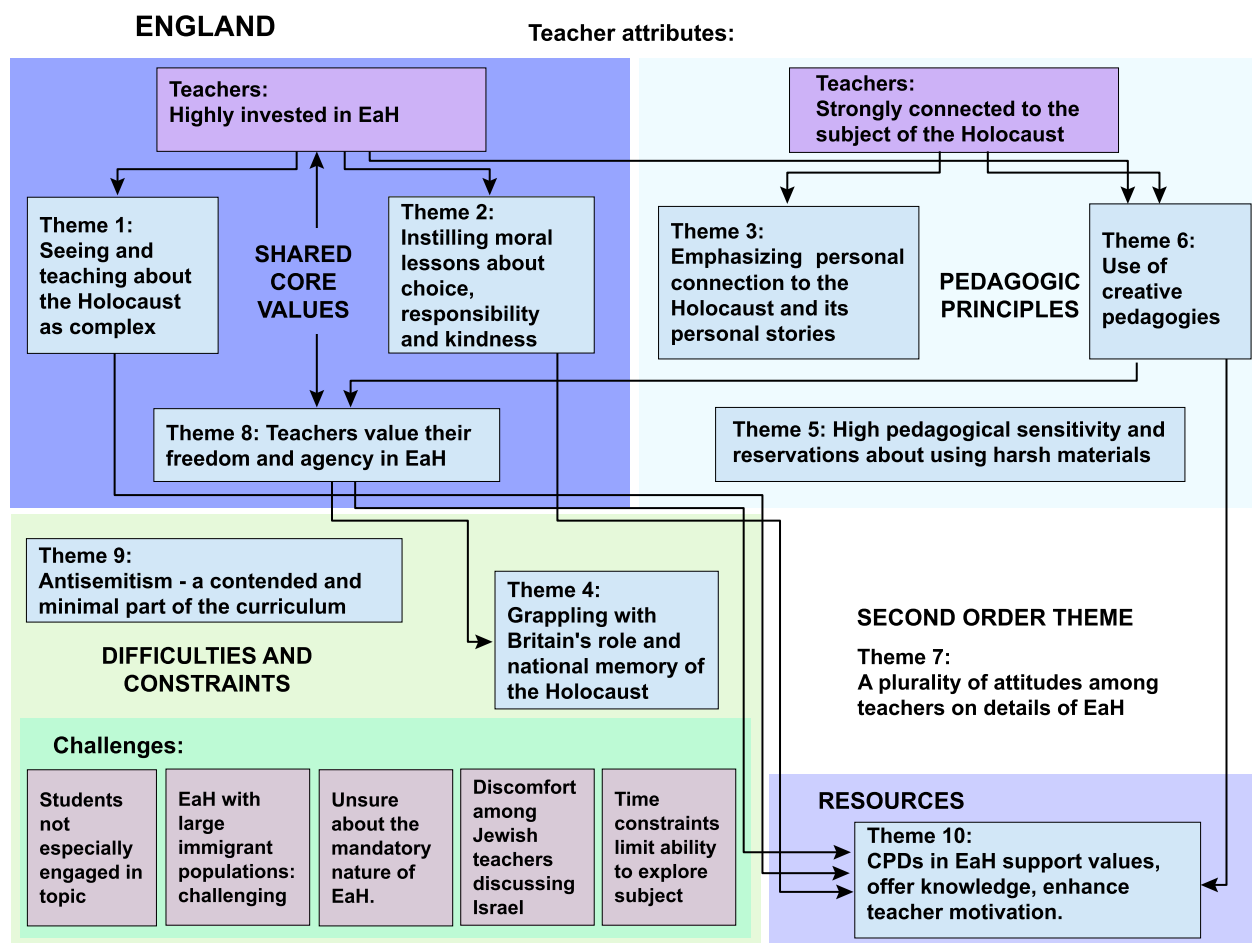


Figure 4: Thematic integration of English teachers' interviews

We organized the themes into three sets: The first is a shared core of values and attitudes. These include viewing the Holocaust as complex, instilling moral lessons and the theme which seems to underlie this set: the freedom accorded to teachers who teach about the Holocaust. These relate to

the fact that this group of teachers are highly invested in EaH. We argue that the freedom accorded these teachers increases their involvement in EaH. The second set of themes are the **pedagogical principles**, which we propose is related to the fact that the teachers find a way of personally connecting to the Holocaust. These include emphasizing the personal stories and connections, teaching sensitively and using creative pedagogies. This set reflects today's child-centred educational climate, as well as today's historical preference for the lived history of so-called ordinary people. The third set of themes relates to areas of **difficulties and constraints**, and includes teaching about antisemitism, grappling with Britain's history in WWII, the low level of a priori student engagement with the topic, and, for some – challenges with EaH among immigrant populations, discomfort when discussing Israel (especially among the Jewish teachers), ambivalence about the mandatory nature of EaH and time constraints. A second-order theme – the diversity of attitudes among the teachers – does not relate to the content of the interviews but to its wide variance. A final theme – attesting to the importance of CPDs – is considered a key resource as it seems to support many goals, such as pedagogical freedom.

In reviewing these themes, we see that four sets of attitudes emerge as holding special importance for this group of teachers:

- **“Connecting.”** The importance of connecting on an emotional level to the material is attested to by moral teachings, personal connections of teachers and use of personal stories in teaching.
- **“View reality in shades of grey.”** Complexity is seen as reflective of reality but also as more interesting and advanced and is considered a cognitive virtue.
- **“Freedom of choice is key.”** This is true both for the teachers (who can express a diversity of pedagogic opinions, criticize their nation, reflect on their own prior teaching of the Holocaust, and develop creative pedagogies) and for the students, as one of the main messages to students in the importance of choice in difficult situations.
- **“Be sensitive.”** This pedagogical injunction is based on the importance of sensitivity – to children and to victims of the Holocaust – in fostering diversity. This leads to attempts to shield the students from inappropriate emotional triggers and to discuss emotional aspects of EaH. It is also a message to students, to be sensitive and kind to others, as a result of learning about the perils of prejudice and racism.

How do our findings compare to the previous findings on EaH in England, detailed in the literature review?

While previous scholars were in consensus about the detrimental effects of the lack of a unified backbone for EaH in England – with no clear and shared goals, methods and even requirements –, our study found a similar state of diversity but concluded the opposite: A diversity of attitudes among our respondents was expressed in differences (at times oppositional) about the goals of EaH, divergent academic understandings of the Holocaust, different teaching methods, and multiple curricula. However, this diversity turned out to be an asset for English EaH, as it allowed for a very high level of autonomy and educational freedom among the educators. This in turn led to higher levels of professional engagement since teachers developed a sense of ownership over

their educational endeavours. Indeed, this plurality has been noted previously (Foster 2020) as a “liberating” force, and we concur.

While Pettigrew et al. (2009) found most educators prefer the human-rights, anti-prejudice perspective, Foster (2020) identified an “overriding tension” between a contextualizing historical pedagogy, and the human-rights lessons-based one. Our study found roughly equivalent evidence for both perspectives, but since they often appeared in the narratives of the same teacher, the conflict may be less of a challenge for the teachers in class. There seems to be ample space – time constraints notwithstanding – to work towards both sets of goals, and it is possible that the tension, while theoretically sound, functions as a false dichotomy in the classroom.

Teachers in the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education study (2009), similar to our own, were very concerned about how to make the Holocaust relevant for their twenty-first century students. Our study fleshes out the ways in which they manage this concern in class, through an impressive range of creative pedagogies, geared exactly to that purpose.

Previous studies have found that Muslim students are as engaged and committed to the lessons of the Holocaust as others. This had not yet been internalized by all teachers in our study, since some expressed difficulty and concern about teaching Muslims and other immigrant and minority populations about the Holocaust.

Our study supports recent findings of a significant improvement in the knowledge-base of teachers, due to richer, more professional and more readily available CPDs, especially those of UCL Centre for Holocaust Education. The importance of these CPDs was attested to by many of the respondents, while those who did not yet have a chance to attend them planning to do so in the near future.

3.4.6. Findings from the Spanish sample

The teachers: Six subtypes, none personally related to the Holocaust

The profile of teachers we interviewed is quite diverse, and includes men and women teachers under and over the age of thirty, less experienced (under 5 years) and more experienced (over 5 years) teachers; formal and informal educators; those who teach about the Holocaust as a specific topic and those who teach about it as part of a subject; teachers with EaH training and teachers without it; teachers with high and low levels of knowledge on the Holocaust; teachers from various autonomous communities, teachers who specialize in different subjects (History, Philosophy, Language, Religion among others) and, finally, a diverse group in terms of religiosity (Catholic, Jewish and non-religious) and in terms of ethnicity within Spain (Catalan, Basque).

When asked about the origin of their vocation as teachers in general, almost all expressed a passion for their field dating back to their early teens or youth. Some of them attributed this to the influence of relatives, to the influence of former schoolteachers or to their own interest in current affairs and politics, historical literature, films, or even video games. Some say that their vocation for the world of education was clear from the beginning, while others say that they did not plan to become teachers until they had to make a living. Among the 22 Spanish respondents, only one is not a

formally trained educator; his interest in the topic of the Holocaust led him to teach it through an informal educational programme in schools.

Their interest in the Holocaust started much later than their passion for education. When asked about their personal relationship to the Holocaust, none of the respondents had any family connections to report (such as a victim, perpetrator or bystander family legacy), which indicates a sort of distance between them and the subject. However, some described their family links with Francoism as a legacy of victims or perpetrators. Others said they feel a highly personal and intense bond to Holocaust memory, born of the initial emotional impact when they first learned of the topic. This occurred typically at a later age, either by reading testimonies such as Primo Levi's "If This is a Man," by meeting a survivor, or stemming from a special interest, fascination and even admiration for Jewish culture. In all of these cases, this preliminary interest led them to further delve into the world of WWII, the Holocaust and the Jews. Eventually, these personal interests were consolidated into a commitment to contribute to Holocaust memory and continue to learn about it through an educational prism. Thus, many of the teachers made a point of feeling personally connected to the Holocaust despite this initial biographical distance.

This was not the only narrative among the respondents. For some the Holocaust is just another episode of contemporary history; another subject on the curriculum to be taught. This does not mean, however, that the subject is downplayed: in these cases, teachers connect with the topic when it comes to explaining it but tend not to go much further.

Keeping these categories in mind is key when analysing interviews and drawing conclusions, as they affect the way teachers teach about the Holocaust, Nazism and WWII. Specifically, the degree of educational experience combined with one's level of knowledge on the subject, and having EaH training, are important differentiating elements, and affect, among other issues, whether a historical or ethical approach to EaH is chosen.

Based on these distinctions, we can classify the respondents into three types or six subtypes of teachers:

1 "Engaged activists": These are teachers who –

- Received specific EaH training by different organizations (e.g., Yad Vashem, House of Wannsee); and due to their continuous search for knowledge, have become part of a pool of experts in EaH in Spain.
- Carry out singular and long-time projects in EaH with their students.

In our sample, such teachers were middle-aged, which means they belong to the Spanish political transition generation. Nearly all of them are highly critical of Francoism and present as leftists. Their encounter with the Holocaust occurred after graduating from university and they do not remember having heard about it before. This group includes two subtypes, categorized according to their aim for EaH:

- Those who focus on **critical social thought** and engage their students with issues of political commitment and responsibility. Most of them studied philosophy.
- Those who use the **human rights approach**. Most of them studied history and were involved with NGOs, youth organizations and had international experience.

- 2 **Experienced historians:** These teachers have a good level of knowledge on the subject, due to their love of history and their responsibility for teaching the topic in the curriculum, but they did not receive specific EaH training and their encounter with the topic occurred when they had to prepare it as part of their role as teacher. They tend to focus on Nazism and other types of totalitarian regimes. They did not express the need to undergo training in EaH.
- 3 **Inexperienced Teachers:** A shared feature is their basic level of knowledge on the topic, despite having heard about the Holocaust early on. They can be classified into three different subtypes:
 - **Beginners.** These teachers have themselves been taught about the Holocaust either in Secondary School or when they were studying for their degree. Twitter, Instagram and Videogames are their preferred tools both for acquiring knowledge and for teaching.
 - **Lacking in knowledge.** During the interview, these teachers realized that they do not know much about the topic and that they would be interested in knowing more about it or in participating more in Holocaust Memorial Events, such as those of International Holocaust Remembrance Day.
- 4 **Informal educators.** These teachers got involved in EaH through a specific informal educational project, such as the Stolpersteine (stumbling-stones) project, or documentary filmmaking. They are interested in learning more teaching strategies and better ways to teach about the Holocaust.

Teachers feel supported, but often need to initiate. Regardless of their classification, almost all the teachers say they feel supported by the principal of the school and by their colleagues, as they have had no problems developing their educational work around the Holocaust. However, those who organize extra activities, which go beyond the classroom lesson, do note that none of these activities would take place were it not for their personal initiative. These are not, therefore, projects promoted as part of a school vision, but depend on the good will of the teacher on duty, who on occasion has the support of other teachers involved. In rare cases, the school promotes additional EaH activities, such as in the case of a school project on Spanish Republican exiles, but this is also not usually the case.

Only one respondent described difficulties with a colleague with whom he had disagreements about whether Stalinism or the Spanish Republicans committed crimes in Spain.

The schools: Varying levels of diversity

More than half of the teachers work in public schools, while the rest teach in semi-private ones. The degree of diversity (socio-economic status, ethnic and migratory background) of the educational setting varies. Some respondents serve highly homogenous populations, others experience some level of diversity in their schools and still others have a 90% rate of ethnic minorities (e.g., of Roma and migrant students) in their classrooms. Usually, the level of diversity is related to the type of school, with public schools being much more heterogeneous than private ones, but we also found some semi-private schools with quite a diverse student population, and one very homogenous public school, which is situated in a wealthy area of a city. Some of the semi-private schools are confessional (Catholic).

Thematic analysis of the interviews

Theme 1: A critical, socially active educational lens to EaH

In general, teachers try to teach the Holocaust in a critical way, avoiding simplistic narratives and showing the complexity of the nuances that make up the phenomenon. However, this critical lens tends more towards the social-ethical than towards the historical.

Teachers who deal with the subject from an ethical and philosophical point of view go deeper into a reflective understanding of the facts, going beyond the descriptive, and moving towards the evaluative or prescriptive. This is often linked to Hannah Arendt's (1963) theory about "the banality of evil" and focuses on three groups: perpetrators, victims and bystanders. These more philosophically minded teachers use these topics to reflect ethically and politically on their own responsibility for the facts, extending this to include other situations of discrimination (such as being bystanders in the face of far-right rhetoric, xenophobia and contemporary racism) as well as discussing other genocides past and present, as Guadarrama says:

We are talking about the responsibility of others; we are trying to find out who is responsible for what with conscience and freedom. But what about us? I always made them think about this: We assume responsibilities, come on. Things never happen for no reason, so where am I in all this? What would I have done, because we don't know, but where am I in this whole story? Who am I in all this story? And what responsibility do I have in this whole story, at an ethical level? What is needed to reach a level of dehumanization like this in the case of executioners? What does it take to reach a level of indifference in the case of the necessary collaborators? How can I avoid this? And speaking of all that ethical responsibility, we always came to the political sphere, which I think is also unavoidable. [...] I told them: boys, girls, as Kate Millett said, there is nothing that is only personal, everything personal is political, and therefore your position in the world will become political, by action or omission. You decide where you stand, from now on what you want to be: victim, executioner or "bystander." You will have to decide where you stand in the world in this wicked triangle.

Even those who teach from a historical point of view, make use of the Human-Rights perspective through comparative historical teaching. Oro uses current events to point out the rise of the extreme-right political parties, and how this is similar to the ascent of Hitler to power. In the interview he describes several incidents of right-wing politics in Spain that he had used in classroom discussions, and he does not mince words:

For example, like last year there was that demonstration, in honour of [the Spanish Blue Division soldiers who joined the Nazis at the battle of Krasni Bora against the Soviets]. At the end of the march, speakers gave antisemitic speeches. I love it when the [Neo] Nazis do these things, because it helps me to teach entire classes about it. I stop whatever I am doing, to show them the video and tell them, "Look at what is happening, it's not from fifty years ago, but yesterday in Madrid, honouring those who went to battle with Hitler against the Russians. So be very careful." Many times, they themselves name some political parties. [...] I tell them, "Be very careful. Careful about the day when you'll be able to vote. Because this

can happen again.” [...] I tell them these things] not because I want to indoctrinate them, but I want them to think. “Look kids, this is the statue of Hitler from 1933 and this is the statue of Hitler [he is referring to a statue of Franco] from 2021. Isn’t it the same?” I don’t want them to think I’m indoctrinating them; I want them to start thinking for themselves about the absurd things the adults do still.

Other history teachers considered that the aim is to make sure the students learn how to create connections, and to study cause and effect, and consequences. Here, again, it is less the historical aspects that are emphasised, and more the connections to the present. For example, Turia considers the main aims of EaH to make students active in political and social life, connect history to contemporary issues and challenges, and enhance students’ historical consciousness.

At times, this contemporary social-activism education can end up minimizing the actual topic of the Holocaust, as Abbetxo says:

So, for us, the issue of the Holocaust, the issue of the persecution of the Jewish people, or of any other people [pauses] or what Nazism did or what Stalinism did, what totalitarianisms do today, with multiple ethnicities, different types of people, etc. Everything is in the same container. So, what do we do as professionals? You don’t talk about the Holocaust [pauses]. You have to have a testimony of life.

Theme 2: Linking the Holocaust to Francoism

Closely related to Theme 1, we found that none of the teachers deal solely with the history of the Jews and the Holocaust in their classes. They always teach about it in conjunction with other victims of Nazi persecution and in particular with the Roma genocide. Some mentioned other genocides, however, the most controversial question was whether to link the Holocaust with the subject of Franco’s Government. On this issue, respondents expressed three different approaches:

- 1 Some teachers questioned and criticized the role of imposed neutrality of the Spanish state during the war, that is, the relationship between Franco, Hitler and Mussolini as collaborators, the war crimes of the Blue Division, etc. They see Franco’s regime as a clear collaborator of the Nazis and include the Spanish Republicans as a topic in EaH:

So, what I do to end the issue is that I don’t separate the Spanish Civil War from the World War, I unite them. Because I was taught in my [academic] degree that the latest historical studies indicated that in the end, world war, well, civil war and world war go together. In the sense that they are wars that cannot be explained without each other, it is a continuation of the great European civil war, which in this case reached the whole world. (Sant Mateu)

I like to do a general comparative study of, for example, the general characteristics of fascism. And in there we study Hitler and Mussolini and I also include Franco [...] We are close to a place where we had a- Francoist concentration camp, you could call it. It was very close to our high school. (Teide)

The whitewashing of Francoism as a non-fascist regime is absolutely false. That is, it is unsupportable. There's a part, there's a moment, because of course, I always hope that the one that corrects my students' exam for entering University will be "red." Because of course, in the end, I always start talking about Francoism by asking a question that is not on the agenda, [...]: "Why is Francoism fascism?" [...] And in fact, I've been talking about the Spanish genocide for two years now, which I know isn't right, I know there are a lot of historians who would say "that's crazy, what are you doing," but [...] ultimately, in this country there was a genocide of people from the left, either because they were sent into exile, or because they were killed or because they were told "you stay at home and if you raise your head I beat you." And this is pure and simple genocide, and that's it. (Mascletà)

They need to know that Franco was no less than Hitler (Oro)

- 2 Another group of teachers still holds that Franco did not have any relation to the Nazi regime, and that Spain kept its neutral status:

[...] "Why are you working on the history of the Franco regime, when it has nothing to do with what happened in the Holocaust?" And of course, we said, how does it have nothing to do with it? The División Azul that was Franco's participation, of Franco's neutrality, existed, do you understand me? (Monestir)

For us [Spaniards] it's not a regular subject, because we were not directly involved in WWII, so the historical implications for us were not the same as for other countries. (Valldoreix)

- 3 Other teachers link Spain and the Holocaust through presenting the Spanish Righteous among the Nations but do not teach about the Spanish restricted policies against the Jews.

Be their opinion as it may, several teachers noted that some students are pro-Francoists or have heard at home that he was a great man, and feel that this too should be taken into consideration when teaching the topic:

I have a sector of the class that is firmly pro Franco, well-. They like Hitler because he was Franco's friend, because he was a bad bastard, and they are in the stage of being "bad guys," I think it's more about how they present themselves [...] So, bottom line I think this is how they live it. There is a minority who do like the figure of Franco, because of course, I guess if you heard in your family that Franco did great things for Spain; that during Franco's time there was no unemployment; that there was, above all, the issue of immigration. I mean, they're pretty anti-squatters and pretty anti-immigration in general. (Sant Mateu)

Theme 3: Content extension and some use of creative pedagogies

Those teachers who are most closely associated with the subject of the Holocaust tend to adapt lessons by adding additional content that extends beyond the dictates of the curriculum or the textbook. They demonstrate a dedication that is the result of many hours of extra, voluntary work: not only is the subject discussed in the classroom in depth, but extracurricular activities are also organized in order to connect students emotionally to the topic. For example, the Holocaust is

explored through the testimonies of survivors or through literature (the figure of Neus Català with *“Un cel de plom”* is a popular example), events are organized to commemorate historical memory with the families of the students, or the Holocaust is explored through creative and cultural activities, such as the performance of an opera. Memorial site visits are also part of these extended activities.

Approaching the Holocaust and WWII from a richer and more holistic perspective than is required is not uncommon. However, most teachers teach the subject following the contents of the textbook. It is quite common within the more limited framework to use excerpts from films to illustrate the subject (e.g., *Life is Beautiful*, *Schindler’s List*, *The Pianist*).

When contextualizing the topic, before explaining it, some of the teachers encourage students to search for information in a PBL-style, in order to promote their autonomous work and engagement.

It is also worth noting, in terms of EaH pedagogy, that Covid restrictions had an unexpected positive side to them, which was the improved use of digital tools and especially of Instagram:

Then came Covid, and my Rusadir students, no one had internet, no one had email, but everyone had a cell phone with Instagram. So, it was my way, through their [Instagram] “stories,” to be in contact with the children and send them the homework, and they would send me their homework by private message. I spoke with the director, and he told me: “Look Rif, we are in a situation, knowing the economic situation of the children, that they do not have a computer at home, that they do not have internet, that the mobile is with a card, you know, with prepayment [...] well, if it works for you, go ahead.” (Rif)

Theme 4: Focus on the emotional aspects of Holocaust pedagogy

Ethical and political reflexivity is often accompanied by attempts to strengthen students’ emotional bond with the topic, through their own family stories, those of other classmates, or unfamiliar survivors. The teachers’ goal is to put a name and a face on the victims rather than treat them as large quantities of anonymous individuals.

Many teachers consider it essential to focus on the emotional and personal aspects of the subject if learning about the Holocaust is to succeed among their students. When Guadarrama used the Stolpersteine (stumbling-stones) project in class, two of her students discovered that they had a grandfather who had been incarcerated and murdered at Mauthausen, and they did not know much about what had happened. The Stolpersteine team graciously researched the grandfather’s story and gave the family much needed information and photos from the camp. This was a very powerful educational experience for her and the students.

For Nervion, focusing on the emotional dimension of education is essential, as emotions leave an impression for longer than data does:

And *Life is Beautiful* reaches them, that is, it reaches their soul, it reaches inside. I think it’s funny, it’s the only one that has dealt with the issue of the Holocaust from the perspective of humour, and besides, apart from humour, it’s also very sentimental, that is, the ending is very strong.

Theme 5: Use of harsh and graphically explicit material in teaching

Most of the teachers we interviewed have few qualms about using materials, images or texts of a graphic nature, that may hurt students' sensibilities, and this is common from 4th grade onwards. For example, Llobregat explains why she screens the film "Night and Fog"⁶⁷ to her students:

I practice the shock doctrine, I don't hide anything or want to sugar-coat anything, the facts are what they are, and these kids are old enough to be able to digest and integrate all this, and therefore, based on the questions that Alain Resnais poses at the end, who is responsible, who is responsible, then we begin to think in ethical terms who is responsible in that triangle.

Another teacher, Rif, explains that it is precisely the "morbidity" of these types of shocking images and stories that leads students to become curious about the events of the Holocaust, noting that this is especially true of boys rather than girls, since through video games and war movies they already have some knowledge of the subject:

As a matter of fact, the images, I show them the images, and whoever can't stand it can cover their eyes. But I believe we have to see them, with all that has happened, no? It's not the same you know, to see Life Is Beautiful and then to see [films of] Americans entering the concentration camps. We tell them, look, this is the way it was. I have to be a bit blunt, but that is what it was.

Teide notes that although today's youth are more sensitive than in the past, she still deems it important to expose them to images and films of concentration camps:

And the images from [Holocaust films], each year they are more sensitive to the images, the images from the extermination camps. [...] It's like they do not know about it, but they are very sensitive to those kinds of tragedies. I can tell you that about 20 years ago, I would show them the images, and- it would, like, shock them, but many of them would not believe it, they would say it never happened. [Today] they know less about it, but it's like they are more sensitive to it.

Interviewer: And, and why do you think this change was possible?

Teide: I believe that in contrast to what people say, the kids, today's young people, are very sensitive. I think they have a high sensitivity; they are more creative; they are more sensitive. [...] They say, please teacher, show me. They can stand the images, the content. That is the feeling I have. [...] I also don't want to hurt them, but it is something that they have to know about.

67 The French film "Night and Fog" by Alain Resnais, is a "brutally graphic" documentary of Auschwitz, produced in 1956, and includes historical footage of the horrors of the camp. It does not censor the inhumane treatment of the prisoners of the concentration camps and includes not only images of the gas chambers and mounds of corpses but also scenes of unethical medical and scientific experiments, rape, and executions performed on the imprisoned victims. (can be accessed on the website watchdocumentaries.com).

Theme 6: Antisemitism is not addressed educationally although it is expressed

Antisemitism it is not addressed in EaH and most of the teachers believe that it does not exist in Spain. One of the reasons they give is that there is a smaller Jewish population than in other countries. Mascletà explains: “It’s my personal opinion, but I think of course, due to the non-existence of a Jewish reality for 500 years in Spain, Judaism is not part of our daily reality.” Only in Melilla, a highly multicultural city where Muslim and Jewish people live together, teachers from there explain that there are some antisemitic comments and tensions in the classroom due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Melilla, Melilla is really racist. I’m telling you, it’s multicultural because we have to live together and it looks very nice in the Melilla title, but Melilla is racist. And Melilla is racist among Muslims and Jews. And in Melilla the issue of Israel and Palestine, I’m telling you, they don’t know the history, they don’t know where they come from, they don’t know why they come, but yes, it’s like “the Hebrew is bad.” (Rif)

In other parts of Spain, on the other hand, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict does not often surface educationally, and respondents note that the students are much uninformed on this subject. In its place, they describe xenophobia against the Maghreb or Latino-American population, and this then goes beyond the students, and saturates society in general. Therefore, some teachers consider it important to highlight diversity among students:

Human life is very important, no, no matter what religion you want to be, or ideologies you want to have, or sexual tendencies. So that no one will tell you what you have to do or stop doing. You need to live your spirituality on the inside, and not pay attention to the crazy person who tells you that you have to expel Christians from Muslim territory. In the end, I think that is what they need to understand. (Abbetxo)

Although they neither teach nor experience antisemitism, some teachers, upon reflection, themselves made what could be considered antisemitic remarks:

When I have to give the example that Fernando VII had the right of veto in the constitution of Cádiz-. Ferdinand VII had the right to veto laws, so to explain the right of veto, what I usually explain is the Security Council of the United Nations, in which five countries are permanent members. One of them is the United States, and that in the face of the atrocities committed by the State of Israel against the Palestinians, even if the United Nations tries to sanction Israel, because by using the right to veto they stop it. And then I take the opportunity to say a little about what a lobby means, recounting the powerful lobby that the Jews have in the United States, who are the ones who manage the dough and those who control Hollywood, in broad strokes. (Nervion)

A teacher of mine, for example, a violin teacher from when I was little, who was a super modern girl, suddenly married a boy, they became Orthodox, four children, and she from

being super modern, wearing a miniskirt and neckline, to thick tights in summer, okay? So, the Unorthodox series, my brother and I, were not surprised. And we are tired of seeing people, well that, on Fridays go to pray, dresses, curls. (Rif)

Other teachers, while not expressing anti-Jewish or anti-Israeli sentiment themselves, sanctioned it among their students:

But it is clear that antisemitic jokes, anti-gypsy jokes, concentration camp jokes are the order of the day. I don't think they should be blamed for being antisemitic because being an anti-Jew at that age is, I think... [Leaves the sentence unfinished]. (Sant Mateu)

Theme 7: Difficulties in teaching about the Holocaust

Respondents raised the problems of limited opportunities to explore the topic, the opposite problem of Holocaust fatigue:

- 1 **No space on curriculum:** The main problem noted by respondents is that the curriculum is very standard and if the topic of the Holocaust does not appear in the curriculum, it is difficult to bring it up. In Philosophy, for example, it does feature, either in the 4th year of ESO⁶⁸ or in the Baccalaureate, so it is not discussed unless the teachers make a deliberate effort to fit it into the tight schedule of their course. The same thing happens in History, except that the Holocaust is one of the studied subjects in the 4th year of ESO. However, teachers have very limited time to deal with it, along with WWII and totalitarianism, and the topic is often reduced to transmitting bare-bones historical facts without time for ethical-philosophical reflection.

Due to the lack of time, but also due to the fact that the Holocaust is not considered a priority in Philosophy, the critical and reflective analysis of the Holocaust is not carried out without the initiative, dedication and goodwill of some teachers. As Llobregat points out, it's either a matter of ignorance on the part of curriculum designers or it is not in the political interest of the regime to focus on this subject.

The classroom thus fails to function as a place to exercise deep reflection on issues of discrimination and civic responsibilities. The corollary is a lack of development of the initial political awareness that is necessary to become free and critical citizens.

- 2 **Holocaust fatigue:** Paradoxically, despite the lack of time or the limited curriculum, some teachers believe that there is a kind of "chronic fatigue syndrome" regarding the subject of the Holocaust. They feel that the "Nazi theme" is recurring and difficult and believe that students have heard about this topic too many times, not only in school, but also at home, on TV, in movies, and in video games. They feel that by now, their students probably already know everything they can teach them. This, despite the fact that it is often found that Spanish students have only a vague

68 ESO, (Educación Secundaria Obligatoria) is Secondary education in Spain, which is obligatory. It consists of four years, from seventh to tenth grade. These are known as 1st to 4th years. Students in ESO are between 12 and 16 years old.

and biased idea of the subject, although there are usually no cases of absolute apathy or denial. Monestir describes Holocaust fatigue:

[Holocaust fatigue] is worrying me quite a lot in recent years, because, that is, recently students have begun calling it a tiring subject. The word they use is “fatiguing,” okay? And they say: “Yikes Moni, but, again, we’ve been talking about this the first semester and the second quarter and now we’re talking again, and are there no other topics?”

Some teachers aim to counteract the feeling of fatigue by correcting the often-confused knowledge on the subject and deepening it.

3 The post-truth era in which we live also affects EaH:

I think we have to recover the idea that truth exists, that not everything can be relativized, that we cannot talk about revisions or a revisionism that questions us, although sometimes, perhaps sometimes, it is worse than denial, in some things. Therefore, to me the subject is truth. With history facts exist, and the facts lead us to say this is what works socially as truth, for me this is very important.

Monestir considers this to be a serious challenge in EaH, albeit a relatively recent one:

This is happening more and more. [...] in fact, this past year I was working on the concept of denial, revisionism, fake news, okay? All this post-truth and so on. I didn’t work it out from this topic, I worked it to open up the concepts and have everyone look for what they thought of the topic and then each student took a fact and then, yes, there was someone who took the Holocaust, right? But it is true that I find, well, that we are, that especially in recent years, – there has been a kind of historical relativism, which allows, well, that all opinions are equally valid as all facts.

He sees a connection between post-truth and Holocaust fatigue: “There is an oversaturation of information that causes intoxication in some way. Of course, then this knowledge as such is much more questioned.” In a post-truth world, too much Holocaust-related information provides the students with more opportunities to question facts, due to a false belief that they have all the information needed to challenge them, at their fingertips. Along similar lines, Llobergat talks about:

A certain intellectual arrogance: “Ah, that – what could you tell me? What could you tell me, not only am I tired of the phenomenon, but I already know this.” Which is a general trend, eh, not only with this, but generally with everything. But with this topic, with that “oh, if we already know all this about the Nazis and fascism and the Jews, what else can you tell us about it.” Well, no, I don’t have to tell you anything, it’s you who should tell me what ethical-political position you will take from here on. I mean, I don’t have to tell you anything, I already know that you are very wise, that you know a lot, that you have studied a lot and that you have talked a lot at home. Then at the moment of truth [their knowledge] is not so much, we see that it is not so much. But this kind of – being above the phenomenon. The fatigue, the “we already know, we already know it” attitude.

- 4 **Lack of materials in Spanish:** One teacher noted that one of his bigger challenges is the lack of materials in Spanish, especially materials on non-Jewish victims of the Nazis. This in itself can indicate how the “Jewish Holocaust” is seen merely as a section of a larger topic of totalitarianism, genocide and persecution:

So, on one hand, the lack of time. And on the other hand, the lack of teaching materials, or at least I couldn't find them [...] it is not easy to find materials on homosexuals, or the disabled. At least, I could not find them. Maybe if someone insists and searches. [...] Maybe what I have to do is find it and prepare the material myself, but this is where time, everyday reality, with children, and so on, can make it more difficult. But of course, the easiest, not the easiest, but the most comfortable, because it is there and there is a lot of material is the subject of the Jewish Holocaust. (Mascletà)

- 5 **Covid restrictions** are another set of constraints. Respondents noted in particular the issue of not being able to visit memorial sites. This was seen as a big problem for those for whom a trip to the concentration camps is part of their EaH programme.

Summary: Thematic integration in relation to previous studies

In recent years there has been progress in the number of groups that support robust knowledge about the Holocaust in Spain. Nevertheless, the political aspects of this endeavour continue to be ambiguous and discontinuous as Spain's role in WWII continues to generate controversy. The historical memory of these events has become entangled with political identities and their respective narratives. Some Spaniards, including teachers, consider EaH to be less relevant in countries that were not occupied by the Germans or took an active part in WWII, such as Spain. Furthermore, the existence of diverse memories, sometimes causing “memory envy” or “divided memories,” challenges Holocaust memory and EaH. At the same time, there are very high social expectations attached to EaH in Spain: it is often presented as a useful tool to counter Holocaust denial and extreme right attitudes, and for preventing stereotypes, prejudices, and racism. The thematic analysis of the interviews illustrates these elements.

We identified several links between the themes and the teacher attributes, which we summarise in Figure 5.

We organized the themes and some of the teacher attributes around a shared core: **Grappling with a sense of distance from the Holocaust and from Jews**. Three main themes relating to this were 1) a critical, socially active educational lens, which values the importance of EaH through the opportunities it affords for contemporary social activism education (rather than, for example, a historical or commemorative focus); 2) a linkage of the Holocaust to Francoism, a topic that is readily meaningful and relevant to most Spaniards; and 3) the fact that antisemitism is rarely discussed and, simultaneously, the fact that a few of the Spanish respondents were practically the only ones in our study who expressed any anti-Israeli or anti-Jewish sentiment themselves. In terms of teacher attributes, not only were they unfamiliar with Jews in Spain (whom they perceived to be even fewer than they actually are) but none of the teachers were personally connected through family history

to the Holocaust. All of this creates a distance. This core issue of distance, coupled with the high motivation of many of the teachers to do a good job in EaH and to transmit important values and messages to their students, led to several pedagogical characteristics: 1) The choice to extend and enrich the rather limited curriculum with additional sources and topics; 2) The tendency to focus on the emotional aspects of EaH; and 3) the proclivity for “shock pedagogy,” that is using harsh materials in EaH. All of these can be construed as ways of drawing students into a subject that is distant from them and their world. Various pedagogical difficulties were also noted, and some, such as a sense that students suffer from “Holocaust fatigue” or the lack of materials in Spanish, can also be related to this sense of distance and the teachers’ attempts to bridge it. Finally, six subtypes of teachers were identified, based on their experience, exposure, field and age.

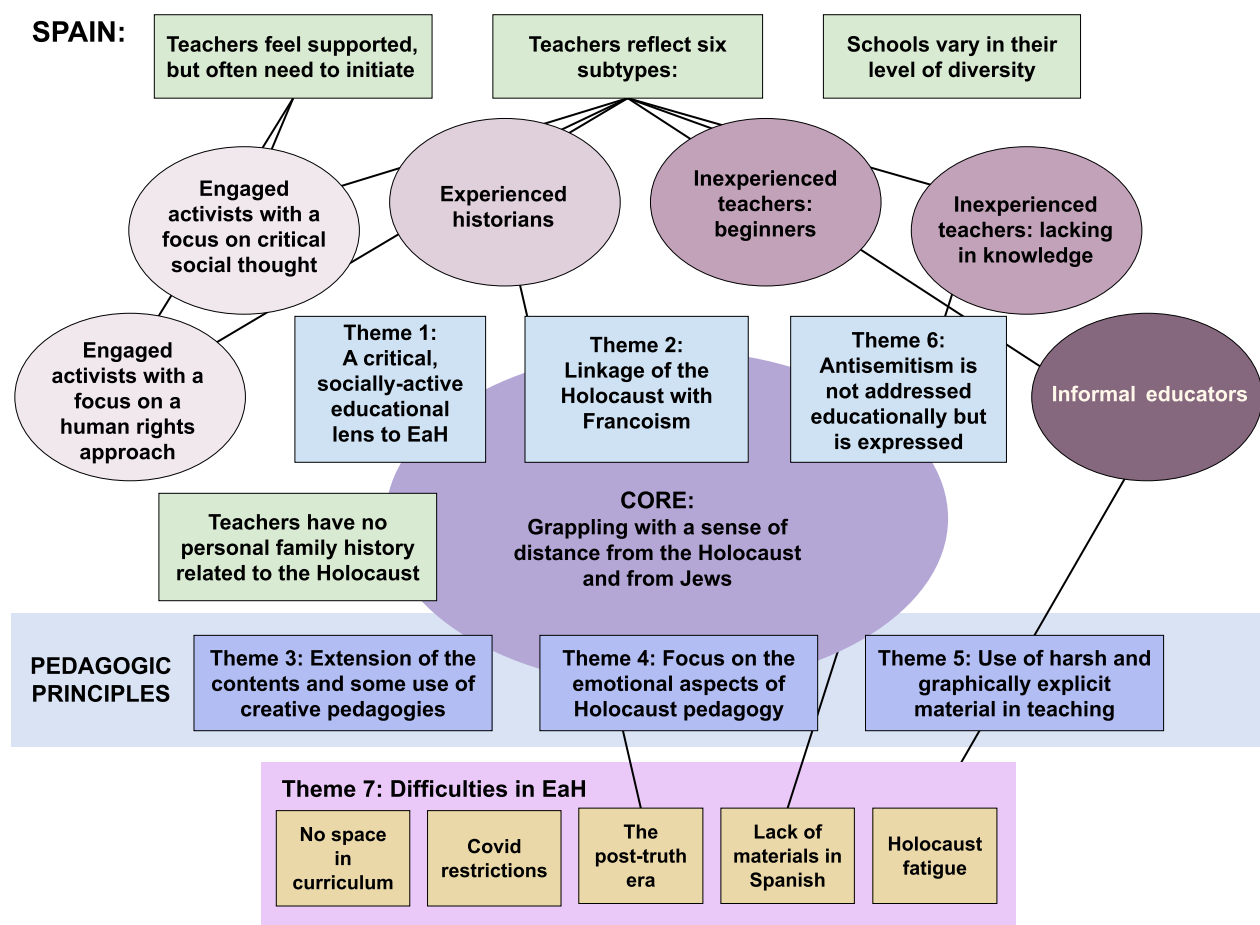


Figure 5: Thematic integration of Spanish teachers' interviews

The core aspect of a sense of distance from the Holocaust, meshes well with previous scholarship on the topic, which we presented earlier, in the Spanish literature review. We noted that scholars consider the collective memory of the Holocaust in Spain to be a sort of delayed memory (Menny 2014), and part of this might relate to this sense of “somebody else’s problem.” Also, we should keep in mind that Spain was relatively late in establishing itself as part of the global Holocaust memory community and that EaH became obligatory less than 15 years ago there. What we have recorded in

our interviews may be a snapshot of a “work in progress”: some teachers have begun to develop an expertise, while others are at the first stages of their journey towards knowledge and pedagogical proficiency in EaH. We see this in teacher subtypes and themes: Of the six sub-types of teachers we identified, the appellations of three are prefaced with the word “inexperienced”; themes that relate to pedagogy and to difficulties also support this interpretation. Some themes seem to reflect phases of EaH from which other countries have moved on. Specifically, the use of “shock pedagogy” is a highly contested practice in EaH elsewhere. A host of scholars and educational organizations caution against relying on emotional manipulation when teaching about the Holocaust and advocate adapting the materials presented to the developmental level and sensibilities of the students, by avoiding shocking, graphic or very harsh photos or footage (e.g., Bormann 2018, Lindqvist 2008, Novis-Deutsch, Perkis & Granot Bein, 2018; Short and Reed 2017 and many others). This is not the case in Spain, and perhaps we should add – “yet.” The theme of “Lack of materials in Spanish” (a point supported by research as well, as noted by Carrier 2015 and Richou & Simó in press) is another indication of the “in-process” state of EaH in Spain.

The other underlying issue is whether, how and to what degree, EaH should include the Francoist regime. Should Nazism and Francoism be equated, or does this reflect mainly “memory envy” (as Hartman 2002 describes it)? Various aspects of this topic were discussed by the respondents, but the consensus seemed to be that the Holocaust should be taught in conjunction with other topics, with the Franco regime looming large among them. Teachers made statements such as “I’ve been talking about the Spanish genocide for two years now” or “They need to know that Franco was no less than Hitler.”

A finding not covered in previous studies on EaH in Spain was the respondents’ emphasis on a socially critical perspective and on human-rights activism. Previous studies tended to focus on the levels of knowledge of students and teachers about the Holocaust, rather than on teachers’ goals and messages. Note that locating EaH fully within the framework of human rights education without acknowledging “the specificities of the historical discipline” (Carrier et al. 2015, 17) has been problematized in previous studies (e.g., Eckmann, 2010, Mihr 2015).

It is just as important to notice what was *not* discussed (or discussed very little) by the Spanish respondents. Very little local history related to the Holocaust was mentioned, in line with previous findings that Spain’s lack of significant places of memory was an impediment to engaging students in EaH. Little historical problematization or complexification of the topic was mentioned (e.g., discussing dilemmas, presenting different viewpoints, learning historical interpretations of causes and effects of the Holocaust) The Holocaust was seen more as an opportunity to transmit moral teachings to the students (e.g., “I tell them, be very careful. [...] Because this can happen again.”) The flip side of this contemporizing-moralizing perspective surfaced in the words of the teacher who admitted: “Everything is in the same container. So, what do we do as professionals? You don’t talk about the Holocaust. You have to have a testimony of life.”

3.5. Shared and Comparative Themes and Analysis

3.5.1. A comparative and integrative thematic analysis

The five national teacher profiles that we described can be mapped onto a two-dimensional space, as a function of two axes (see Figure 6).

The first axis is each country's historical and geographical proximity to the events of the Holocaust. Some of the countries we analysed (Germany, Hungary and Poland) were directly involved in or directly affected by the Holocaust; they were located at its epicentre, either as perpetrators (Germany) or as their accomplices or victims, while the others (England and Spain) were involved indirectly and were more peripheral to the Holocaust. As we shall see, this distinction has pedagogical implications today.

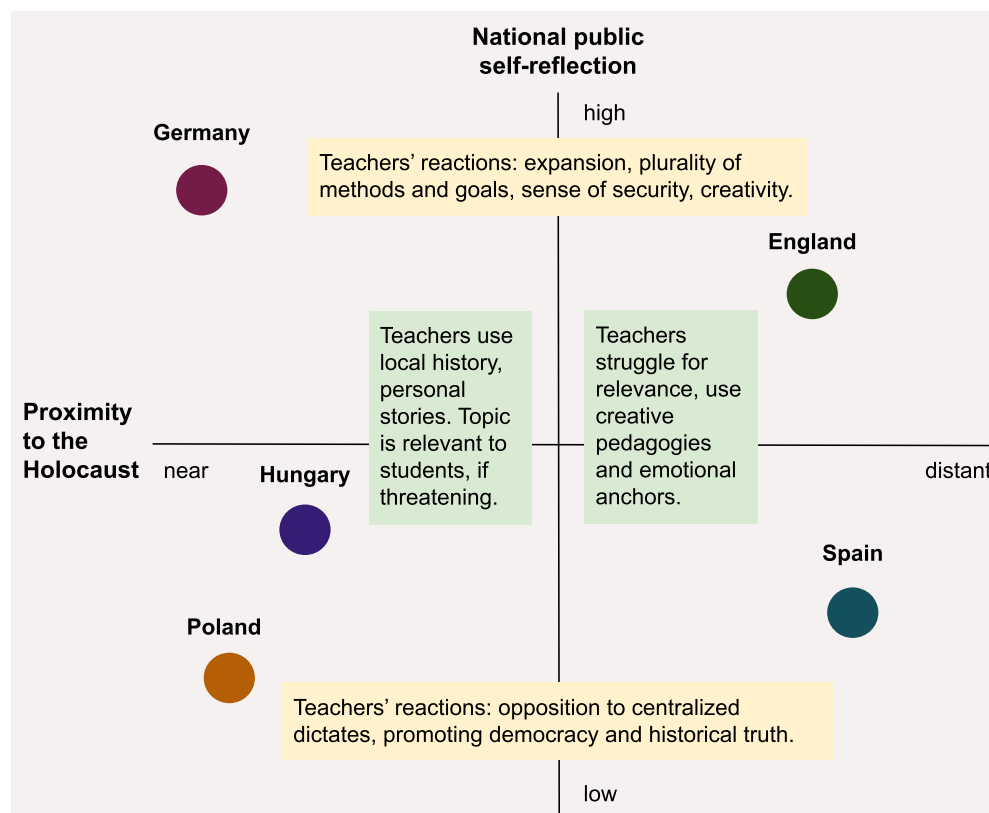


Figure 6: A two-dimensional mapping of the national case studies

The second axis is the approach to public self-reflection about the historical period of WWII and the Holocaust. This involves examining the nation's role in WWII and in the Holocaust, taking responsibility for any misdeeds or crimes, and making amends. Germany, the primary perpetrator country, has fully acknowledged its responsibility, works to atone for its crimes, and has made critical self-reflection of its role in WWII a cornerstone of its national identity, although researchers today point to a concerning gap between public and family narratives (see German literature review for details).

Hungary has taken some responsibility for the collaboration of its government with Nazi Germany during the war, and has committed to protecting its Jewish population, but the current government has not recognized the complicity of Hungarian society itself in Holocaust-related crimes, honours the memory of Miklós Horthy through statues and memorials,⁶⁹ and has been hostile to various discriminated groups, such as immigrants, indicating a limited level of self-scrutiny as relates to the Holocaust. Poland has focused in recent years on its status as a victim of the Nazis and on the suffering of ethnic Polish people during the war. It has hindered public discussion of those crimes in which Polish individuals and groups were complicit, instead taking a defensive position towards those who suggest that any Poles participated in Holocaust crimes. Spain espoused neutrality as its official wartime policy, but Francoist Spain maintained political and economic ties with Germany and did at times support the Axis countries (e.g., the Blue Division, the list of Spanish Jews delivered to Himmler in 1941). These darker parts of Spanish history in relation to the Holocaust are today rarely a topic of public self-scrutiny or discussion in Spain (although exceptions exist).⁷⁰ The UK heroically led the Allies in the war against Nazi Germany, saved many Jews and liberated Bergen-Belsen, but it too has some dark blots on its history when it comes to the Holocaust and to antisemitism past and present (e.g. strictly limiting the number of Jewish emigrants to Palestine, avoiding military action to stop the operation of death camps). There seems to be quite a bit more self-reflection and self-critique in England than in Spain regarding such events. The different national styles of public reflection also have important pedagogical implications.

As Figure 6 indicates, the teachers in our study interact with both of these elements: The closer the country is to the events of the Holocaust, either as perpetrator, victim, collaborator, bystander, or a mixture of these, the more easily teachers can engage the students with the topic, as it is a meaningful and often painful part of their history. Teachers in Spain and England struggle more with a sense of distance from the subject. As the Dedoose[®] analysis, presented in the next section, attests, they take their students least often on visits to memorial sites (in the case of Spain, this is also a matter of economic/material possibilities). The lack of easily accessible sites means that teachers have had to identify memory landmarks, take students on trips abroad, or find other ways of drawing their students into the topic. In contrast, when an event took place in one's own backyard, the signs are, often literally, under one's feet. Both Polish and Hungarian teachers have been harnessing local history to EaH in highly effective ways.

Among the Spanish teachers we interviewed "shock pedagogy" is practiced, and, less controversially, emotion focused EaH is quite common. In England the teachers we interviewed try out various

69 Miklós Horthy was the regent of Hungary during WWII. He entered an alliance with Nazi Germany, was complicit in the murder of the country's Jewish population during the Holocaust and was considered to be a vocal antisemite (US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2017.) On June 21, 2017, Viktor Orbán, Hungary's current prime minister, shared his appreciation of Horthy, by describing him in a speech as an "exceptional statesman". MTI, "[Minél többet ad fel hitéből és a kultúrájából Európa, annál gyengébb lesz,](#)" vissza website, June 21, 2017.

70 On March 8, 2022, the Balearic Parliament recognized the participation of Franco's government in the Holocaust and the part it played in Nazi crimes. It also condemned the implicit participation of the Franco regime, once the war was over, in the reception of fugitives and leaders of the Nazi regime into Spain.

pedagogies to draw students in, while avoiding “shock pedagogies.” In both Spain and England there is a preference for connecting EaH to a human rights framework (a less common practice in Poland and Hungary), linking the Holocaust to contemporary events and bringing as much educational passion to the subject as possible, but the sense of distance still seems to pose a challenge to both.

Regarding the second element, we find that the more a nation recognises the enormity of the Holocaust and is willing to acknowledge its own role and responsibility in it, the more comfortable the teachers feel to express themselves creatively in EaH and to work “with” the system rather than against it. This might be related to having long democratic traditions and more ethnically-diverse societies (in the UK and Germany) versus a history of non-democratic regimes and more culturally and religiously homogenous societies (Poland, Hungary and Spain).

Germany and England are clear examples of such cases, and we find this national “willingness to work through” (although, of course, of a very different nature in Germany and in England), to be related to an internal sense of autonomy, freedom and satisfaction expressed by the teachers when educating about the Holocaust in that climate. In Germany, an open and supportive atmosphere and connection with state or sub-state actors leads to a sort of harmony between the teachers and the establishment that can be described as relatively unique.⁷¹

On the other extreme, Poland, the most resistant to shouldering blame, and Hungary, which seems to have learnt least from its past, both limit and control teachers. Paradoxically, by so doing they induce their teachers to go “against” the system covertly or overtly, at least in our sample of caring and devoted teachers. Spain, too, is not high on self-reflection; the “Franco period” of its history has not yet been worked through and judging from the complete lack of reference to the Spanish Inquisition and expulsion of Jews, neither have antisemitic events in Spain’s past. Relatedly, we found a critical attitude towards Spanish authorities among Spanish teachers as well, although the tendency to advocate a socially active and critical educational perspective characterized only a subset of the teachers, while others remain quite unaware of Spain’s problematic past in terms of Jews, and its current antisemitism.

71 Importantly though, in the German case, we must bear in mind that teachers are professionals whose job it is to convey knowledge and foster a particular civic identity. While the German teachers seem to be in line with the requirements of the educational system, and rarely express resentment towards the well-established role of EaH in the curriculum, our data cannot rule out the possibility that resentment among parents, students, or Germans at large is widespread, as empirical data on the prevalence of secondary antisemitism in Germany suggests. A study conducted in 2014 found that 55% of the participants partially or fully agreed with the statement that they were “annoyed by the fact that even today the Germans are still being criticized for the crimes committed against the Jews.” (Klein et al. 2014, p. 70) Therefore, it is not surprising that resentment against the alleged over-thematization of the Holocaust in the education system is “omnipresent” (Salzborn & Kurth 2020, p. 28) within German society. Thus, the German educational system and its teachers may serve to bridge the gap between a public attitude of atonement and a private attitude of ambivalence towards Holocaust memory, while their success in this endeavour may not be assured.

3.5.2. A Thematic Comparison of the Five Countries

A comparative examination of the themes that emerged in the five samples, elicits eight categories:

- 1 **Teacher characteristics** – These may be related more to sample than to country, but they seem to indicate successful recruiting of diverse samples in most places.
- 2 **Student characteristics** – These are less likely to be related to sample characteristics as each teacher reported on many students that they have taught over the years.
- 3 **Teachers' EaH goals**, central concerns and important values.
- 4 An **ideological thematic core** based on how teachers view and assess the public domain in relation to EaH. To some extent, this is also a reflection of their political attitudes.
- 5 **Issues of content** and its interpretation.
- 6 **Pedagogic principles** – The ways in which each group teaches about the Holocaust, and how they manage some pedagogical issues in the classroom.
- 7 **Challenges**, difficulties and constraints that teachers face in EaH.
- 8 **Resources** of support and strength that help the teachers achieve their goals (this category was absent in Spain).

Table 9 presents these themes by country, with colour coding to indicate the eight categories: Red – teacher characteristics; Orange – student characteristics; Crimson – goals and values; Green – attitude to public domain; Black – content choices; Light blue – pedagogy; Dark blue – challenges; Purple – strengths.

Next, we assessed these themes by how similar or different they were from each other across different countries. Several themes were shared across all five locations; another set of themes reflects a diversity of opinions and practices; a third set reflects points of contention, that is, opposite trends or conflicting views between locations; and a final set of themes includes topics that were idiosyncratic, that is, each theme only characterized one location. Note that as we shift to increasingly broader summaries, we inevitably miss the unique details, single-cases, and subtle differences between individuals and locations, in favour of rather sweeping generalizations. This trade-off should be kept in mind. The last type of analysis before the final summary is a series of categorical analyses made by coding interview segments by topic using the mixed-methods digital platform of Dedoose,[©] and using survey data by the respondents to identify patterns in the full data set.

Table 9: A comparative list of themes by country and by category (colour coded)

Poland	Hungary	Germany	England	Spain
1. Teachers devoted to EaH despite zeitgeist.	1. Three types of teachers: initiators, well-trained and self-taught.	1. Teachers are focused on an ethical mission.	1. Teachers strongly connected to EaH in various ways.	1. Teachers of 6 types: Engaged activists (social-critical or human rights), Experienced historians and Inexperienced teachers (beginners, lacking in knowledge) or informal educators.
2. Teacher and student attributes: homogeneous.	2. Students are relatively homogeneous.	2. Student diversity levels vary.	2. Teachers deeply invested in EaH.	2. No teachers personally connected to Holocaust.
3. Students threatened but interested.	3. Students of today more digitized, less rebellious.	3. Overall, students are highly interested in the Holocaust.	3. Students highly diverse, not especially involved.	3. Teachers feel supported, but often need to initiate.
4. Teachers practice social activism in their local communities.	4. Main goals: show big picture; warn of recurrence.	4. Some students experience Holocaust fatigue and resistance to the topic.	4. Teaching about the Holocaust as complex on many levels	4. Their schools vary in diversity.
5. Educational goals focus on personal responsibility and anti-authoritarianism.	5. The impact of family stories and their relation to levels of interest in EaH.	5. Goals: autonomous judgment, emotional connection, promote human rights or democracy, combat antisemitism, highlight choice.	5. Main goal: Instilling moral lessons about choice, responsibility and kindness.	5. A critical, socially active educational lens to EaH.
6. The pressure of the state "historical policy."	6. Teachers critical of textbooks and new national curriculum.	6. Antisemitism is expressed and experienced.	6. Teachers value their freedom and agency in EaH.	6. Holocaust often linked to Francoism.
7. Governmental policies affect teachers' freedom.	7. Teachers experience control from "above" in EaH	7. Educationally countering a feeling of distance from the Holocaust.	7. Grappling with Britain's role and national memory of the Holocaust.	7. Extension of the contents and some use of creative pedagogies.
8. The ethno-centric model of national identity.	8. Competitive comparisons between the Holocaust and other historical trauma.	8. Teachers rarely embed the Holocaust in larger narratives.	8. Emphasizing personal & individual aspects of Holocaust.	8. Focus on the emotional aspects of Holocaust pedagogy.
9. EaH is approached via the local lens.	9. Enhancing the curriculum with creative pedagogies, local angles and additional resources.	9. Understanding antisemitism depends on worldview.	9. High pedagogical sensitivity and reservations about using harsh materials.	9. Use of harsh and graphically explicit material in teaching.
10. Pedagogies are highly diverse.	10. Direct emotions expressed by students considered a measure of EaH success.	10. EaH and Israeli-Palestinian conflict not systematically combined.	10. Use of creative pedagogies.	10. Difficulties in teaching about the Holocaust: No space on curriculum: Holocaust fatigue, the post-truth era, lack of materials in Spanish and Covid restrictions.
11. Current events discussed in the classroom.	11. Antisemitism among students "manageable," less so among colleagues.	11. Pedagogy is experience- and skill-oriented; less knowledge-oriented.	11. Antisemitism a contended and minimal part of the curriculum.	11. Antisemitism is not addressed educationally but is expressed.
12. Minimal EaH curriculum concerns educators and elicits their reaction.	12. Covid restrictions negatively influenced EaH.	12. Challenges and strengths of the German system.	12. EaH in a location with a large immigrant population is perceived as challenging.	
13. Antisemitism is experienced by teachers.	13. Specific educational settings are supportive.	13. Teaching EaH to minority students – A separate set of challenges.	13. Discomfort among Jewish teachers discussing Israel.	
14. Gaps in teachers' knowledge and their efforts to reduce them.			14. Ambivalence about the mandatory nature of EaH.	
15. Additional challenges in EaH.			15. Time constraints.	
16. Sources of teacher support.			16. A plurality of attitudes among teachers on details of EaH.	
			17. Attesting to the importance of CPDs in EaH.	

Shared themes: All countries

- Teachers committed to EaH:
- Feeling supported, trained (but not necessarily by official sources)
- Creative pedagogies

Themes reflecting diversity of opinions, practices:**Goals:**

- Personal responsibility, autonomous judgment, free choice – Poland, Germany, England
- Show big picture, complexity – Hungary, England
- Anti-authoritarianism, pro-democracy – Poland, Germany, Hungary
- Foster emotional connection – Germany
- Promote human rights – Germany, Spain
- Combat antisemitism – Germany
- Teach kindness – England
- Social critique, social activism – Spain, Poland

Acting upon values:

- Social activism – Poland, Spain
- Freedom, agency – England, Germany, Poland, Hungary

Pedagogical considerations:

- Pedagogies are diverse and creative – Poland, Hungary, England
- Use of local lens when possible – Poland, Hungary, England (effort made)
- Pedagogy is skill oriented, experience oriented – Germany
- Antisemitism exists among students – Poland, Germany, Hungary, Spain
- Emphasizing personal & individual aspects of Holocaust – England

Challenges:

- Not enough time/ curricular space to teach – Poland, England, Spain
- Covid negatively impacted EaH – Spain, Hungary, Germany
- Gaps in teacher knowledge – Poland, Spain
- Working with minority students is difficult – Germany, England
- Mandatory nature of EaH problematic – England
- Teachers need to initiate for things to happen – Spain

Themes reflecting opposite trends or views between countries:**Family stories:**

- Teacher personally connected (through family, stories) – Germany, Poland
- Teachers not personally connected – Spain
- Mixed picture of personal connection – Hungary, England

Teachers' feelings about the public domain:

- Concern, opposition – Poland, Hungary
- Feel restricted freedom – Poland, Hungary
- Identification – Germany, England
- Critical national self-reflection – Germany, England, Spain

Levels of heterogeneity:

- Teachers are a diverse group – Hungary
- Students are diverse – England
- Varied levels of diversity – Spain, Germany
- Students homogeneous – Poland, Hungary
- Teachers homogeneous – Poland

Student interest levels:

- Interested in EaH – Poland, Germany
- Less involved in EaH – England, Hungary
- Resistant, fatigued by EaH – Spain, Germany, Poland

Issue of shock pedagogy, manipulation of emotions:

- Support these practices – Germany (both), Spain (both), Hungary (emotions)
- Reject these practices – England

Raising the issue of antisemitism in class:

- Antisemitism is discussed, taught – Germany
- Antisemitism avoided – England, Spain

Idiosyncratic themes:**Teachers of different profiles:**

- Hungary (initiators, well-trained and self-taught)
- Spain (engaged activists, experienced historians and inexperienced teachers)

Content-related themes

- Teachers rarely embed the Holocaust in larger narratives – Germany
- A plurality of attitudes among teachers on details of EaH – England

Main educational concern:

- Germany: Issues of identity – Educationally countering a feeling of distance from the Holocaust
- Poland: Concern about ethno-centric model of national identity's effect on EaH minimization, distortion
- Hungary: Teachers critical of new national curriculum, distortion
- England: Issues of engaging students, low involvement
- Spain: Inexperience. Having "joined late" – Learning to navigate EaH, still work in progress

3.5.3. Mixed Methods Analyses; Categorical Distributions

We used the mixed-methods platform Dedoose[®] to input and code all of the interviews, and then to explore the frequencies of different topics and issues that arose in interviews across and between countries. Additionally, all interviews were linked to quantitative questionnaires that the teachers completed online. These questionnaires tapped 20 attributes of each teacher, including experience, EaH training, Holocaust role legacy (being descendants of victims, perpetrators etc.) and political attitude. We then compared the frequency of topics raised by teachers from different countries.⁷²

⁷² All raw counts were normalized based on descriptor ratios in the sample (i.e., if there were more female than male teachers in the sample, this baseline was accounted for in the analyses). Percentages are out of the full count of teachers in the sample whose interviews were coded for that particular topic.

Here are some of the main findings. When relevant, we note the research question that these findings address and/or report statistical significance.

Teachers' self-descriptions. Teachers described themselves in many ways. 50 of the teachers described themselves as having some sort of personal link to the Holocaust. In Poland and in Germany, half of the teachers began their interviews by noting their family's innocence in any Holocaust-related crimes. This matches the fact that in the questionnaires, only 11% described their Holocaust legacy as what could be termed "predominantly negative" (e.g., perpetrators, collaborators).

Half of the Polish teachers also told stories of being personally discriminated against (smaller numbers of teachers in other countries did as well), relating their identity to a "victimhood narrative." About a quarter of the teachers in Poland, Hungary and Germany (but not in Spain and England) described themselves as political and social activists. About a fifth described themselves as combaters of post-truth.

Sources of student knowledge about the Holocaust. The sources to which teachers attribute their students' basic knowledge about the Holocaust shift between countries, with German (27.9%) and Spanish (49.8%) teachers more likely to report their students gaining knowledge from films and social media and Polish teachers (42.3%) more likely to report their students' knowledge originating from their parents. German teachers (71.8%) were more likely to report that their students have a high level of knowledge about the Holocaust but were also the most likely (30.7%) to report low or basic levels of knowledge among their students. Victoria from Germany explains this apparent anomaly:

A few students are interested and also bring in a lot of prior knowledge. That differs indeed—right, some students already sit there with a lot of knowledge and others have no knowledge at all. Just recently for example, I realized that the term "ghetto" was only known to them from today's youth slang, and they were not aware of the historical meaning, so I first had to explain that in eleventh grade. And yes, then you realize there are large gaps in the knowledge, they are there, and you first have to bridge them to form a basis for conversation.

Hungarian (29.8%) and Polish (31.6%) teachers were the most likely to report that their students come to their classes with no knowledge at all about the Holocaust. For example, Gabriella from Hungary shares: "There are children who would, for example, start laughing [...] It's because they don't know anything about this topic, and it's very depressing [to them] when they are told what actually happened."

Students' and colleagues' attitudes about the Holocaust. Teachers discussed the attitudes that surround them towards the Holocaust. They experienced these attitudes from students, colleagues and principals. England had the highest number of references to teachers experiencing a "supportive environment" for teaching about the Holocaust. Attitudes of whitewashing and defensiveness towards EaH were reported primarily in Hungary (33.8%) and Poland (43.1%) while attitudes of "indifference" (66.1%), "blaming the victim" (100%) and "rivalry of victimhood" (83.3%) towards the

Holocaust surfaced predominantly in Polish interviews. For example, Jagoda of Poland says of her colleagues:

I am actually in a circle of people who are interested in this topic, but I also keep hearing, “stop it, on and on about those Jews, why do you bring them up, it only interests you and perhaps two more people, nobody cares about it, the students don’t want to hear it.”

Regarding a rivalry of victimhood, Paweł from Poland tells the following anecdote:

I have colleagues at school who have strong nationalist leanings – I’m speaking of my History teaching colleagues – and I once invited them to my lesson on the Holocaust [...] after I came back from Yad Vashem. [...] So, my colleagues are there and they like the lesson very much, and suddenly one of them says, “Why don’t we try to do a similar thing about Volhynia?⁷³ Why teach this, since we could transfer this method to teaching about the crime of the Ukrainian nation on the Polish nation?” And they started thinking how to transpose the workshop to there.

Issues of antisemitism. Elements of antisemitism were noted 150 times by 52 teachers in the interviews. Antisemitism was identified by teachers in all five countries, but most commonly in Poland (47 times) and in Germany (43 times). Hungarian (11) and Polish (12) teachers were the most likely to identify their colleagues as antisemitic. German (24), Hungarian (19) and Polish (19) teachers most often noted that their students were antisemitic. For example, Martina from Germany describes how once “a colleague [...] came very furiously with two students, carrying a whole table with her, because a swastika had been scribbled on it, in grade 6.” Holger shares a similar experience:

In the context of insults among themselves, so um: “You dirty Jew,” yes. Um, I don’t want to say now that that is a common saying, but that happens. [...] A short time ago, a fifth grader, I’ve also photographed it, made a swastika on the table with his pencils.

Although both teachers emphasized that they don’t see this as signs of the children being antisemitic as much as provocative, the antisemitic context of the symbols chosen is obvious.

Research question 7 probed a possible relationship between EaH engagement or other challenges and the prevalence of students from marginalised groups in the class (calculated as an average of the reported prevalence of racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, and students of low SES in teachers’ classrooms). We found that overall, 60% of teachers reported teaching in classes with less than 30% students from marginalised groups, 12.7% teach in classes with 30%-60% students from marginalised groups and only 9.3% teach in classes with over 60% students from marginalised

73 These teachers are referring to the crime of ethnic cleansing carried out in the region of Volhynia (today’s western Ukraine; a part of Poland before WWII) by ethnic Ukrainians on ethnic Poles in 1943 and 1944. This crime is played out ideologically and politically by Polish nationalists, which can explain why Paweł’s right-wing colleagues made such a comment.

groups. When taking this baseline into account (i.e., when normalizing the code counts), we found that according to the teachers' reports, classes with high percentages of students from marginalised groups were as likely to be positively engaged and connected to EaH as classes with low percentages of such students. However, there were also some differences: First, while joking around and making light of EaH were not very common, nor were expressions of anger and hostility at EaH, these reactions were reported much more frequently by teachers whose classes include many students from marginalised groups. 86.7% of such reactions occurred in classes with 75% or more immigrant students, 75% of such reactions occurred in classes with 78% or more students of low SES, and 75% of such reactions – in classes with 82.9% or more ethnic and racial minority students. Higher levels of antisemitic remarks in class were also reported in such classes. On the other side, these were also the classes where teachers reported more often that EaH made a difference in the students' lives. Finally, classes with fewer students from marginalised groups were characterised by higher levels of Holocaust fatigue.⁷⁴

Goals and messages of EaH. Research question 2 asked about EaH goals and messages and how they differ across countries. Most of the teachers discussed their intentions in teaching about the Holocaust. Some formulated these as goals to achieve, others as messages to convey. Table 10 lists the seven main messages and the 11 main goals that were mentioned by the teachers. As the table shows, the relative importance of the various messages was similar in all countries, the top three being that history can repeat itself, that everyone has a capacity for evil and that the students should avoid being bystanders. In terms of EaH goals, the three main ones were to reduce stereotypes, prejudice or racism, to teach critical thinking and independent thought and to help students understand historical context, although here there was more variability between countries. However, the frequency of goal or message discourse set Spanish teachers apart from the other respondents: less than half of the Spanish respondents discussed this topic, while nearly all teachers did so in the other countries.

Table 10: Main messages and goals for EaH, by n of teachers per country

Category of messages or goals	Poland	Hungary	Germany	England	Spain	Overall
Messages						
1. History can repeat itself	11	7	8	10	3	39
2. Everyone has a capacity for evil	7	3	5	6	0	21
3. Do not be a bystander	5	3	5	4	3	20
4. Human rights are critical to uphold, all people are equal	5	4	3	2	2	16
5. Take responsibility for the Holocaust as member of perpetrator nation	1	5	7	0	0	13
6. The Holocaust is incomparable to anything else	3	0	5	3	1	12

⁷⁴ When interpreting these findings, keep in mind that in Poland, and to a lesser extent in Hungary, the number of teachers with immigrants and minority students in their classes was low.

Category of messages or goals	Poland	Hungary	Germany	England	Spain	Overall
7. Israel is important and its existence is crucial	1	0	2	1	0	4
Goals						
8. To reduce stereotypes, prejudice or racism	10	5	6	10	6	37
9. To teach critical thinking and independent thought	7	3	9	10	4	33
10. To help students understand historical context	7	7	6	8	3	31
11. To teach students how dehumanization works	7	5	4	5	2	23
12. To help students connect emotionally to the Holocaust	4	3	6	2	4	19
13. To instil respect for others, kindness, care, develop empathy	8	4	4	4	0	20
14. To create good citizens and foster a Benevolent society	3	3	4	5	2	17
15. To make students interested in the Holocaust	3	2	5	1	3	14
16. To instil activism in students	3	2	3	3	1	12
17. To help students realize that the Holocaust was here – where they live.	4	4	3	0	1	12
18. To make students bearers of testimony	0	1	0	2	1	4
Overall discussion of goals of teaching and messages to students (n of teachers)	18	14	17	18	9	76

EaH content – What is being taught? This topic was raised in research question 4. We first note that a majority 63% of the teachers, across countries, reported that they engage in **comparative teaching**. That is, they compare, contrast or relate the events of the Holocaust to other events. This was mentioned quite often in the interviews (161 times) and various types of comparisons could be discerned. Among Hungarian teachers, the most common type was a comparison of the Jews to other groups of victims, such as the Roma and Sinti. Among Polish teachers, comparison to other genocides and other wars was the most common, for example, comparing the Holocaust to the genocide in Rwanda. Spanish teachers tended to relate the Holocaust to students' own lives, whether in reality or as a theoretical exercise. For example, Mascleta says:

I say, ask your father and mother what they would do if they couldn't feed you or if you were in an area of armed conflict where a guerrilla could suddenly come and catch you and rape you and-... I do this at certain ages, in 1st grade in ESO I don't talk like that, but when they reach 4th grade, between the ages of 16 and 18, of course they are very direct and very clear messages that describe a reality. So, it is little controversial.

Other categories included comparing the Holocaust to contemporary events and to historical events. Teachers noted various reasons for comparing the Holocaust to other events or experiences, among them: expressing the magnitude of the Holocaust by contrast, historical academic interest, a desire

to make the subject meaningful to the students by comparing it to other events, and competitive comparisons aimed at highlighting the suffering of other groups. For example, Sant Mateu from Spain says:

I, in this case, make special reference, because it seems like it is being erased, to the fact that the Nazi regime was especially cruel against Russia, the Russian population. This does not mean that something couldn't happen to a French Jew, or to a Danish gypsy (*sic*), but how the Russian people were treated is an incredible wound.

Next, we address the topics that teachers reported teaching about as part of EaH. 12 categories of topics were mentioned (see Table 11) and these can be sorted into three broader types: Historical aspects are discussed the most, contemporary implications are next and value education and lessons to be drawn are also discussed but mentioned the least.

Table 11: Content categories of EaH teaching, by n of teachers per country

Category + type	Poland	Hungary	Germany	England	Spain	Overall
Historical topics 214 mentions						
1. Antisemitism and its role in the Holocaust	13	7	14	14	5	53
2. Judaism—history of the Jews or their culture	10	10	10	8	4	42
3. History of the Holocaust—dates and facts	10	13	4	10	5	42
4. Daily life of victims	10	6	7	4	1	28
5. Critical historical analysis of events	8	0	9	5	4	26
6. Who is to blame; analysis of perpetrators	2	5	9	3	4	23
Contemporary implications of the Holocaust 95 mentions						
7. Israel, conflict in the Middle East	8	11	14	14	6	53
8. Neo Nazism and antisemitism today	3	4	12	1	4	24
9. Psychological roles, social psychology and the Holocaust	3	2	6	6	1	18
Value education 48 mentions						
10. Ethical: value /moral/ virtue/character education	7	2	6	2	3	20
11. Human rights	3	1	6	1	3	14
12. Religious aspects	2	2	2	5	3	14
Overall discussions of EaH content of teaching (n of teachers)	19	17	17	18	13	84

Pedagogical methods of EaH. Research question 3 addressed EaH pedagogy. Most teachers discussed their pedagogical methods for teaching about the Holocaust and described them as highly diverse and varied: teachers listed 19 categories of educational methods, Table 12 lists the methods they described, in order of frequency and broken down by country. As this table shows, novel and creative methods (e.g., multimedia use, art and creative expression, visits to sites, debates and other creative pedagogies) are favoured by these teachers more than frontal lectures or textbook

study. We also note that some controversial pedagogies such as simulations or having students put themselves in the place of people in the Holocaust, were mentioned by teachers as well, across countries.

Table 12: Pedagogical methods by n of teachers per country

Pedagogical method used	Poland	Hungary	Germany	England	Spain	Overall
1. Multimedia	15	17	7	4	10	53
2. Memorial site visits	17	10	15	3	5	50
3. Discussions, debates	11	11	11	4	5	42
4. Reading literature	10	6	9	6	6	37
5. Witness visits / testimonies	10	4	8	6	7	35
6. Analysis of primary sources	7	5	11	3	2	28
7. Use of imagination in creative pedagogy	10	4	5	3	4	26
8. Art, dance, music, plays, photography	3	8	6	4	5	26
9. Lecturing, PPT presentations, textbooks	4	5	3	9	4	25
10. PBL—send children to research autonomously	6	5	3	3	3	20
11. Teacher shares personal story	4	8	2	3	2	19
12. Present multiple perspectives (e.g., perpetrators <i>and</i> victims)	5	2	6	4	1	18
13. Creates collaborative research project with students	6	3	2	3	3	17
14. Students put themselves in Holocaust protagonists' place	5	3	4	0	2	14
15. Student exchange programme	3	0	2	0	2	7
16. Applied learning (case study)	3	0	2	0	2	7
17. Simulations	2	0	3	1	1	7
18. Watching plays	1	2	0	0	1	4
19. Trips to Israel	0	0	1	0	0	1
Overall teachers who mentioned EaH pedagogy (n of teachers)	19	17	18	15	13	

Challenges and issues faced in EaH. Research question 7 focused on EaH challenges. A majority (80% of the teachers) described challenges they face in their work as Holocaust educators. This topic was raised 384 times in the interviews, and 15 different types of challenges were discussed, attesting to their importance in the teachers' minds. Polish teachers tended to mention being intimidated by "history politics" and having to manage defensive responses to difficult moments in history. They were also concerned about parental responses and complaints related to their teaching about the Holocaust and about other teachers not paying attention to the topic. German teachers were concerned about how much material there is to cover, more than the time available. They debated how to teach sensitive content to students. They also emphasized how difficult it is to help students realize what it was like in Germany over 70 years ago and described a struggle to make the topic as

relevant today as in the past. For example, Bernd of Germany talks about how Nazi Germany has been relegated to “distant history” for many students:

So that’s one thing that is definitely an issue today, yes? Some students first perceive it as if they were talking about the Punic Wars. That was bad and so, of course, war is always bad, but that was 75 years ago. Yes, it’s a bit historicized, it’s increasingly moving into the distance. And you don’t know whether people take it differently than, and I don’t want to compare it now, that goes without saying, but differently than the horrors of the seventeenth century, of the Thirty-Year War. And that is precisely the topic on which we, I believe, as teachers in schools, must work to bring out the singularity. And, of course, you can only do that by talking about anti-Semitism.

Hungarian teachers complained especially about the unified curriculum, which is dense and problematic. They noted aspects of an environment hostile to EaH, such as the hostility of other teachers to the topic and were concerned about stereotypes and prejudice among the students. For example, Tünde described the opposition of her principal to EaH:

As a librarian, I brought several exhibitions from the Holocaust Institute in the name of public education [...] but the principal at the time, who is still the principal, [...] she was shocked, and an argument which led to shouting arose between us when I said that I wanted to bring an exhibition from the Holocaust Memorial Centre. And they did not allow this, on the grounds that “I should not add fuel to the fire,” and that these children aren’t mature enough to deal with such topics.

Spanish teachers in particular spoke of a lack of resources to use in teaching, while teachers from England raised developmental concerns about raising sensitive topics in EaH and also described challenges with special or difficult students such as immigrants. They too debated how to teach sensitive content to students. For example, Dana said:

It tends to be taught at the end of Year 9, um, I think, perhaps from a maturity point of view, um, because I think any, any younger it would be difficult to teach sensitively, without- you know because it is a horrific subject, and you don’t want to frighten the students, but you want, you want them to have empathy. So, if you teach – I think it has to be taught very carefully or approached very carefully.

Changes in EaH over time. How has EaH changed since the teachers began teaching, or since they themselves were students? This was the focus of research question 8, and it turned out to be a major topic of discussion (raised 275 times in the interviews). Teachers from all five countries noted six types of changes that occurred in EaH, including higher levels of awareness of the topic today, the effects of having fewer and fewer witnesses, changes related to political and social climate, changes in the students themselves and changes in methods of teaching. As an example of the last category, consider Lawrence’s thoughts:

The message always was that the Holocaust was bad. [...] But it was taught in a way that you wanted to shock the children into agreeing with you. [...] Um, and it was kind of that shock and awe kind of approach, of trying to show them the most gruesome images to make them feel how awful it is. You know, kind of, this is how awful it is, look at all these bodies. Um, and if that didn't work, you'd show another picture. And here's a video clip and, and so on. I mean, when I first started teaching 17, 18 years ago, that was still fairly well entrenched in terms of that is the way the Holocaust is taught [...] And I'm just- you know, I'm very, very glad that we've moved away from that, um, because it's just so... impersonal. I just get this real sense that you are intruding on something that you don't need to intrude upon.

Students' reactions to EaH. Teachers discussed how their students react to their teaching about the Holocaust. Overall positive engagement with the topic prevailed and included such categories as: students became more accepting and tolerant, students were visibly emotionally moved, students' sense of justice and "why" questions were engaged, students were interested, connected and resonated with the topic, and the topic made a difference later in the students' lives. As an example of this final category, consider Klara's words:

So, when we did this Wagon Exhibition with the March of the Living, [...] one of the boys, a pupil, he was in eighth grade, at the time, he walked next to me and said that he did not understand how come so many people deny it and why they don't come here to see what happened here. And that those memories cannot be denied. And this hit me, it impacted me so much, that he is 14 years old-. That is to say, he understood what sort of tragedy this was. We also talked a lot about what led the Hungarian people to explicitly help Nazi soldiers in this Holocaust. In particular, he was ashamed that, as a Hungarian, he was a national of a country which allowed itself to do so. Auschwitz is the largest Hungarian cemetery. [...] I am still in contact with them today, although they are now in secondary grammar school, and they still say that, if possible, at any time, they would come [back]. So, I feel like there is evidence that this was not a one-off thing, but that if a child gets interested once then it is certain that they will be moved by it even later.

However, in all five countries teachers also reported negative reactions to EaH, albeit to a lesser extent. These include such responses as anger, hostility, hysteria, expressions of Holocaust fatigue, indifference, arguing that there is no point in learning this, expressions of boredom and joking around and making light of the subject. An example of resentment towards EaH was offered by Karolina of Poland:

Those students that take their hermetic views from home, their conservatism and this kind of thinking about the world, so black and white, well, they resent it. They don't want to talk about it, as if they were afraid, as if it suddenly turned out that someone is trying to make them believe that black is not black.

Victoria of Germany distinguishes two group who react negatively to EaH:

Especially those students who are very provocative, maybe even a little aggressive, throw such a statement into the room: “We do not need any of this, what is this about.” That has, I really get the impression, that those are located in a more right-populist environment. [...] and then it is also sometimes about conspiracy theories [...] like antisemitic theories. And regarding the students with a migration background, they express different statements. Like in my experience, I more often hear jokes about the topic by students with a migration background, or like some jokes about Auschwitz told in class or said as a side-line.

The impact of EaH training on extent of teaching. Training in EaH was related significantly to the number of hours spent teaching about the Holocaust per course: $t(86) = -3.22, p < .001$. Teachers with EaH training ($M = 13.22, SD = 9.23, n = 45$) on average spend nearly twice as many hours teaching about the Holocaust per course than do teachers without EaH training ($M = 7.84, SD = 7.09, n = 43$).

3.5.4. Summary and Concluding Remarks

Our holistic country-by-country comparative analysis found that the closer the country is to the events of the Holocaust, the more easily teachers engage the students with the topic, as it is a meaningful and often painful part of their history. Likewise, the more a nation recognises the enormity of the Holocaust and is comfortable with acknowledging its own role and responsibility in it, the freer the teachers feel to express themselves creatively in EaH and to work “with” the system rather than against it.

Our categorical mixed-methods analysis identified shared aspects across the full sample. While many students in most countries were perceived to be respectful towards the memory of the Holocaust and engaged in EaH, challenges for Holocaust educators abounded. Negative reactions such as hostility, fatigue or indifference were far from uncommon among students and expressions of antisemitism abounded. Linking the Holocaust to contemporary events, using comparative frameworks to discuss the Holocaust and offering an ethical perspective on Holocaust memory seem to be some of the teachers’ preferred educational responses to such challenges across the range of contexts. Other issues, such as sanctioned or unsanctioned pedagogies and educational frameworks for EaH, differed by national context. For example, teachers in some countries tend to connect EaH to a human rights framework while in other countries this was uncommon; some teachers use shock or emotion-focused pedagogies while others eschew them.

The holistic and categorical analyses converge in pointing to a difference between Central-Eastern Europe and Western Europe in terms of the affinity or conflict between the teachers and their educational and national leadership. While Polish teachers are managing difficult “history politics” and Hungarian teachers are offering a counter-narrative to the nationalist and populist discourse of their government, German teachers and, to a lesser extent English ones, seem to play an almost opposite role, as they typically identify with their national Holocaust memory narrative. For German teachers, this includes working to bridge the gap between a public attitude of atonement and a

private attitude of ambivalence towards Holocaust memory. For the English teachers, this implies a freedom to teach creatively. Spanish teachers seem to have their own concerns, as they are relatively inexperienced in EaH and may not yet have considered their goals and methods in depth. They spoke of a lack of teaching resources and were in the process of taking ownership of their EaH vision.

EaH in the five European countries that we explored is characterized in equal measures by similarities and diversity, by challenges and difficulties, and by a sense of purpose and meaning. “Time and tide wait for none,” goes the English expression. As time passes, the tide of history naturally pulls us away from the events of the Holocaust. Teachers are called upon to make their most creative efforts to engage students with the Holocaust and its significance. The group of committed educators that we studied seem to be doing just that.

3.6. Appendices

This report’s appendices can be accessed online through the following links:

Appendix 1: [Method details](#)

Appendix 2: [Survey questions](#)

Appendix 3: [Interview protocol](#)

Appendix 4: [Dedoose© full list of codes](#)

If reading this report in a printed version, please access the appendices through this report’s website.

CHAPTER 4

Digital Sites of Tension: The Holocaust on Social Media in Contemporary Europe



Editors and writers:

Dr. Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann

Misha Brenner

Research assistants:

Petra Várhegyi

4.1. Introduction

Social Media (SM) has become an important space to negotiate the relevance of the past to the present. With regards to commemoration and education about the Holocaust, SM platforms are usually considered an ambiguous ecology and are often perceived as a contested space. The main concern is that unregulated debate on SM, to which individual as well as institutional actors contribute, does not comply with standards of accurate and fact-based historical research, uses (and abuses) historical references for political purposes, tends towards a problematic “distortion” of the historical events, and is in danger of preparing the ground for effective attempts to question historical facts and even deny the historical existence of the organized mass murder of Jews during the Second World War.

On the other hand, the history and memory of the Holocaust has become an important frame of reference for negotiating moral values and (trans)national identity in the 21st century. As Levy and Sznajder (2006, 131) emphasized, the Holocaust is a “master moral paradigm” for defining and debating the danger of bigotry, bureaucracy, demagoguery or nationalism. In the 21st century the memory of the Holocaust serves, especially in the context of the European Union’s self-perception, as a fundamental reference point for ethical and moral guidelines to interpret present challenges and conflicts. On the other hand, the Holocaust has become a universal, and often decontextualized, reference for suffering and victimhood and is extensively utilized within discourses of self-victimization.

The main objective of this part of the study is to better understand how people from Poland, Hungary, Germany, England¹ and Spain talk about the Holocaust on SM. In accordance with the overall objectives of our research we were interested to learn to what extent the Holocaust is present in SM discourse and how this relates to contemporary affairs and topics in today’s Europe. We ask when Holocaust memory becomes prevalent on SM, how it intersects with other topics of interest, and how far the domain of SM differs from public-political discourse and education with regards to posting about and debating Holocaust-related subjects. A specific focus is on the differences between a more historical approach to Holocaust memory and emphasizing its relations to present affairs through analogies, equating and comparison.

The ways in which the Holocaust is commemorated and negotiated on SM are the outcome of the central role Holocaust memory has come to play in the West in recent years. Hence, paradoxically, the presence of references to the Holocaust on SM and the emotional intensity in which it is discussed by users, testify to the impact of the “globalization” of Holocaust memory and to the fact that this particular event became a unique reference point for debates about humanist values, global atrocities, human rights and the importance of memory. This recent tendency, however, has two disturbing results with regards to SM:

1 In this chapter we refer to England only in case of the analysis and interpretation of our own collected data. In case of other studies, we refer either to England or to UK, depending on the information offered in the respective study.

- In contrast to ‘cold’ commemoration practices and memory rituals, controversies and debates about the Holocaust on SM – including distortion and denial – ultimately contribute to the intensification of its unique and exceptional meaning for the present.
- Due to the presence of the Holocaust on SM, which is characterized by “presentness” and interconnectedness, Holocaust memory becomes a highly relational topic, which means that it is naturally connected to the present in general and other historical and present events in particular.

The “dialectic” nature of SM as discursive spheres of memory leads to the simultaneous presence of pervasive Holocaust distortion and trivialization on the one hand and information about the historical events that “may strengthen Holocaust knowledge and raise awareness of the many forms of Holocaust distortion being propagated, in part thanks to ready (online) access to accurate historical scientific knowledge on which to judge historical facts” (Manca 2021a, 4). Those observations lead to three preliminary assumptions about the Holocaust on SM:

- SM constitutes “a counter-public sphere” (Birkner & Donk 2020, 379). It includes alternative- or even counter-memory that in contrast to other “official” forms of memory politics and related commemorative practices and rituals, is less regulated and demonstrates individual and collective engagement with history that can be described as forms of “doing memory.”
- The space for talking about the Holocaust is always contested and Holocaust memory on SM is always a form of conflicting or “agonistic memory” (Bull & Hansen 2016).
- Within the networked structure of SM, Holocaust memory becomes “connected memory,” and hence has an affinity towards “relational memories” including analogies and multi-perspective as well as multidirectional approaches to history.

This chapter reviews Holocaust-related discussions and debates on SM from the perspective of alternative, conflicting and agonistic forms of relational and multidirectional approaches to the past. This complements the analysis of the public-political discourse and of educational approaches with more unregulated and “user-generated” forms of Holocaust commemoration and (civic) education on SM.

- *Alternative memories* include perspectives on history that differ from certain national or European memory narratives. This includes memories of marginalized and/or suppressed groups as well as politically opposing memory regimes, such as from the far-right, including distortion and denial. The first often function as “counter-memories” to a hegemonic memory regime, the latter as “antagonistic memories” that reject certain memory cultures.
- *Conflicting memories* describe certain opposing approaches or interpretations of the same historical events (Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2022). Those can collide due to different national historical narratives or because of different political worldviews. Conflicting memories can provide a framework for the negotiation of alternative memories.
- *Agonistic memories* react to memory conflicts by accepting and embracing the necessarily conflicted nature of a vivid memory culture. It rejects a definite narrative of the past and accepts the multiperspective nature of memory by working-through contrasting memories (Bull & Hansen 2016).

Within this framework of alternative, conflicting and agonistic memories we consider Holocaust memory as relational and multidirectional. It is relational due to the connective nature of SM. This constitutes a complex network, in which relations between past and present, different users, places, institutions and memory projects as well as different memories can be constituted on the basis of posting, liking, sharing, remixing and other digital techniques (Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2021; Henig & Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2022). By intersecting different memories within discourses about memory on SM those memories can also be considered multidirectional in Rothberg's (2009) sense. We assume that those unregulated forms of posting about the Holocaust contribute – even in their most controversial forms – to a vivid culture of memory that preserves Holocaust memory as an important, even unique, reference frame to deal with contemporary global conflicts and identity issues.

Our analysis of the domain of SM focuses on a particularly discursive and political platform: the short-text blogging platform Twitter. This focus of study, however, is based on an evaluation of SM platforms in a much broader sense. For that purpose, we reviewed a variety of current studies and research reports that explore Holocaust memory as well as related topics such as Holocaust distortion and antisemitism with a focus on different platforms. In doing so, we were able to define insights into SM as a heterogeneous affinity space for Holocaust commemoration and education. We discuss those insights in light of the results of our evaluation of Twitter posts, which we collected from Poland, Hungary, Germany, England and Spain over a period of three months in 2021. The three-month period constitutes a random and therefore typical case study. Those results can help us to better understand the dynamics of European Holocaust memory as a site of tension through reviewing SM as an unregulated affinity space.

4.2. Methods and Study Design

Our study of Holocaust memory on SM is based on a mixed-methods and multilayered approach that includes a variety of different sources that provide the data for our analysis. Based on a comprehensive review of existing studies we conducted an in-depth analysis of the Holocaust discourse on Twitter. This analysis combines quantitative and qualitative approaches. For that purpose, we conducted an automated, a manual and a content-related qualitative analysis of portions of our scraped data.

4.2.1. Review of existing studies

As a first step we reviewed existing studies and research reports that offer a comprehensive understanding of Holocaust memory on a variety of different SM platforms. In doing so, we were able to explore SM as a diverse and multidirectional memory ecology. By applying our specific research focus on SM as an aggregator of European Holocaust memory in five different countries and languages to the data discussed in other studies, we were able to identify certain patterns of SM memory, as well as gaps in the existing research. We summarize and discuss the results of this review in the background part of this study.

4.2.2. Twitter analysis

In a second step we analyzed Holocaust-related posts that were scraped from Twitter during a period of two years. This data-collection enabled us to explore how users of this platform speak about the Holocaust, and how they relate its history and memory to other topics and events. Twitter provides a highly discursive space for Holocaust memory, as it is based on a highly connective and responsive network of short messages (tweets) that are interrelated by retweets, hashtags, comments or as parts of longer threads (connected chain of tweets).

For our focus analysis of Holocaust related tweets, we used the data-scraping platform Scooper to collect Holocaust-related tweets posted between June 25, 2021, and September 30, 2021. This randomly chosen scraping period offers insights into the everyday appearances of Holocaust references and mentions on the platform in the five countries of interest: Poland, Hungary, Germany, England and Spain. Tweets were collected from profiles from those countries and in the respective languages: Spanish, English, German, Polish and Hungarian. To provide a comprehensive sample of tweets, Scooper utilized the full Twitter API. Based on our query, which was sent to Twitter, Scooper received the complete information directly from Twitter's database, including all demographic data as it is saved and displayed on the platform. The data was scraped according to our specific research query, and contained the content of the tweets, links to the original posts, and additional metadata.

For our query we asked researchers from each of the five countries to submit relevant Holocaust-related keywords in order to reflect each country's unique approach to and state of the Holocaust online discourse. Based on the suggestions we standardized the keywords for better inter-country comparison.

Our query was organized into three categories. The first category included words that remain consistently relevant to the Holocaust, independent of context, such as "Auschwitz," "Anne

Frank,” and “Yad Vashem.” Some keywords in this category were specific to certain countries (e.g., “Jedwabne” only showed up in this category in Poland.) Others were typically used in all languages (such as “Anne Frank” and “Shoah.”) We collected any tweet within our timeframe containing any of the keywords in this first category.²

The second category consisted of terms which we estimated to be so broad that collecting every tweet with these words would give us too many irrelevant posts. Therefore, we collected them only if they appeared in tweets together with keywords of particular interest from a third category. Words in this category included “SS” and “World War 2.”

The third category contained keywords of particular relevance for our study’s focus on intersections between the Holocaust and topics such as antisemitism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, migration and others. Those keywords referred to seven predefined topics: Israel and Palestine, education, commemoration, immigration, nationalism, antisemitism, and the Roma community. We only collected tweets with these keywords if they appeared together with one of the words from the second category or the first category. By doing so, we made sure that we only collected tweets that interrelated those topics with the discourse about the Holocaust.

4.2.3. Data cleansing

The tweets were then cleaned for each country in compliance with the following procedure: Any tweet from any country that wasn’t identified by Scooper as corresponding to that country’s most spoken language was removed, as well as any tweet that Scooper identified as a “bot” or a “retweet.” In addition, we checked for any tweeter who posted more than 100 times during our time frame and deleted their tweets if we found them to be replicas, because this would indicate that they serve as bots. Finally, we removed any other replicated tweets over the course of our analysis from tweeters who posted the same thing repeatedly, even if they did so less than 100 times. This ensured our data wouldn’t be biased by a select group of excessively ‘loud’ tweeters.³

4.2.4. Automated data analysis

In a first step we automatically analyzed the given data with the help of Natural Language Processing. For that purpose, we used the data visualization platform “Orange[®]” to create word clouds and

2 After collection, we realized that there were some gaps in the data for some countries due to geographic concerns and differences in keyword choices. For example, we left out the keyword “Nuremberg” in German, being concerned it would render too many tweets about the city itself, with no connection to the Holocaust. Most notably, we were missing the keyword “Hitler” on Polish Twitter and the keyword “Nuremberg” on Polish and Hungarian Twitter, so we filtered out any tweets that these keywords would have returned in any of the other countries.

3 We also took out any German tweets that included the term “SA,” if they didn’t also include any of our other keywords because we found that most people using the term “SA” were not referring to the Holocaust. Similarly, we omitted any German tweet containing the name “Schindler” that didn’t also contain any of our other keywords (this also includes the name “Oskar” or the word “Liste” [list], since “Schindler” is a fairly common surname in Germany).

word networks that offer insight into specific key topics addressed in the data sample in relation to the countries. In order to clean out propositions and any other terms that didn't give any meaningful value to word clouds and word networks, we consulted with researchers from each country to help us identify any irrelevant words ("stop words") that appeared in the initial word cloud and word network drafts, and deleted them.

4.2.5. Manual coding

To manually code tweets from our dataset, we took a sample of 100 tweets from each country. These tweets were selected using a random number generator. After completing the coding stage, we still had a deficit caused by tweets that had been deleted by Twitter and by tweets deemed irrelevant to these specific datasets. Therefore, we took an extra eighty tweets spread between the five countries to code so that we would have at least 100 relevant tweets for each country.

The tweets were manually coded by two researchers, who reviewed each tweet in the context of the discussion. The coders also categorized the content of the tweet based on images, articles, or videos mentioned or embedded.

Based on an initial review of our data samples, we identified two main categories to describe Holocaust discourse on Twitter:

- Tweets using the Holocaust as a reference to discuss (mostly) present day issues ("Use the Holocaust").
- Tweets focusing on the (historical) discussion of the Holocaust or related topics including commemoration ("Talk about the Holocaust").

We coded a total number of 580 tweets, split between the five countries. Out of these 580 tweets, 78 could not be coded, either because the tweet was incomprehensible, deleted, or the tweeter's account was suspended by Twitter. We were left with 502 tweets, of which the coders agreed on 90.4% of the codes for each tweet, with a Cohen's Kappa of .76. A breakdown by country can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. A breakdown of percent agreement between coders for the manual code

Country	Agree	Disagree	Agree %	Ambiguous
Germany	87	15	85.29%	23
England	90	10	90%	12
Spain	92	8	92%	10
Poland	90	11	89.11%	13
Hungary	96	4	96%	20
Total	454	48	90.44%	78

The coders responded to the question of content based on the tweet's context in a discussion, rather than judging the tweet by itself. In doing so, we were specifically aiming to identify topical intersections, multidirectional and agonistic memories in the context of active SM engagement.

4.2.6. Qualitative content analysis

The qualitative analysis of our data supported a research focus on specific topic intersections and multidirectional memories. For that analysis we randomly selected tweets from our datasets with specific keywords for different countries. We then took a random sample of fifty tweets per country from these subsets. The tweets in the datasets for the case studies included words related to:

- Holocaust (all countries)
- Covid (all countries)
- Colonialism (England and Germany)
- Sinti/Roma (all countries)

We coded each of the tweets that we gathered, according to various conceptual terms and categories of interest, including “counter-speech,” “counter-narratives,” “double genocide,” “moral remembrance,” “multi-directional memory,” “Holocaust distortion,” “misusing the Holocaust as a yardstick of evil,” “critical Holocaust memory,” “Holocaust denial/conspiracy theories,” “transnational memory,” “local memory,” “agonistic memory,” and “antagonistic memory politics.” We used this coding scheme to filter notable tweets of particular interest to our study. Those categories assisted the qualitative analysis for each case study.

Following the analysis of Holocaust discourse on Twitter we added two smaller cross-country studies that refer to topics that are closely connected to this discourse and emphasize its multi-directional nature. First, we analyzed the intersections between Holocaust memory and the history and legacy of colonialism, because this debate constituted an enduring controversy already during but especially after the period in which we collected our data. Due to different approaches to the history of colonialism in England and Germany, we decided to compare the discourse in these two countries.

Second, we focused on the commemoration of the Sinti and Roma genocide as part of the events that constitute the Holocaust. The international memorial day for the victims of the Porajmos took place in our sample period. Therefore, we decided to specifically focus on its commemoration on Twitter in different countries.

4.3. Theoretical Background

More than the parliamentary or news discourse, SM platforms represent direct responses and negotiation about the past and its relevance for the future. In doing so, “social media seems to provide a fairly balanced, plural, and open arena for speakers from the political periphery” (Birkner & Donk 2020, 375). As said, this can include “alternative” as well as counter-narratives, such as Holocaust denial, distortion and reversion, but it also enables forms of user-generated moderation of content shared on SM. Thus, despite the problematic aspects of SM communication – especially with regards to misinformation, fake news and filter bubbles⁴ – those platforms had and have a transforming effect on Holocaust memory. As Friesem (2018) argues, the “‘Web 2.0 environment,’ which is characterized by user-generated content (UGC), both facilitates the production of additional layers of discourse and plays a vital role in shaping this emerging phase. While in previous eras memory construction was primarily in the hands of state agents, and later in the hands of popular culture creators as well, in the Web 2.0 era, anyone with an internet connection can disseminate his/her own perspective widely and instantly, thus adding one’s own pieces of meaning to the collective puzzle” (Friesem 2018, 87). SM thereby “undermines traditional ‘top-down’-models of information creation, adoption and dissemination of collective memory” (Pflanzelter 2017, 142).

4.3.1. Memory on social media

SM platforms have become important environments for searching information about particular social and political topics, including history. They thereby constitute an emerging environment for engaging with a variety of topics through digital social practices such as liking, commenting, sharing, and posting. They “enable individuals to turn from passive consumers to active producers of information (prosumers)” (Pflanzelter 2017, 139). Furthermore, they serve as a space for negotiating identity as well as the relevance of the past for an increasingly complex present. With regards to Holocaust memory, SM has turned into a significant “memory ecology” that allows for “connective” memory practices (Birkner & Donk 2020, 368). We witness the emergence of a particular form of SM memory that adopts certain practices and features connected to and provided by specific platforms. Posting, linking and sharing content allows for “more immediate modes of remembering” (Hoskins 2014, 189). SM platform affordances therefore have an impact on how a specific platform is utilized for negotiating, commemorating and educating about the history of the Holocaust. Although Holocaust references can be found on all SM platforms, and although the “dark side” of SM communication is present on all platforms in the form of hate speech, antisemitism, racism, bigotry, distortion and denial, each of the platforms allow for different ways to engage with the Holocaust and to participate in a process of “doing memory” that is in most cases different from the more regulated and contained spheres of public discourse and education about the Holocaust.

Table 2 outlines the characteristics and affordances of SM platforms with regards to the history and memory of the Holocaust:

4 Structured as a semi-public space, personalized newsfeeds structured by specifically selected groups of friends as well as algorithmic recommendation systems based on previous use and click-behaviour, can result in very selective and therefore biased content, with which users primarily interact via their SM accounts (Pariser 2011).

Table 2: Social media platforms in relation to Holocaust memory

<p>Twitter</p> <p>Established 2006. Owner: Twitter, Inc. (since October 2022 owned by E. Musk)</p> <p>Users: 397 million users per month worldwide. In Europe it is most popular in the UK and Ireland while in Germany 8% of the population use “micro-blogging” platform that allow users to share short text messages of up to 280 characters among online followers. Common formats are text, image and/or video posts (tweets), longer threads that contain multiple tweets, retweets and comments.</p> <p>Holocaust memory: Although a significant portion of Holocaust memorials and museums (39%) have never used Twitter according to a study from 2021, 25% use it on a daily basis and an additional 21% on a weekly basis (Manca 2021b, 15). In January 2020, shortly before the Covid pandemic had reached Europe, German Concentration Camp memorials launched the hashtag #1945liberation on occasion of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Nazi concentration and extermination camps. Memorials used this hashtag on Twitter and other platforms for collaborative commemoration initiatives. This became even more important when the Covid restrictions forced the memorial sites to close their doors to visitors (Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2021, 1107).</p>
<p>Facebook</p> <p>Established 2004. Owner: Meta Platforms.</p> <p>Users: 2.9 billion users worldwide in 2021 (420 million users in Europe); allows users to post, like and share images, text and videos with friends, in groups or publicly.</p> <p>Holocaust memory: In 2009, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial was the first that launched an official Facebook page. In 2020, Facebook was the SM platform most often used by Holocaust memorials and museums. 87% use it on a daily or weekly basis (Manca 2021b, 15). As part of a 2009 commemorative initiative of the Polish Brama Grodzka-Teatr NN in Lublin, the page of “Heino Zytomirski” was created, for the child murdered in Majdanek when he was 9 years old (Popescu 2019). It was utilized as a fictive diary, which documented his life on the basis of testimonies, historical documents and family photographs (Pentzold & Sommer 2011, 72-73). The profile attracted the attention of approximately 5,000 followers that interacted with the page before it was deleted one year later in 2010.</p>
<p>Instagram</p> <p>Established: 2010, Owner: Meta platforms</p> <p>Users: 1.1 billion active users; allows users to share photos and video clips with lengthy captions of 2,200 characters as well as stories and in-app edited videos. The popular Instagram Stories format was introduced in 2016. Based on the idea of disappearing content, the format allowed for digital storytelling by adding short films or slides with pictures, texts, and other graphic elements, which expire after 24 hours. In 2019, Instagram launched the Instagram Reels feature that allows users to create and post short videos up to 15 seconds long. This was later extended to 90 seconds.</p> <p>Holocaust memory: In 2020, 79% of Holocaust memorials and museums had an Instagram account. 63% were posting on a regular basis either daily or weekly (Manca 2021b, 15). On occasion of the 100th birthday of Sophie Scholl, a Munich university student and member of an anti-Nazi resistance group, German public broadcasters created the Instagram project “@ichbinsophiescholl” (“I am Sophie Scholl”). The account, which attracted up to 930,000 followers, reenacted the last months of Scholl’s life. A recent study, however, showed that the main target group of 14- to 19-year-old users barely took notice of the project. Just 145 of 1,250 participants of the study viewed posts from the profile, most of them only once (Korsche 2022).</p>

YouTube

Established 2005. Owner: Google

Users: Videos on the platform are watched by over 2 billion users monthly. Approximately, 27% of the regular users originate from Europe. The platform primarily functions as an uploading and publication space for user-generated video content and found footage of all kinds.

Holocaust memory: YouTube plays a crucial role for audiovisual content produced and disseminated by Holocaust memorials and museums. Accordingly, memorials and museums use YouTube on a regular basis. Although just a minority of 5% engage with the platform on a daily basis 89% use the platform, 59% at least every month (Manca 2021b, 15). During the Covid pandemic Holocaust memorials such as the Dachau and Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp Memorials had established YouTube channels for broadcasting recordings of guided online tours or short video clips about the history of the former camps. In 2020, the Anne Frank House used the platform to disseminate the “Anne Frank Video Diary,” an attempt to translate the famous diary into a series of selfie-videos (Henig & Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2022).

TikTok

Established: 2017. Owner: Bytedance

Users: 2 billion downloads in 2020; allows users to create and share short videos of 15 seconds to 10 minutes long, utilizing special effects such as greenscreen. Dialogic features include replying to comments with new videos as well as commenting, stitching and duetting content. Videos are distributed based on a recommendation algorithm according to user behaviour and interest.

Holocaust memory: In response to a controversial #POVHolocaustChallenge, in which users performed fictive Holocaust victims, Holocaust survivors and memorials began posting videos on the platform in 2021. The first was British Auschwitz survivor Lily Ebert who, together with her great-grandson, produces videos, in which she testifies about her experiences during the Holocaust. Though in 2020, TikTok was not yet very popular among Holocaust memorials and museums (Manca 2021b, 15), as a result of a “TikTok Shoah Commemoration & Education Initiative” several Concentration Camp Memorials in Germany onboarded the platform in 2021/22 and started regularly uploading content. The Neuengamme Memorial, which posts videos created by young volunteers since November 2021 on TikTok, received 10,000 followers, 90,000 likes and 1 million views within the first two months (Steinhauer 2022, 23).

Telegram

Established: 2013, Owner: Telegram, Inc.

Users: 500 million active monthly users in 2021, being the fifth most popular app in the UK and the fourth most popular in Germany; messenger service that allows users to chat through text and voice messages as well as video calls, and share images, videos, documents and audio files. Chats can be organized in closed groups.

Holocaust memory: 49% of Holocaust-related content on the platform denies or distorts historical facts (UNESCO & UN 2022). Accounts contain decontextualized, misleading or manipulated historical photographs and documents that should support conspiracy myths or undermine the factual basis of Holocaust history.

A challenge of analyzing the discourse about the Holocaust and Holocaust references on SM is the success of attempts to regulate communication on these platforms. Because openly addressed forms of Holocaust denial and incitement are often immediately detected by the platform's content moderation system, it is rather difficult to identify incriminating content. Tweets that are documented in our results are therefore often no longer accessible on the platform itself.

SM platforms implement different content moderations strategies. The UNESCO and United Nations report on Holocaust denial and distortion, for instance, refers, among others, to the following guidelines (UNESCO & UN 2022, 23). Harassment and violence are also prohibited on **Twitter**, including references to genocides and lynching. Certain hateful images and signs are also incriminating, such as the Nazi swastika, animalistic features applied to humans, or the abuse of historical symbols such as the yellow Star of David with its implicated references to the Holocaust. Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter, however, increased fear of a fundamental change of the platform's moderation policy. An initial study revealed that conversations about Jews have increased since Twitter was sold to Musk. On that specific aspect, "there were close to 100K messages that included the term Jews" (Jikeli & Soemer 2022, 14).

According to the community guidelines of **Instagram** and **Facebook**, posts should not target individuals or groups in generalizing, offending or dehumanizing ways. Denying or distorting information about the Holocaust are included in this regulation. **TikTok** is also dedicated to removing hate speech and content depicting hateful behaviour from the platform. This includes the promotion and glorification of antisemitism, anti-LGBTQ propaganda or white supremacy, the use of symbols, logos, flags, gestures, names and music that is related to such ideologies, the denial of historically well-documented events of mass violence such as the Holocaust and conspiracy content. On **Telegram** all conversation is considered private and is not regulated. According to the terms of use, users should not scam others, promote violence or post illegal content. The messenger platform, however, does not block users that "peacefully express alternative opinions" (UNESCO & UN 2022, 23).

Content moderation by SM platform providers became more rigid in recent years, especially in countries such as Germany where new legislation (the Network Enforcement Act, NetzDG) pushes SM companies to remove illegal content including hate speech immediately from their platforms. The result is that "big IT companies have been deplatforming hate organizations and influential hate actors, in addition to deleting hateful posts and tweets" (Karakoulaki & Dessì 2021, 27). The effects of recent crises on SM communication – especially the rise of conspiracy theories in the context of the Covid pandemic – intensified the pressure on SM companies to properly moderate the content posted on their platforms.

As a result, users interested in these kinds of worldviews, including conspiracy ideologies, moved to different, less moderated platforms and communicate in closed communities. Recently, the messenger service Telegram became a popular virtual space for such forms of communication (Mulhall 2021, 16-17). However, as the same study observed, existing problematic content including videos, memes and hashtags remain on mainstream platforms such as Facebook or Twitter (ibid., 17).

Videos or pictures sometimes convey clear messages that cannot be identified through text search, or users may use coded language. That makes the presence of counter-speech on platforms such as Twitter even more important. Those voices not only provide vibrant forms of non-official and user-generated content moderation by means of democratic dispute and commemoration, they also call out problematic implicit messages and thereby make those statements detectable. Thus, in the qualitative analysis of SM discourse about the Holocaust, the context provided by threats or Twitter disputes is necessary to understand how far those platforms provide a space for Holocaust distortion, denial and trivialization. It is also important in highlighting how they become a place for counter-speech and user-generated forms of commemoration and preservation of a shared understanding of history against distortion, denial and alternative historical narratives.

As a first step, we reviewed existing reports on the depiction of the Holocaust in SM (Centre for Research on Antisemitism 2022a, 2022b; Manca et al. 2021a, 2021b, 2022; Karakoulaki & Dessì 2021; Lehman & Kappl 2021; UNESCO & UN 2022). This review serves as background against which we will then present and discuss the findings of our particular study that primarily focuses on the SM platform Twitter.

The SM discourse on the Holocaust is characterized by the following framework, shifting between commemoration and antisemitism (Holocaust denial and distortion) on the one hand as well as between a historical and current focus on the other hand (see Figure 1).

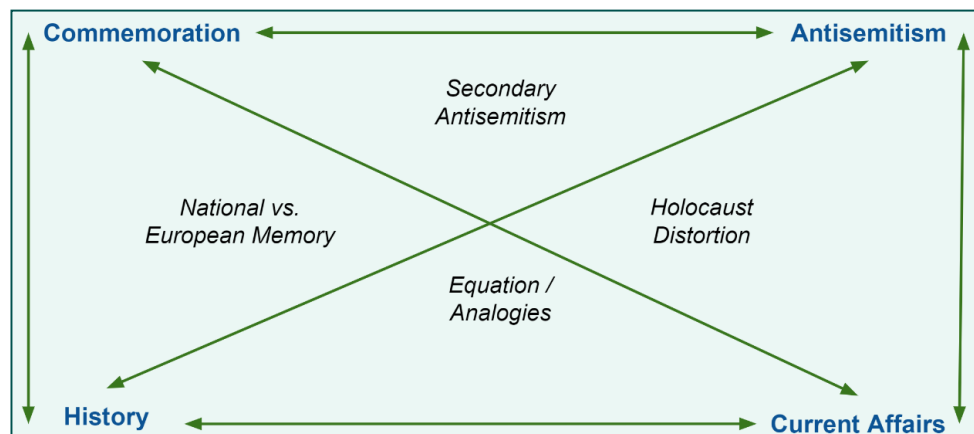


Figure 1: Framework of Social Media discourse about the Holocaust

Commemoration and history are oriented towards the past, while connecting it to the present and future. An important aspect is the tension between national and European memory concepts and historical narratives. Though often related to the history of the Holocaust, antisemitism is mostly a phenomenon of the present, as is the quite dominant focus on current affairs, to which Holocaust memory is often related. Between history and current affairs the question of proper relations – equation, comparison, analogy – is significant. Typically forms such as rejecting responsibility for the Holocaust or attacking memory politics, define the connected field between commemoration and antisemitism, as does the controversially discussed phenomenon of distortion with regards to antisemitism and current affairs. In the following, we analyze some of those factors on the basis of existing studies.

4.3.2. Commemoration

The emergence of digital media has offered new avenues for processing collective memories. In particular SM has become a globalized and transcultural arena for mediatized commemoration (Manca 2021a, 2). Pfanzerter however, also emphasizes that memory “in the age of social media [...] is not only ‘transcultural’ but also mobile, non-linear, and heterogeneous” (2017, 139). An important feature that intensifies such mobility and connectivity, for instance on Twitter, are hashtags that support the interconnection of tweets and create a wider conversation (Manca 2021a, 6).

Correspondingly, SM is an unregulated, complex and entangled commemorative space that poses significant challenges, in particular to Holocaust memorials and museums, because they “leave institutionalized pathways and blur the boundaries to the private” (Pfanzerter 2017, 137). SM quickly became a space for sharing visitors’ experiences at memorial sites, including selfies that were often interpreted as disrespectful and trivializing gestures, as well as hashtags (Wight 2020). When examining the use of *#Auschwitz* on Instagram, Commane and Potton (2019, 178) identified a “majority of positive engagements,” with users posting images relating to remembrance. Although they also found images and comments related to antisemitism, still, the user engagement with *#Auschwitz* on Instagram contributed to the presence of commemorative content on SM. With regards to Holocaust memorials and museums the use of SM primarily corresponded to what Manca identified as a “broadcast-mode use of social media” that followed a “mono-directional communication” of content (2021a, 13). Holocaust memorials and museums use SM platforms mainly as a forum for displaying pre-curated content and parts of their collections, or as Pfanzerter described: “Museums and memorials are now engaged in the multilingual ‘feeding’ of different social networking platforms by representing their vast archival material and collections and by promoting their activities and publications online” (2017, 140).

In response to the restrictions imposed by the Covid regulations, however, many institutions increased their use of SM significantly. The intensified use of SM offered a new possibility of commemorating the Holocaust from a distance (Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2021). This phenomenon occurred across all platforms. Facebook and Instagram were utilized for online live tours. The recordings of those tours were often later made available via YouTube. YouTube also served as a forum for newly produced short educational videos. The Mauthausen Memorial and the Sachsenhausen Memorial launched a series of short videos, in which guides focused on a variety of often overlooked or marginalized aspects of the sites’ histories. Though SM was still used for disseminating educational content, communicating commemorative activities, and showcasing collections, content produced for SM platforms became tremendously diverse. This also included collaborative commemorative activities such as the initiative *#Liberation1945* of the Mauthausen Memorial. Of particular importance were platforms that specifically support visual content and videos, as those media offered a remote yet sensory experience of the sites (ibid.).

4.3.3. History

SM also became an important place for sharing as well as contesting historical narratives. History appears on SM as a form of audio-visual and performative historiography (Bunnenberg et al. 2021,

269). Through SM historical content and information can be shared globally and across various platforms. This affects as well as transforms collectively shared images of history, and thereby also social and political practices (Bunnenberg et al. 2021, 272).

This includes disputes about contested national narratives, such as in the international debate about Poland's controversial "anti-defamation law" from 2018, which sought to prohibit the claim that Poland was co-responsible for Nazi atrocities. The Twitter hashtag #PolishDeathCamps, for instance, constituted a space for conflicting historical narratives related to World War Two and the Holocaust (Ray & Kapralski 2019, 209).

Platforms, such as Twitter, were also rendered an important space for the political negotiation of historical narratives within national frameworks. A recent study on far-right anniversary politics on SM illustrated how the German far-right party AfD adopts the popular hashtag #OTD (On This Day) in order to establish an "alternative" historical agenda opposed to the "official" German memory culture that has the memory of National Socialism and the Holocaust as its centre. In doing so, the AfD "polarized and politicized discourses" about history in order to "challenge the country's public commemorative status quo" (Richardson et al. 2022, 1374).

Both of these recent examples demonstrate that history on SM is on the one hand contested, and on the other hand an historiographic practice with social and political implications. Correspondingly, Bunnenberg et al. (2021, 269) emphasize the aspect of making history on SM with the help of different social and communicative practices. SM play an important role in this process of "doing history."

4.3.4. Antisemitism

Recent studies demonstrate that antisemitism can be found on every SM platform. There are variations between platforms, however, all the various types of antisemitic hate and resentment can be located on each platform (Mulhall 2021, 10). As Mulhall emphasizes in his introduction to a study about "Antisemitism in the Digital Age," "major tech platforms have created online spaces where antisemitism has been allowed to flourish" (ibid., 11). In particular, the "constant repetition and refreshment" of antisemitic messages turn SM into a receptive environment for antisemitic communication (ibid., 39).

Among typical forms of antisemitism on mainstream SM platforms are *conspiracy theories*, which make up the largest proportion of antisemitism on popular platforms, and coded language as a response to platform moderation attempts that seek to remove antisemitic language (ibid., 34). Recent studies also monitor antisemitic posts that refer directly or indirectly to the *Israeli-Palestinian conflict*. While expressions of "classical" antisemitic stereotypes are more common in the far-right, left-wing and liberal users tend to be involved more frequently in debates about Israel, including demonization, double-standards and delegitimization, which are interpreted as indicators of Israel-related antisemitism (Lehmann & Kappl 2021, 7-8). Figure 2 summarizes these aspects, by social media platform.

Due to its public character, **Twitter** tends to invite abusive trolling and allows the insertion of hate speech into a variety of conversations (Mulhall 2021, 66). Antisemitism on Twitter is mostly conspiratorial, and includes the spreading of the QAnon conspiracy myth, Holocaust denial and Israel-related antisemitism (ibid., 67). Often, users do not include openly antisemitic references in their posts but “use coded language and ironic insinuation to advance antisemitic ideas without making explicit statements that might prompt their removal from the platform” (ibid., 68).

Antisemitism, is spread on **Facebook** by extremist groups as well as by “average” users (Mulhall 2021, 38). Facebook is used strategically to normalize antisemitic ideology. Antisemitic messages can be shared through images, texts or comments, however, “most of the dissemination of discrimination and hate is found in the comments sections in pages with a high user numbers” (ibid., ibid., Sic). Those pages can deal with a variety of different topics, and comments can turn these popular pages into “reservoirs of antisemitic hate speech” (ibid., 42). Most comments refer to “‘trigger’ topics,” including WWII or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Similar to trolling on SM, posts often have the primary function of provoking a controversy in the comment section or to change the focus (“whataboutism”).

Instagram has a certain affinity for conspiracy material, recent studies show (Mulhall 2021, 45). Most of those posts combine pictures, graphics and text in a pseudo-factual way to spread misinformation. Many conspiracy posts utilize related hashtags to interconnect their posts with other conspiracy material.

YouTube also hosts antisemitic content although these videos can usually not be found by directly searching for antisemitism. This turns the platform into a useful storage for antisemitic video content for informed users. As a recent study from 2021 has shown, some “such videos have been present on YouTube for as long as ten years” and have up to half a million views (Mulhall 2021, 69). In addition, several YouTube accounts promote antisemitic and racist content, and are run by far right and supremacist organizations (ibid., 70). As a SM platform YouTube also allows users to comment on videos and rate them. In several cases the comment sections become forums for spreading antisemitic hate speech and sharing antisemitic worldviews.

On **TikTok**, antisemitism often appears in coded forms. The complex interplay of multiple layers allows users to play with different meanings, while utilizing language, text, visual, trending memes, filter and hashtags. Even where the hashtag #Antisemitism/us is blocked, antisemitic content can circulate on the platform and mobilize users unaware of specific codes and their meaning (AAS 2021, 25). Antisemitism on TikTok benefits from the extreme reach provided by the platform’s algorithm (Mulhall 2021, 62). Studies found an increase in antisemitic content in recent years (Weiman & Masri 2022). In 2022, TikTok dedicated itself to intensifying measures for combatting hate speech and Holocaust distortion on the platform.

Specific platforms, such as **Telegram** have become “home to some of the most extreme antisemitism” and have “facilitated far-right terrorist subcultures, of which antisemitism is a core component” (Mulhall 2021, 35). Telegram is particularly popular in the UK and Germany. The messaging app has a particular affinity for conspiracy movements and related influencers. Antisemitic content can be shared as text posts, memes, visuals, clips and files (ibid., 56). In doing so, “Telegram has provided a safe haven for antisemites deplatformed by other social media platforms, allowing conspirational networks to flourish and facilitating their slide into increasingly overt Jew-hatred” (ibid., 60).

Figure 2: Antisemitism by social media platform

Since 2019 most mainstream platforms practice “deplatforming” of users that perform hate speech including antisemitism. In July 2021, Facebook agreed to automatically link Holocaust-related content to the website “Facts About the Holocaust” created by the UNESCO and the World Jewish Congress (WJC). In January 2022, TikTok announced that it would join the initiative. Since then, videos that refer to the Holocaust contain a caption that leads users to a collection of historical facts. In addition, the TikTok search engine suggests to users that look for problematic terms such as “Holohoax” to visit the website and learn more about history.

Distortion is considered both a particularly problematic though also controversially discussed form of antisemitism appearing on SM, and it is usually closely related to current affairs. The following section focuses on this phenomenon.

4.3.5. Distortion

When it comes to Holocaust memory on SM, one particular concern is the danger of Holocaust distortion. As Manca et al. (2022) explain, Holocaust distortion is often considered to be a form of “secondary antisemitism,” which means specific antisemitic resentments that refer to the Holocaust or Holocaust commemoration. This could be forms of Holocaust inversion as well as analogies between current events and atrocities that were characteristic for the Holocaust, but also the universalization or trivialization of the Holocaust. Such Holocaust trivialization is also often transported on SM through memes and text-image compositions (Mulhall 2021, 42).

The “Double Genocide” model can also be interpreted as a form of Holocaust distortion as it proposes the “equality” of Nazi atrocities and Soviet crimes. Although analogies and comparisons are a standard approach in scientific as well as in popular discourses about historical events and their relevance for the present, troubling analogies to the Holocaust are at times labelled “Holocaust equivalence” (Manca et al. 2022, 25).

Though explicit views of Holocaust denial are expressed on and through SM platforms, and related propaganda content is shared through messenger groups and online forums, at least on the most popular and more strictly moderated platforms, explicit denial of historical events decreased and was replaced by “a shift in tone towards a more mocking or comical style” as well as “a more celebratory stance on the Holocaust,” especially by far-right SM users (Mulhall 2021, 31; see also UNESCO & UN 2022, 12).

Of greater concern are forms of distortion, although this concept is highly ambiguous, especially when dealing with such a diverse and conflicting environment such as SM platforms. According to a recent study that offers recommendations and guidelines on how to counter Holocaust distortion on SM, distortion “excuses, minimizes, or misrepresents the Holocaust through various media and in a variety of ways which are not always readily identifiable” (Manca et al. 2022, 25). This rather broad definition makes it difficult to define the particular boundaries of Holocaust distortion, especially in the context of agonistic, disputed and conflicting memories. Rightly so, Manca et al. emphasize that it “is important to stress that tensions are increasingly common in Holocaust memory” (ibid., 27), and that it is characterized by cultural, regional and national differences. Accordingly, their study states, the “boundary between what is comparable with the history of the Holocaust and what is

not may seem difficult to define and identify precisely, and even more so on social media, where people tend to make equivalences with other genocides with greater ease” (ibid., 29). Therefore, the study shifts attention away from measuring Holocaust distortion towards SM counterstrategies.

In 2022, UNESCO and United Nations published a report focusing on Holocaust denial and distortion on SM.⁵ According to this study, “Holocaust distortion significantly and deliberately misrepresents [...] historical facts” (UNESCO & UN 2022, 18). Forms of distortion reviewed by this study are: Celebrating, Blaming, Delegitimizing (especially directed against the State of Israel), Smearing, and Equating (including the political use and abuse of Holocaust analogies) (ibid.).⁶ Holocaust distortion is distinguished from Holocaust denial. Nevertheless, the study assumes a certain “animosity towards Jews” that is also part of the intentions behind Holocaust distortion: “As with denial, antisemitism is often a key component in these forms of Holocaust distortion” (ibid., 19).

The report identified 16.4% of the Holocaust-related content on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Telegram and Twitter as denying or distorting (ibid., 26). Part of the findings, however, was also that across the different languages “most content received little engagement, suggesting it was from low-level accounts rather than high-profile figures, influencers, or organized campaigns” (ibid., 29). The highest percentage, or 14.5% of the total content corresponds to the category of Holocaust distortion (Blaming, Delegitimizing, Smearing and Equating), with the highest percentage of 10.4% of the posts equating the Holocaust to other events. As said, this particular category is ambiguous, because, as the report’s authors also state, “not all comparisons to the Holocaust are problematic.” 1.1% of the analyzed content was coded as celebrating Nazi crimes, while 4.3% belonged to the category of denial. The report assumes that the relatively low number of “arguably more offensive forms of distortion” is a result of self-, community- or platform-regulation of problematic and harmful content (ibid., 29). See Figure 3 for further details.

Relating the Holocaust to other present or past events is a legitimate practice that helps to clarify differences and define specifics. Such forms of “equation” or “comparison” are therefore an integral part of SM as a forum for negotiating the relevance of history to the present, and for debating the role of Holocaust memory. In many cases, the debates about specific content and on how far it meets the criteria of Holocaust distortion, might help to further define the boundaries of such ambiguous categories. According to the UN report, the attempt to equate the occupation of Palestinian territories or Israeli policy towards Palestinians with genocidal mass murder and extermination (i.e., ghettos, gas chambers, death camps) usually does not meet the standards of criticism but intends to delegitimize and sometimes even questions either the dimensions of the Holocaust or Israel’s right to exist. Hashtags such as “Hitler was right” or “ZioNazi” are typical expressions of that (UNESCO & UN 2022, 42).

5 This report is based on research that monitored Holocaust-related content posted on a variety of platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and Telegram) in multiple languages (English, German, Spanish, French) in the months of June and July 2021; a similar time period as the one our study chose for exploring the discourse about the Holocaust on Twitter (UNESCO & UN 2022: 22).

6 The last category of “omitting” did not show up in the sample (UNESCO & UN 2022: 22).

It is more complicated to evaluate comparisons with the Holocaust that tend to “trivialize and diminish it through false equivalences or misappropriate the Holocaust” (ibid., 44). This often happens in the context of political or moral debates. Equivalences in this context can be labelled either as “moral equivalences,” which often do not really focus on the Holocaust or deal with related questions but use it as a “moral touchstone” for criticism or outrage, or as “procedural equivalence,” which does not compare the Holocaust with other events but evokes Holocaust and Nazi references to delegitimize certain practices (i.e., Covid regulations) (ibid., 44).

Compared with other mainstream SM platforms, Twitter contains the highest amount of Holocaust denial and distortion. 19% of the collected tweets were labeled as denying or distorting. With regards to languages, such tweets are distributed relatively evenly among the platforms, with a slightly lower number in Spanish. On Twitter all categories of distortion except equating are low. 16% of the analyzed tweets equate the Holocaust to other events.	8% of Holocaust-related content on Facebook denies or distorts the Holocaust, according to the UNESCO and UN study. Most of the problematic posts were written in English followed by German and French. No denying or distorting postings were found in Spanish. ⁷ Most posts on Facebook belong to the category of equating with a relatively high number of delegitimizing Israel and blaming Jews for the Holocaust. Posts that deny the Holocaust are relatively rare.
With 3% of its posts categorized as antisemitic, Instagram is the platform with the lowest amount of denying or distorting posts. The majority are English language posts. Only a few were written in Spanish, and even fewer in German. ⁸ On Instagram the report found only posts that equate the Holocaust to current or past events.	Holocaust denial on YouTube , not analyzed by the UNESCO and United Nations study, dropped significantly after a change in the terms of use in 2019 according to a study from 2020, which analyzed the use of the term “holohoax” on SM platforms (Guhl & Davey 2020, 2).
On TikTok 17% of the videos and other Holocaust-related content were identified as Holocaust denial or distortion. Most of these were in French, which is partly a result of the popularity of the comedian Dieudonné on the platform. ⁹ A significant amount of German language videos also fall into this category. Equating is the most popular form of Holocaust distortion on TikTok. Posts that deny the Holocaust are relatively rare.	In proportion to the collected data, the messenger service Telegram contains the largest amount of Holocaust denial or distortion. Most such posts are in German, although “all languages showed a high prevalence” (UNESCO & UN 2022, 28). Holocaust denial is very popular on the platform. The report also identified the highest amount of content celebrating the Holocaust (7.7%) and a similar percentage of posts equate the Holocaust with other events.

Figure 3: Holocaust denial and distortion by social media platform

7 The report’s authors emphasize that this “does not mean that Holocaust denial and distortion are nonexistent” on Spanish Facebook. The relatively low number of posts reviewed in this language indicates that this result might only reflect this particular period of monitoring posted content.

8 The reason might be the relatively low number of posts (see previous footnote).

9 Dieudonné’s own account was removed from TikTok in 2020. AFP, “[French anti-Semitic comedian banned from TikTok](#),” *The Time of Israel*, August 12, 2020.

4.4. Holocaust Memory on Twitter

Though it is a rather small SM platform, Twitter has around 397 million users per month worldwide and in Europe “plays an outsized role in public discourse due to its widespread adoption by politicians, media outlets and influential figures in public life” (Mulhall 2021, 66). Therefore, we focused on Twitter in order to detect Holocaust-related discourses correlating with our study’s focus on other intersected sites of tension: public-political discourse and education.

In total, we collected 569,509 tweets from the defined period of three months in summer 2021, of which 258,410 came from Spain, 170,949 from Germany, 96,256 from England, 42,873 from Poland, and 1,021 from Hungary. The distribution of tweets reflects the popularity of the platform in different countries. Twitter is less frequently used in central and eastern European countries, in particular in Hungary. The UK, Spain and Germany are among the countries with large numbers of Twitter users (Figure 4). The proportional distribution reflects the higher intensity of references to the Holocaust in Germany and Spain in comparison to the UK. In January 2022, the UK was the 6th highest ranking country in the world in using Twitter (after the U.S., Japan, India, Brazil and Indonesia) with 18.4 million Twitter users. Spain had 8.75 million users and Germany had 7.75 million users in the same period.¹⁰

After cleaning the data as described in section 2.3, we were left with 129,666 tweets from Spain, 112,468 from Germany, 53,861 tweets from England, 28131 tweets from Poland, and 833 tweets from Hungary (see Figure 4). This offered us comprehensive insight into the discourse about Holocaust memory in Spain, Germany and England, while the number of tweets from Poland and Hungary, where Twitter is not similarly popular, mostly allow insights into how specific sectors of society are talking about the Holocaust and are “doing” Holocaust memory on SM.

Our analysis of the collected data reveals certain tendencies in the countries analyzed in this study. The results form the basis of a critical discussion of specific information extracted from our samples. First, we investigated the frequency of particular keywords based on the content of the tweets. Those keywords partly overlapped with our search terms; however, they also offered us insight into the specific context in which those search terms were used. In a second step, we analyzed the number of collected tweets per day, which allowed a better understanding of the particular events or debates that caused an increase in Holocaust-related posts. We illustrate our findings with typical examples extracted from the qualitative analysis of our collected data and discuss them in relation to the results of manually coded samples of tweets. As described in the methodology sections, those tweets were coded according to whether they primarily evoke the Holocaust in the context of current affairs (“Use the Holocaust”) or primarily refer to the Holocaust as a historical topic (“Talk about the Holocaust”).

The analysis showed significant differences between the five countries. Therefore, we present our findings concerning the discourse about the Holocaust on Twitter according to country. Those

10 [“Leading countries based on number of Twitter users as of January 2022,”](#) Statista, 2023.

findings indicate specific tendencies that are typical for each country as well as elements of the Twitter discourse that are characteristic of all countries in our study. This is particularly true for the impact of the Covid pandemic on the discourse about the Holocaust.

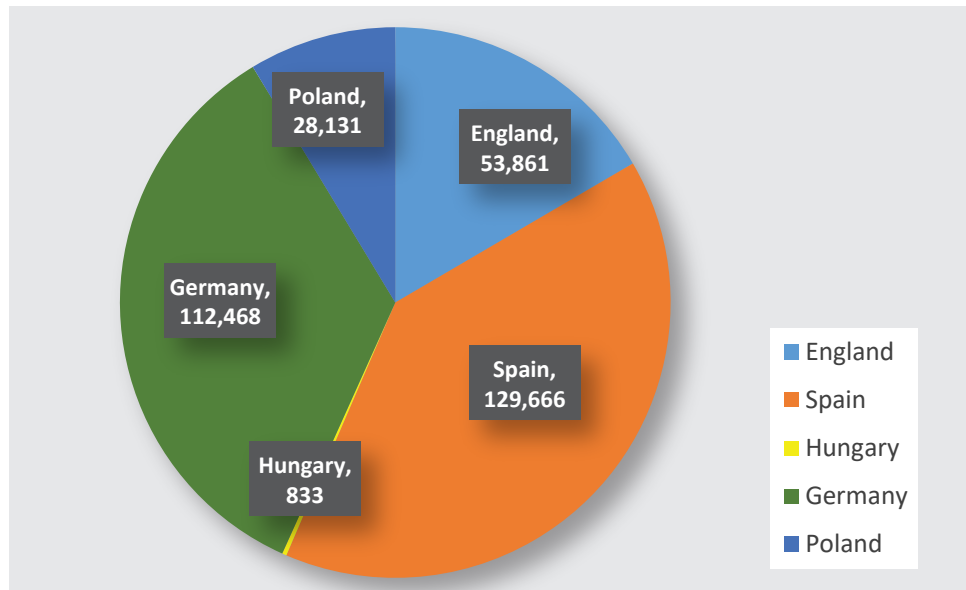


Figure 4: Number of tweets scraped by country after data cleaning

4.4.1. References to the Holocaust relate to present-day debates

The analysis of each country's Twitter discourse about the Holocaust shows that in the majority of countries, Holocaust references relate to topics and debates in the present. 75% of the coded and agreed-upon tweets use the Holocaust in that manner, while only 25% primarily focus on it as a historical phenomenon. In four out of the five countries the majority of tweets deal with current affairs.

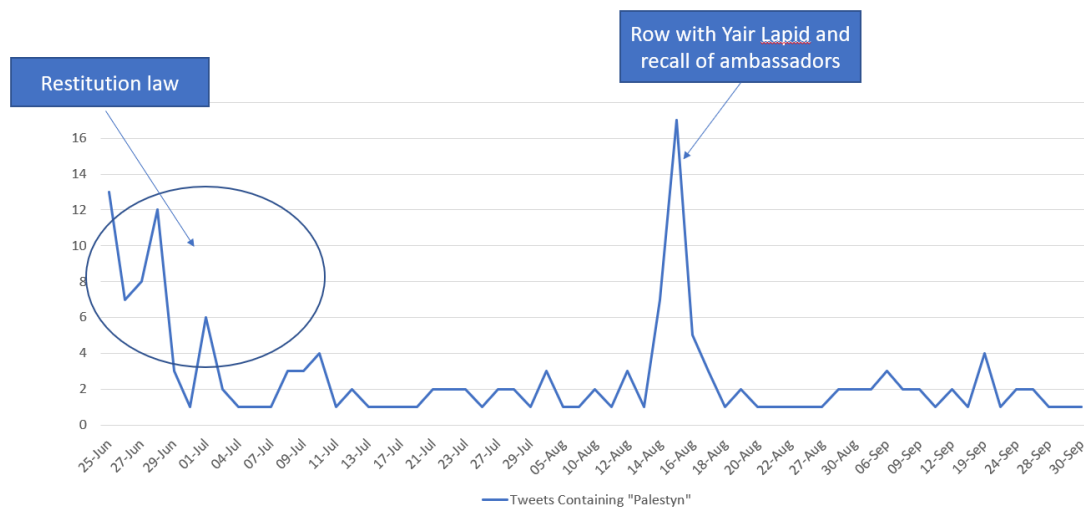


Figure 6: Number of Polish tweets containing the word "Palestyn"

This demonstrates that Polish affairs are at the centre of the SM discourse about the Holocaust and related topics. Even the Israeli-Palestinian conflict becomes relevant only in relation to debates about Polish national history and identity. This is further illustrated by the dominance of terms referring to Poland and the Polish people in the Twitter word cloud. Terms such as "Polakow" (Polish), "Polacy" (Polish people) and "Polska" (Poland) are used quite frequently in the tweets. The significance of Polish history is also illustrated by the terms "Jedwabne" and "Pogrom." Though the appearance of these terms is clearly related to the anniversary of the anti-Jewish pogrom in the German-occupied Polish city on July 10, 1941, the frequency of its use also points towards the controversial place of this massacre of at least 340 men, women and children murdered by their neighbours, in Polish national memory.

The word cloud thereby shows that the discourse about the Holocaust on Polish Twitter is primarily related to Poland's own national historical narratives as well as to the controversial history policy implemented by the governing PiS party. This is even indicated by the frequency of references to Germany, such as expressed in the term "Niemcy" (Germany). Although the English and Spanish word clouds also prominently feature the words Germany and German as indicators of the origin of the Nazi perpetrators as well as of German responsibility for the Holocaust, the Polish case is particularly interesting if we compare the frequency of "Niemcy" with the significantly lesser used term "Nazisci." This might indicate the impact of a specific strategy of nationalist activists in Poland to emphasize the German nationality of Nazi perpetrators over their ideology, thereby highlighting German responsibility for the Holocaust and downplaying Polish collaboration. An example for that can be found in a Twitter controversy, in which the Twitter user "Max Piaseczny" who has the hashtag "#BabiesLivesMatters" in his profile (a reference to his stand against abortion but also a statement against or at least ridiculing the Black-Lives-Matters movement) and uses the account "@Polub_PiS_X," which connects him to the ruling Polish conservative party PiS, criticizes the use of the term "Nazi" by another user: "I guess the Germans? There is no and there was no such nationality as 'Nazis'" (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Polish tweet exchange relating to the victims of the Utoya killings in Norway

after the German attack on Poland on September 1, 1939. It is not clear if shared world views of “Max Piaseczny” and the right-wing extremist terrorist in Norway also motivated this shift, or if it is mainly the result of an attempt to put Polish suffering in focus when it comes to commemoration and memory culture. In any case the tweet evokes a variety of historical references to experiments, rape and genocide (while the latter is not further specified in contrast to the previous ones) but also the accusation of pedophilia and the abuse of Polish children (a trope that resonates with classical antisemitic stereotypes of pedophile Jews and ritual murder or children).

The successful replacing of the memory of other victims of collective violence by a Polish victim narrative is confirmed after another user responds with the accusation that priests of the Polish church “replaced” the “Nazis” and are now responsible for pedophilia and sexual abuse. Thereby, the original tweet’s attempt at denouncing hatred in public spaces is jeopardized and becomes a debate about competing memories and national guilt. Interestingly, “Max Piaseczny” rejects the previous tweet’s comparison with catholic priests as inaccurate, and refers in this context to Mengele’s experiments, whom he identifies as “the German Mengele.” This historical reference fosters his argument against the use of “Nazis” in the context of crimes and atrocities committed in WWII, because “Nazi” is not a “nationality” in contrast to German. In that way the tweet nationalizes memory and demonstrates the political weaponizing of historical memories, references and analogies as well as the attempt to homogenize a commemorative culture (on and beyond SM) that is characterized by competing memories and memory conflicts.

This comment is part of a discussion that also demonstrates that references to the history of the Holocaust on Polish Twitter often indicate memory conflicts and antagonistic historical narratives. The starting point is a simple tweet that refers to the anniversary of the Utoya shootings, in which 69 young Norwegians were killed by a right-wing extremist on a summer camp vacation of the youth division of the Norwegian social democratic party. Without any references to the particular political and ideological context of the terrorist attack, the tweet (translated from Polish) just refers to “young people” and to a “man filled with hatred” and asks for commemorating the victims and denouncing “hatred in public spaces.”

This politically relatively neutral tweet is commented on by “Max Piaseczny.” “His” tweet changes focus from the commemoration of the terror victims from Utoya to Polish suffering

Clearly the elections had a significant influence on the tweets in our collection, as evidenced by the fact that “AfD” was our second-most mentioned keyword despite the fact that we only included tweets that appeared with a Holocaust-related word. In addition, “AfD” was the word placed most in conjunction with any of the “Nazi”-related words, as shown in the word network in Figure 14. We can see from this network that the term “AfD” appears 5,298 times together with the term “Nazis,” 2,380 times in the same tweet with “Nazi,” and 979 times with the term “NSDAP.” The terms “Nazis” and “AfD” appear in tweets together more than twice the amount of the second most numerous pair, “Nazis” and “Deutschland” (2,464 appearances).

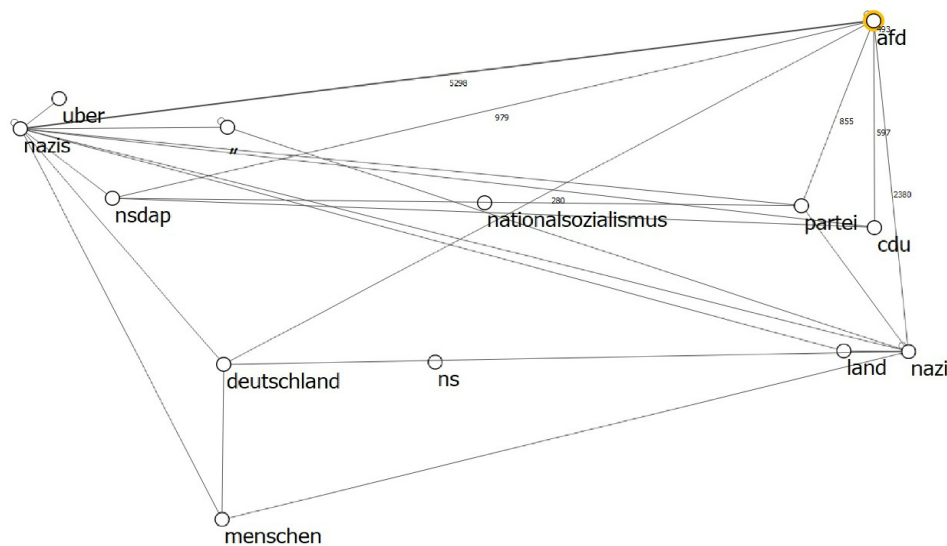


Figure 14: Word network for German tweets with any of the words “Nazi,” “Nazis,” “NSDAP,” “NS,” and “Nationalsozialismus”¹²

We observed on German Twitter the close entanglement of Holocaust-related terms – specifically “Nazi” – with the discourse about right-wing and far-right parties. Taking into consideration that tweets related to this topic usually provoke comments, controversies, counter-speak, a vivid part of SM talk about the Holocaust and National Socialism is due to the polarization caused by the AfD and other right-wing actors in Germany. However, this observation also points towards the universalized and inflationary use of the term “Nazi” on SM.

The controversy about current right-wing and far-right parties on Twitter can also become an affinity space for historical information. In reaction to the candidacy of an AfD politician who presented himself as a “friendly face of National Socialism” and “democratic Freisler” (a reference to the Nazi Judge Roland Freisler who participated in the Wannsee Conference and convicted the members of the 20th of July resistance movement after the failed attempt to kill Hitler), on September 30, 2021

12 Graph for keywords with a minimum threshold of 250 connections to other words, and a frequency threshold of 2,500 mentions. Thicker lines indicate a greater number of mutual mentions within the same tweet, and the number of mutual mentions is also labelled with numbers for each vector between terms.

a German Twitter user added to his post criticizing the politician's nomination a comment with historical information about Freisler ("Blood judge Roland Freisler was one of the most perfidious Nazi criminals and one of the more closely responsible for the Holocaust," translated from German) as well as an appeal to the historical consciousness of AfD members ("There are certainly members in the AfD who are aware of the Nazi crimes and who distance themselves from such statements").

The number of tweets related to the elections might also explain why in comparison to other countries in our sample, terms referencing the Covid pandemic and in particular anti-vaccination protests are less visible in the word cloud. Nevertheless, it does contain typical terms such as “Goebbels” and “Mengele” as well as specific terminology referring to the German discourse (“Querdenker”). A closer analysis of tweets specifically referring to the Holocaust demonstrate that the context of the Covid pandemic still has an impact on the way people address and refer to Holocaust memory on Twitter. A review of Covid related tweets in our scraped sample illustrates this observation (Figure 15).



Figure 15: German word cloud of Covid tweets

The discourse about Covid in the context of the Holocaust is clearly dominated by a terminology that was invented in order to present unvaccinated persons as “new Jews,” suffering from discrimination and punishment. This is a widespread phenomenon as recent studies show that the representation of anti-vax conspiracists as “new Jews” and problematic comparisons to the Holocaust were widespread on SM platforms (Karakoulaki & Dessì 2021, 6). A German tweet from August 11, 2021, illustrates this Covid-related form of Holocaust inversion: “Could you explain what’s so wrong with that? Unvaccinated people are treated like the Jews before the holocaust and then we are forced to carry out a human experiment... The only thing missing is that we are locked up” (#59,493). In particular, the frequent use of the term “Final Solution” that explicitly refers to the mass extermination of Jews during the Holocaust, demonstrates how vivid comparisons between the Holocaust and anti-Covid measures are on German Twitter.

Among those tweets that explicitly refer to the term “Holocaust” we also see many tweets comparing Covid protection measures to the Holocaust, or criticizing these comparisons. In many of such Twitter conversations, users negotiate what are and are not appropriate comparisons while talking about the Holocaust. A popular German tweet from September 4, 2021 comparing supporters of Covid measures with Nazi perpetrators, for instance, quickly leads to a discussion about equation and historical comparisons (Figure 16, English translation follows German).

The word cloud of Covid-related tweets in the context of the Holocaust, however, also illustrates that Holocaust distortion and trivialization in the context of the pandemic meet criticism on the platform and are countered by other users. Terms such as “Comparison,” “Compares” and “Comparing” are also frequently used.

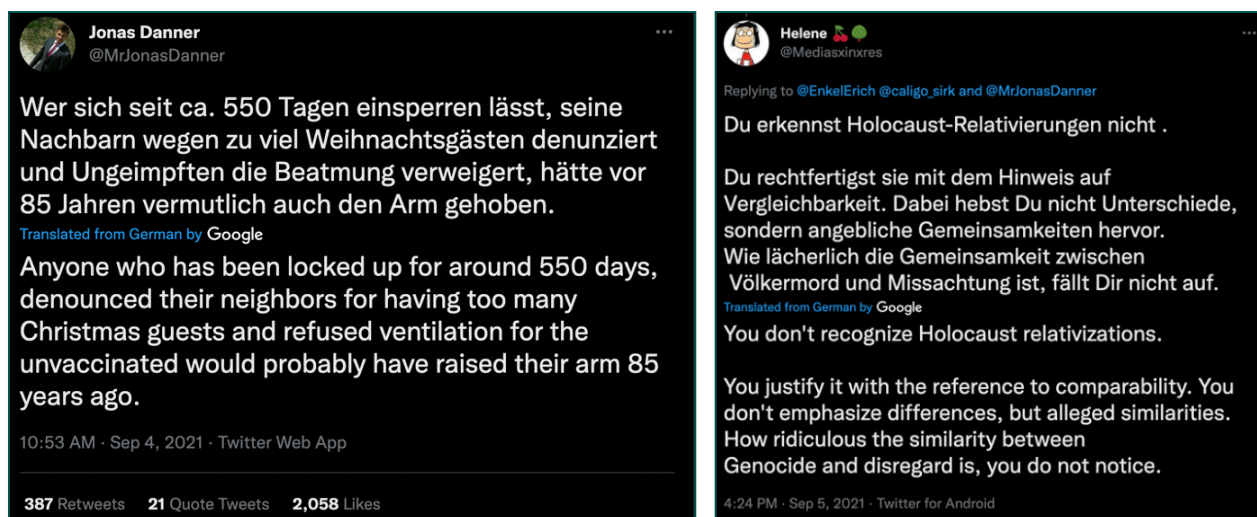


Figure 16: Twitter discussion about historical analogies, German

Also in the general word cloud those terms (“Comparison,” “Comparing,” “Comparisons”) refer in general to the debate about the legitimacy of comparisons, analogies and equation.

The frequency of “Deutschland” (Germany) and related terms indicates that German history and memory culture still constitute a significant framework for dealing with the Holocaust, though a majority of 82% of our coded tweets use the Holocaust in the context of discussions about current affairs. A closer look at tweets that specifically refer to the term “Holocaust” reveals that many of the 11,075 tweets refer to debates about trivializing and distorting the Holocaust (Figure 17).

Though only “denying” is among the top words, many other terms belong to the same complex (“Vergleich,” “verharmlost,” “Relativierung,” etc.). Interestingly, next to “Holocaust” also “#Holocaust” (1,099) is among the most frequently used terms. The use of the hashtag sign signifies increased awareness and demonstrates the intention for that tweet to serve as a form of commemoration or as contribution to the discourse about Holocaust memory.

In this context the presence of terms referring to Holocaust survivors in the word cloud of tweets referring to the Holocaust is also significant. Those tweets demonstrate the importance of survivors’

voices in Germany's memory culture. The frequency of tweets, however, is related to the death of Auschwitz survivor Esther Bejarano who was very popular in Germany and publicly criticized the rise of far-right movements, racism and antisemitism. Her death on July 10, 2021, caused significant traffic on German Twitter as can be seen in the second peak of the tweets per day graphic (Figure 13b).

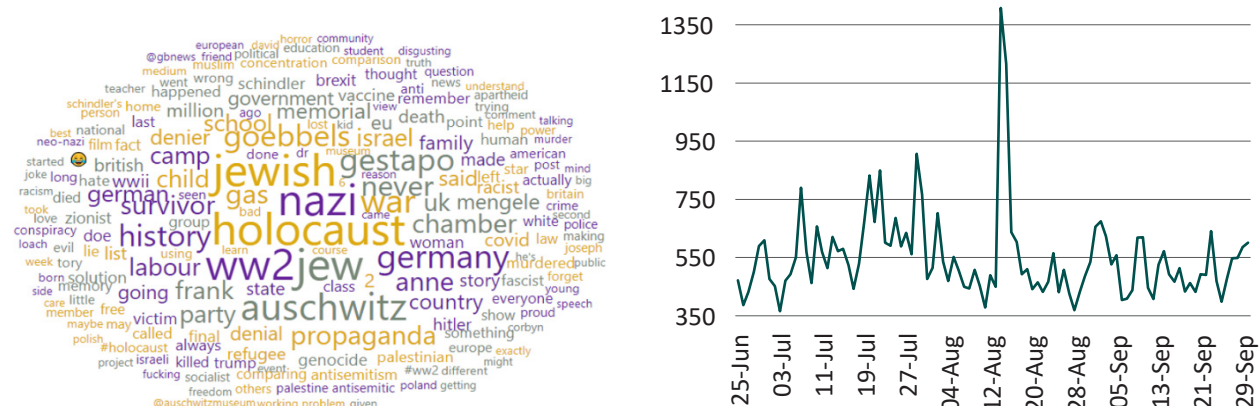
References to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to antisemitism, to other phases of German history (Colonialism, GDR), but also to commemoration in general, are relatively low in the general word cloud as well as in the tweets explicitly referring to the Holocaust.



Figure 17: German word cloud with tweets that contain the term “Holocaust”

4.5.4. England

The top words identified in the England dataset are visualized by the word cloud in Figure 18a. The top words were “Holocaust,” “Nazi” and “Jew,” followed by “Jewish,” “WW2,” and “Auschwitz.” In Figure 18b we visualize the breakdown of tweets by date, with peaks on August 14–15, 2021. This two-day period, when a football team erroneously included a picture of Anne Frank in a memorial for victims of Covid and Ken Loach was kicked out of the Labour Party, comprised about 4.9% of the total tweets in our dataset.



Figures 18a, 18b: Word Cloud for 93,049 tweets from England and tweets by day

Both incidents indicate that in the English sample, references to the Holocaust and particularly to antisemitism often appear in the context of current political and cultural events. Controversies about the Labour Party also constituted a significant proportion of tweets in our preliminary datasets that covered earlier periods. This dominant political framework of references to the Holocaust and World War Two is also indicated by terms such as “chamber,” “party,” “Labour,” “Government” or “Brexit” that are used relatively often in English tweets.

Our analysis showed that 70% of the coded tweets in our sample evoke the Holocaust in relation to current topics, while only 30% talk about the Holocaust as a historical phenomenon. English Twitter users compare present day legislation to specific aspects of the Holocaust, such as claims that former Home Secretary Priti Patel’s proposed ‘Nationality and Borders Bill’ would make the *Kindertransport* illegal, or that there is a connection between Covid legislation and attitudes popular in the Nazi era. Often references to the Nazi past serve as a means to denounce politicians such as in a tweet from June 26, 2021 that satirically compared former Prime Minister Boris Johnson with Hitler and former Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Matt Hancock with Goebbels.

Within the 30% of tweets in the English sample that talk about the Holocaust as a historical phenomenon, the majority are strongly political and related to the present day. Also in this category were tweets that focused, for instance, on the Labour Party and the controversial decision to remove Ken Loach from the party.

The tweets about Ken Loach are also a good example of how it is not always clear whether critical Twitter users that participated in this debate primarily intended to talk about antisemitism or the boundaries of what is and isn’t Holocaust distortion and denial, or were using the debate around Holocaust denial as a means to attack or defend English public figures, political parties, and specific positions toward issues such as socialism and Israel. Some of the tweets are debating whether Loach’s September 2017 comment in a BBC interview, in which he responded to a question about potential Holocaust denial at a meeting that he attended publicly saying, “History is for us all to discuss,” constitutes Holocaust denial. Others discuss the “Perdition Affair,” where Loach created a play which portrayed Zionists as collaborating with Nazis.¹³ Others talk about the Labour Party’s antisemitism scandals. Due to the mixing of these issues, it is difficult to determine what exactly each tweeter has in mind when they posted about Ken Loach and Holocaust denial. Due to the specific agonistic structure of Twitter debates, the discussion about the Holocaust’s legacy is historical at first glance but then reveals obvious present-day political motivations.

While we can again clearly identify references to the Covid discourse such as “Covid” and “Vaccination” or the names “Mengele” and “Goebbels,” the English dataset appears more diverse. It is obvious that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict plays a more dominant role in the context of Holocaust-related tweets than in other countries. Terms such as “Israel,” “Zionist,” “State,” “Palestinian” and “Palestine” that belong to this cluster are part of many tweets in our sample, though it is not clear

13 Rosenberg, Yair. “[Ken Loach Refuses to Condemn Holocaust Denial](#),” *YouTube*, September 26, 2017.

population) as a “victim” and “They” (who “want to reduce” mankind), but also compares them to Mengele as the ultimate analogy for evil, inhumane experiments. In doing so, the tweet implicitly connects to similar conspiracy narratives that proclaim a universal plan to control, manipulate or reduce the world population, a narrative that also usually contains references to Jewish actors such as the CEO of Pfizer or the global entrepreneur and philanthrope George Soros. Interpreting the tweet in this context also implies a form of Holocaust inversion, turning the victims of the Holocaust (and a significant group of Mengele’s “guinea pigs” into perpetrators and those opposing the Covid vaccine into victims (similar to Mengele’s original victims).

Mengele as a historical analogy, however, is not unique to the Covid discourse. It serves as a moral analogy that has a primarily denunciating function in fundamental ethical debates. This is illustrated by a Spanish tweet that denounces the free choice of motherhood by evoking Josef Mengele as an analogy and expressing anti-feminist as well as anti-communist resentments (Figure 25, Translated from Spanish).

The most interesting aspect of this post is that the Mengele analogy is integrated into a set of additional, mostly ideological references. By evoking the Left, Feminism and Leninism as corporal features (left-handed) or disease (“she suffers from”), the tweet naturalizes political positions. Implicitly, it also feeds conspiracy theories by evoking “feminism-Leninism” as an alliance against conservative (catholic) positioning towards the issue of abortion.

The discussion of the most frequently used terms in combination with the analysis of the main peak of tweets during the period in question, shows that the Spanish discourse about the Holocaust on Twitter is mostly used as a historical or an universal analogy oriented towards current affairs. The analysis of our coded sample of tweets showed that next to Hungary Spain is the country with the highest percentage of tweets that evoke the Holocaust in the context of present affairs and make use of it for communicating current topics. We coded only 11% of Spanish tweets as talking about the Holocaust as a historical event.

Keywords clearly related to commemoration such as “Memoria” and “Milliones” are used less frequently. However, terms related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are also not evoked frequently within the context of the Holocaust on Spanish Twitter.



Figure 25: A Spanish tweet reacting to a pro-choice position of a politician with an analogy to Mengele

4.5.6. Focus I: Colonialism

Colonialism is an integral part of European history and memory, which was nevertheless largely overlooked for many decades. While the ambivalent and often controversial memories of colonial pasts are rooted deeper in some societies, such as in England and France, which have a dual colonial heritage— as both the legacy of the colonizers and memories of the colonized are present in those societies today — other countries, such as Poland or the Czech Republic, relate more recent memories of occupation (by Nazi Germany and through communist ideology) to the term “colonialism.”

A specific case is Germany, which on the one hand was actively involved in colonial atrocities during its imperial period, while on the other hand wasn’t considered a colonial power on the same level as England and France. In addition, Germany’s identity is fundamentally characterized by the memory of atrocities committed during World War Two and in particular its responsibility for the Holocaust. Having turned “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” (Germany’s dealing with its Nazi past) into a cornerstone of the country’s national identity, and with it also introduced the Holocaust as a “negative founding myth” of the newly evolving European identity, historical discussions about the Holocaust and its relation to other periods of German and European history, in particular to other genocides and memories of mass atrocities, are usually very controversial topics.

For that reason, we focused on the intersection of Holocaust discourses on Twitter with references to colonialism and colonial pasts. Due to the specific historical connection with colonial history and already established or newly evolving debates about the place of colonial memory, we specifically analyzed a sample of tweets from England and Germany.

A general overview of the total number of tweets from Germany and England on colonialism demonstrates that in the period of our study the link between both topics was much stronger in the German than in the English context (Figure 26).

A closer look reveals significant differences between the German and the English discourse about colonialism in the context of Holocaust memory on Twitter. On German Twitter the specific combination of the two historical topics (Colonialism/Colonial crimes and Holocaust/Shoah) clearly dominated. Both topics are relatively even in their distribution, and the tweets primarily refer to the specific relationship between colonialism and the Holocaust (Figure 27).

However, the distribution of keywords also hints to the main context of discussing the relationship between colonialism and the Holocaust as German memory culture. Furthermore, many

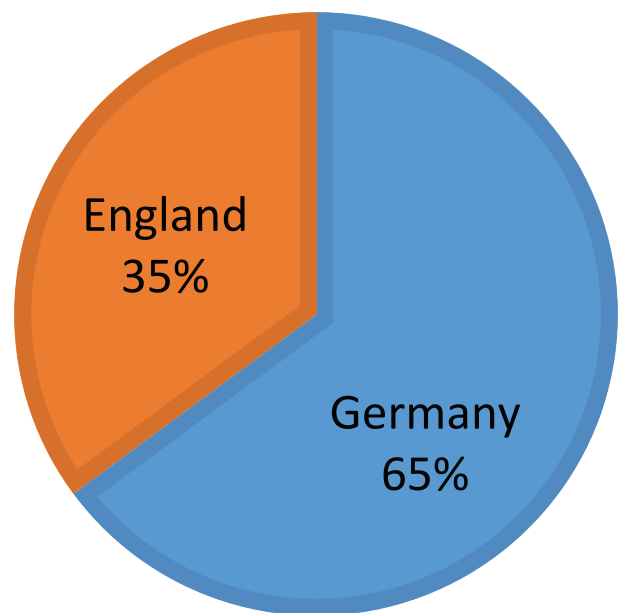


Figure 26: Distribution of German and English tweets about colonialism and the Holocaust



tweets obviously originate from the debates on the uniqueness of the Holocaust and about the justification of historical comparison, which were triggered by the translation into German of Michael Rothberg's book "Multidirectional Memory" in 2021 (originally published in 2009) in German and a polemic article criticizing German Holocaust memory, which was published by A. Dirk Moses (2021).

Those publications prompted an intense debate in German newspapers, which primarily involved intellectuals and academics from different disciplines. Those articles were also shared and retweeted, and initiated new discussions through comments and retweets. The debate about the relationship between colonialism and the Holocaust in the context of multidirectional memory and the ethics of comparison, touches in Germany on three other controversial topics that previously framed the debate about the country's colonial past: the discussion about the renaming of streets that commemorate racist or antisemitic historical figures, the controversy about the Humboldt Forum in Berlin's city centre, the partly rebuilt imperial castle, which today hosts several ethnographic exhibitions, and the ongoing demands to restitute stolen art and cultural heritage from colonized countries, such as the Benin Bronzes.

The English discourse on colonialism differs from that on German Twitter on many levels. On the one hand it is closely tied to ongoing controversial debates about Britain's colonial past and the ways the country remembers colonial atrocities committed by British settlers in contrast to its heroic self-image derived from the victory over Nazi Germany in WWII. The dominance of the keywords "colonial/colonialism" in relation to "history," "British," "WW2" and "empire" indicates this particular framework (Figure 28).

On the other hand, the English discourse about colonialism refers much more often to Israel as a colonial entity. Other than in the German case, the dominance of keywords such as “Israel,” “Apartheid,” “Palestine” and “Zionist” demonstrate that on English Twitter colonialism is much more intensely addressed as a contemporary topic, which is used as an accusatory label to describe

This means that the debate about colonialism and Holocaust memory itself is highly multidirectional, because it intertwines both memories and connects them with each other. 55% of tweets in a coded sample were identified as multidirectional. However, the majority of these tweets originate in Germany. 74.5% of the German tweets in comparison to 38% of the English tweets intersect both histories. This can be explained by the predominantly academic debate about colonialism and Holocaust memory on German Twitter, which primarily focuses on differences and continuities between both histories. Another reason is that the identification of Israel with colonialism as part of the debates about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict only plays a minor role on German Twitter.

Correspondingly, critical Holocaust memory is the second most important frame of reference for tweets intertwining Holocaust memory and colonialism. A total of 29% of the coded tweets can be considered as an expression of critical Holocaust memory or advocating for such an approach. Interestingly, the majority of German tweets fall under this category, while only 23.3% of the English tweets express critical Holocaust memory. This can be explained by the fact that the concept of critical (or reflexive) Holocaust memory originates from the West-German debate about the uniqueness of the Holocaust and its negative impact on the development of what Philosopher Jürgen Habermas during the Historians' Controversy (*Historikerstreit*) of the 1980s defined as "*Verfassungspatriotismus*" (constitution-based patriotism). Since the 1980s all debates about German memory culture have referred to critical Holocaust memory as a desirable standard model for reflexive commemoration. Nevertheless, the dominance of this framework in tweets on colonialism and Holocaust memory also demonstrates the relatively nuanced and balanced nature of the controversy in Germany. One reason for that could be the predominant involvement of academics and protagonists from the liberal left (though often defending the unprecedented or unique character of the Holocaust) in the debates about this topic on Twitter. In contrast, references to colonialism and Nazism or the Holocaust on English Twitter are significantly more polemic, and often not related to a historical debate about Britain's own colonial past but externalized as an accusation against Israel and the situation of the Palestinians.

Surprisingly, however, there is not a single tweet in our random sample that meets the criteria of Holocaust distortion according to the IHRA definition. It could have been expected that, taking into account the controversial debate about the possibilities and limits of comparing the Holocaust to other historical atrocities and genocidal events, forms of actual distortion or the accusation of Holocaust distortion would appear. That was not the case. In only 9% of the cases the Holocaust is used as a yardstick of evil, meaning that the tweet condemns others by using the Holocaust as a negative reference. Interestingly, the German tweets in this category clearly refer to the Holocaust with the intention of safeguarding specific aspects of Holocaust memory such as its unique or unprecedented character, or protecting it against a tendency towards generalization, for instance another case of genocidal racism.

In contrast, the majority of 77.8% of English tweets that use the Holocaust as a yardstick, refer in a mostly aggressive way to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and either identify Israel with the Nazi regime ("Well they are racist, colonialist, settler Nazi bigots") and accuse Israel of misusing the Holocaust ("Fear of guilt by association with the holocaust keeps #Israel innocent of what should

be murder”), or do exactly this, misusing the Holocaust to negate Palestinian claims (“Everything ‘Palestinian’ is Arab Islamist colonialism of Jewish homeland, a Nazi movement dedicated to the continuation of the Holocaust against the Jewish people.”) In doing so, English comments dissociate the Holocaust from its actual historical context and use it as a political token for spreading anti- or pro-Israel sentiments, while in the German cases users try to defend a specific understanding of its historical context and specifics in a highly contested political debate (Figure 30).



Figure 30: English tweets referring to colonialism in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict¹⁴

Those debates are partly channeled into forms of “moral remembrance,” which we define as a form of self-criticism towards the past that express a “duty to remember,” while emphasizing “justice for victims” and tying memory to human rights. We could identify 7% of the tweets in our sample that fit into this category. They are distributed relatively even between English (57.2%) and German (42.8%) Twitter users.

This approach actually arose from the German model of “Verfassungspatriotismus” and is at the centre of European Holocaust Memory, which tends towards inclusive forms of victim- and testimony centred commemoration that universalize and actualize the memory of the Holocaust in the duty to protect human rights. The tweets in this category follow this path and demand forms of commemoration that include Holocaust memory and critical ways of dealing with postcolonial pasts.

14 @Chris Maslanka, [Well they are racist, colonialist, settler Nazi bigots](#), July 9, 2021; @corinthians1312, [Electronic Intifada](#), September 11, 2021.

Interestingly, tweets that demand such forms of balanced commemoration are usually neither addressed as counter-speech – explicitly criticizing and rejecting other users’ comments about the Holocaust – nor contain counter-narratives by providing facts or different perspectives as responses to presumed misrepresentations of the Holocaust.

Most cases of counter-speech refer to multidirectional memory and often also contain counter-narratives. From the 12% of the German tweets in the sample that offer counter-narratives, 66.7% advocate for intensifying commemoration of Germany’s colonial past and its victims, while two Twitter users are afraid that within this debate the Holocaust and its unprecedented character are either trivialized or relativized.

As part of multidirectional and moral approaches to Holocaust memory and colonial pasts, some tweets emphasize the role of education. In doing so, the predominantly academic debate is connected to the question of historical knowledge and learning. Two tweets that explicitly refer to school education, one from Germany and one from England, interestingly demonstrate a very inclusive understanding of history. Historical experiences related to the Holocaust (forced emigration) and to colonialism (slavery, racism) are understood as inseparable from each other. While the English post accesses the debate from the perspective of Holocaust education and the German tweet emphasizes the need to reflect on colonialism in German schools, both see the integration of the two histories as a given (Figure 31).

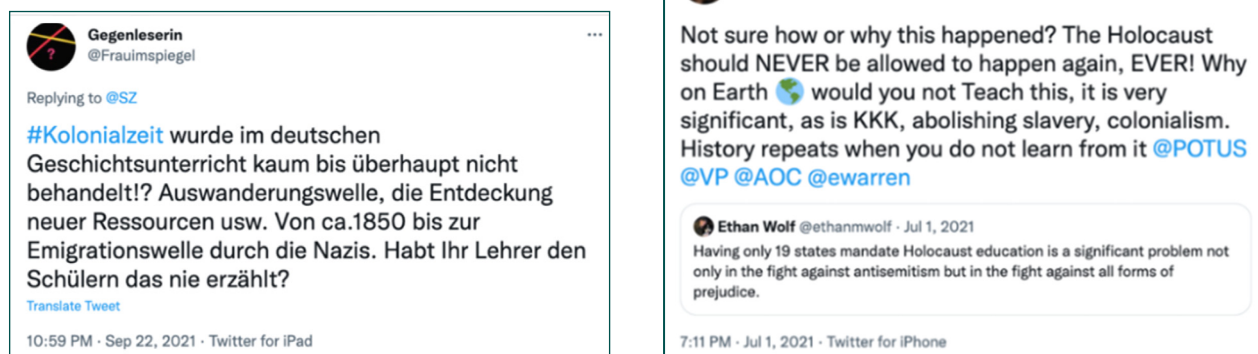


Figure 31: History education in the context of debates about the Holocaust and colonialism¹⁵.

4.5.7. Focus II: Sinti and Roma

Next to the Jewish Holocaust the genocide of Sinti and Roma living in Europe was a key aspect of the Nazi extermination policy implemented in the course of WWII. After the war ended, discrimination of Sinti and Roma continued. For decades the genocide of the Sinti and Roma people, the Porajmos, was not recognized. The IHRA working definition of anti-Roma discrimination defines antigypsyism as:

15 Gegenleserin, @Frauimspiegel, “Replying to @SZ,” September 22, 2021; Kat Singam, @KatSingam, “Not sure how or why this happened?” Twitter, July 1, 2021.

a manifestation of individual expressions and acts as well as institutional policies and practices of marginalization, exclusion, physical violence, devaluation of Roma cultures and lifestyles, and hate speech directed at Roma as well as other individuals and groups perceived, stigmatized, or persecuted during the Nazi era, and still today, as ‘Gypsies.’ This leads to the treatment of Roma as an alleged alien group and associates them with a series of pejorative stereotypes and distorted images that represent a specific form of racism.¹⁶

The discourse on Sinti and Roma and the Porajmos on SM contains a range of elements: it refers to historical events by commemorating, informing about the historical context or, similar to the context of the Holocaust, distorting, denying or glorifying the persecution of Roma and Sinti; or it refers to present expressions of anti-Roma discrimination, stereotyping Roma and Sinti and using the term “Gypsy” as negative stigmatization.

In our sample a majority of tweets mentioning the Sinti and Roma and the Porajmos made these references in commemorative contexts. A reason for that was the European Holocaust Memorial Day for the Sinti and Roma on August 2, 2021, which commemorates the 4,300 Sinti and Roma who were murdered by the SS in Auschwitz-Birkenau on that night in 1944. That day, which since 2015 is celebrated in memory of all the 500,000 Sinti and Roma murdered in Nazi-occupied Europe, fell within our study period. Therefore, we also focused on the intersection between the Porajmos and the Holocaust (Figure 32).

As part of the commemoration practices on August 2, tweets either referred to the historical incident or interconnected the past with present expressions of anti-Roma discrimination. Commemorative posts typically referred to specific biographies or in general to the genocide of the Sinti and Roma. A tweet by a local city archive from Germany has a focus on “local history” and “unknown” stories.

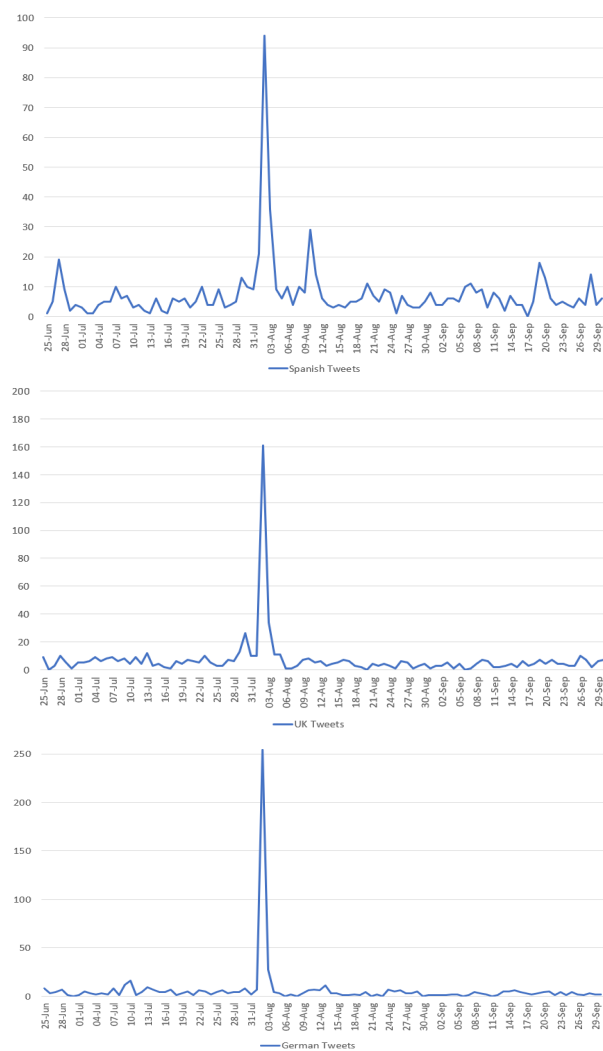


Figure 32: Tweets per day in Germany, England and Spain show the importance of the European Holocaust Memorial Day for Sinti and Roma

¹⁶ [“What is antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination?”](#) International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, retrieved March 21, 2023.

Accompanied by the hashtag #Porjamos, it presents the name and photograph of Wilhelm Steinbach who was murdered in Auschwitz in 1943.

Another commemorative tweet by a local German football club announced the adoption of the IHRA definition of antigypsyism. Though its focus is the Holocaust Memorial Day for Sinti and Roma, the announcement also connects past and present due to the references to present expressions of anti-Roma discrimination in the IHRA working definition.

Other commemorative posts explicitly connect past and present forms of anti-Roma discrimination, as in the case of a thread by a German anti-racism and climate activist. The thread posted on August 3, 2021 starts with a clearly commemorative tweet that refers to a local event in the context of the genocide of the European Sinti and Roma: "In 1943, Sinti and Roma were deported to Auschwitz from what is now the Schlachthof cultural centre. Almost all were murdered." The next tweet explicitly refers to the European Memorial Day, and labels the thread as a commemorative action. Then, however, the user explicitly refers to present forms of anti-Roma discrimination: "Sinti and Roma still experience discrimination and oppression on a daily basis." Referring again to the memorial day, the tweet continues: "The commemoration of the Porjamos, the genocide of the Sinti and Roma, is often forgotten." This emphasizes the relevance of commemoration for the present, as it is mentioned in the last tweet of the thread that reads: "Let's keep the memory alive," accompanied by the hashtags #KeinVergebenKeinVergessen (NoForgivingNoForgetting), also used in connection to other Nazi crimes, and the hashtag #Porajmos. A short video documents how the user brought flowers to the local memorial. The combination of different tweets in a longer thread, and the multimodal integration of text, hashtags and video interconnects historical information, commemorative practice and contemporary references.

Most tweets that refer to Sinti and Roma in the context of the Holocaust on other occasions than the European Memorial Day, are part of online conversations or disputes about historical facts as well as present discrimination. The following tweet is a response to a revisionist tweet that questions historical figures related to the Holocaust (Figure 33).

The tweet refers to the genocide of the Sinti and Roma as part of a counter-information strategy. Referencing a related Wikipedia entry about the Treblinka extermination camp, the intention of the tweet is to respond to a revisionist attempt to question historical figures and facts.



Figure 33: Historical information countering revisionism and misinformation¹⁷

17 [Engines, @Bruce437t, Replying to @BeeJayWest1, @PeterJLyth and 2 others, Twitter, September 10, 2021.](#)

Other tweets refer to the history of the Holocaust in response to general conversations about Sinti and Roma or anti-Roma discrimination. A German tweet from July 13, 2021 posted by a political scientist and educator who works on nationalism, antisemitism and discrimination contextualizes the discourse about Sinti and Roma with a reference to their historical persecution: “They are special in that the Nazis destroyed 500,000 Sinti & Roma industrially and they are still subject to severe discrimination today.”

An even more explicit form of a responsive tweet is a counter-speech preceding the above-mentioned tweet from July 13, which reacts to an ordinary user’s response to a television report about present-day anti-Roma discrimination. The user had posted the demand that Sinti and Roma should integrate into the German society instead of complaining about discrimination. The above-mentioned Twitter user responded with a critical tweet that referred to the fears of Sinti and Roma of exposing themselves publicly due to ongoing discrimination like that expressed in response to the video.

One notable aspect of such counter-speech is also the debate about terminology and the continued use of the term “Gypsy,” which is considered by many as discriminatory. An example of a tweet replying to this discussion is the demand to replace the word even if it would only humiliate a small percentage of Sinti and Roma. The counter-speech tweet from August 16, 2021 emphasizes the discriminatory nature of the term and compares it to other forms of racist language: “It’s just not up to date anymore. It is an insulting term that the Nazis used as discrimination. [...] Is the same with the n word.” Maybe even more typical for the German context, this tweet naturally connects present forms of anti-Roma discrimination with the stigmatization and persecution of Sinti and Roma by the Nazis.

Our sample also contained multidirectional references to Sinti and Roma and the Holocaust. A rare example that blends different experiences of past and present persecution is a tweet from Germany, from August 15, 2021 that refers to Afghan refugees: “Wouldn’t you have taken in any German refugees (Jews/opponents of the Nazis/Sinti&Roma/PoC/ homosexuals/disabled) during the Nazi era?” Again, posted as part of a conversation and thus intended as a critical response to contemporary forms of racism and anti-refugee prejudices, the tweet establishes an analogy between refugees from Nazi Germany and present-day refugees from Afghanistan. This analogy, however, does not equate those refugees, but parallels past and present reactions. Sinti and Roma are mentioned as part of a diverse multitude of groups persecuted by the Nazis. Furthermore, the tweet also refers to the broad support of the Nazi government in the German population.

More common in the tweets of our sample are multidirectional intersections of different themes and topics that are based on victim competition. Usually, those tweets contrast Sinti and Roma as well as other persecuted groups with Jewish victims. An English tweet from August 10, 2021, for instance, evokes a reference to the persecution of Roma by the Nazis in the context of a debate about a preceding tweet, which denounced Israel as terrorist as part of a conspiracy theory: “Let’s talk about how Israel was founded on terrorism. [...] Hamas was democratically elected on the push from US & Israel, after The Apartheid lands killed Arafat.” In response to criticism the same user

then evokes analogies to Roma and other persecuted groups: “What’s wrong.? Oh & let’s not forget the Nazis also punished Polish, Catholics, gays, disabled, a huge amount of Roma Gypsies as well ... did you forget them? Not important enough, eh?” The use of the discriminatory term “Gypsies” as well as the random listing of victim groups demonstrates that this reference is primarily used to counter criticism. Furthermore, the user even implies that the fate of Jewish victims is usually overemphasized.

Similarly, a Spanish tweet from July 22, 2021, refers to the genocide of the Sinti & Roma in order to justify Holocaust revisionism and denial. It states: “You talk about the Holocaust as if you were the only ones who were killed. There were blacks, Jehovah’s Witnesses, gypsies, homosexuals and many more. When I was a child, they said there were 1 million Jews, now they say there are 6 million and when I am old they will inflate the figure to 20 million.”

Victim competition, in which the fate of the Sinti and Roma during the Holocaust and the Porajmos are not specifically recognized but used for other purposes, is more popular in countries such as Spain or England, while commemoration and historical information – which nevertheless often intersects references to present forms of anti-Roma discrimination, dominate in Germany.

An exceptional case, however, is Hungary. Within the Hungarian tweets we identify an everyday culture of antigypsyism. Many of the tweets were pejorative, and “Gypsy” is used in a derogatory manner relatively frequently here, unlike in other countries (Figure 34, tweet translated from Hungarian.)

One tweet even attacks Orbán from the right, calling him a “gypsy dwarf” for imposing Covid restrictions. There is, however, also pushback with tweets referencing human rights as well as Christian values.



Figure 34: Antigypsyism on Hungarian Twitter

4.6. Conclusions

The results indicate that Twitter users in each of the five countries primarily “use” the Holocaust to discuss other issues rather than “talking about” the Holocaust itself. Similarly, Holocaust-related words do not seem to be discussed in their own right, but rather as a tool, primarily to strengthen present day political positions on other issues. This phenomenon was especially true in Hungary, Spain, and Germany. A recent report by UNESCO and the UN interpreted this phenomenon of “equating” the Holocaust to other events in order to promote some sort of political, moral, or social agenda as a highly common form of Holocaust distortion on Twitter. We will suggest an alternative interpretation of this, in the integrative discussion chapter.

The word clouds and networks as well as the distribution of particular topics over time show that the Holocaust is often referenced in discussions about far right and nationalist parties and politics, as can be seen in the cases of Germany and Spain. The word network created from German tweets also shows the close interconnection of references to the far-right populist party AfD to the term “Nazi,” which is usually used as a negative stigmatization. This demonstrates that AfD criticism as well as counter-speech is quite prevalent on German Twitter.

The findings also indicate that specific incidents and events trigger content related to the Holocaust. Those incidents and events can be related to specific anniversaries and commemorative events, as in the case of the Jedwabne pogrom in Poland, or to public cultural or political incidents that evoke relations to the Holocaust and the Nazi past. As demonstrated by the UK tweets, such incidents can create an unforeseen resonance online due to massive tweeting and retweeting related content. However, also political events that are unrelated to the history of the Holocaust such as elections (as in the case of Germany) can trigger significant responses that evoke the Holocaust on Twitter.

The Covid policy and restrictions also triggered the intensity of Holocaust and Nazi references on Twitter, as the Polish case demonstrates. The popularity of the term Mengele in all countries also indicates that. The reference to Josef Mengele who served as a medical doctor in Auschwitz and conducted experiments with prisoners and particularly with children, is a particularly prominent analogy within the online discourse about Covid that directly refers to the historical context of the Holocaust. This analogy can be found in tweets from several countries and is usually used for questioning and even suppressing information about Covid infections and/or the vaccine.

In most cases Holocaust memory is evoked as a reference, sometimes even analogy, to present events as well as in the context of discussions about national memory and historical narratives. In many cases Twitter users counter equation and comparisons that are seen as inadequate or distorting. Examples of this sort vary in both the way the subjects are equated, and to what they are equated. Equating Covid legislation to the Holocaust and politicians to Nazis was prevalent across all five countries, but there were also comparisons of what is happening with Israel, Afghanistan, refugees, and the LGBTQ community to the Holocaust as well. Other tweets use Holocaust analogies to attack public figures and political parties which they deem objectionable, with German and Spanish tweets comparing their respective far-right parties to Nazis frequently, while tweeters in other contexts compare public figures to Hitler, Goebbels, and Mengele.

Current events comparisons notwithstanding, our findings do not indicate any dominant discourses that are uniquely related to the Holocaust. During the period during which we collected our data, intended to offer a random snapshot of “three months of Holocaust memory on SM,” no outstanding debates or events related to the Holocaust or Holocaust memory took place. Despite this, references to the Holocaust abounded. This seems to indicate that the Holocaust and Nazism are a universal reference frame that do not depend on specific triggering topics and can be evoked virtually everywhere and anytime. While we hypothesized strong connections between particular topics (such as Israel, antisemitism, refugees etc.) and the Holocaust on SM, this did not seem to be the case. For example, we could not identify a significant number of tweets referring to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, although the distribution of tweets in England suggests that this topic had an impact on the controversy about antisemitism, the Labour party and Ken Loach. More often, the Holocaust is used as a political yardstick to measure, find wanting and denounce political opponents. Two exceptions to this rule were a single topic and a single country. The topic that seemed to have a specifically strong connection to Holocaust memory was the Covid pandemic and the antivaxx movement. The country in which tweets directly referenced Holocaust history was Poland, where the dispute between the Polish and Israeli governments over a new Polish restitution law was one of several controversies surrounding Holocaust memory.

In sum, we found that most Twitter communication about the Holocaust is political, refers to political controversies or to political events, rather than primarily using the platform for commemoration, education or for sharing historical information. This is also true for those tweets that do not primarily refer to present events but to history. This finding also corresponds with Twitter’s public perception as a platform for political discussion and dissemination. It also conforms to the findings of other studies that equating is specifically frequent in tweets referring to the Holocaust on the platform.

The analysis of the specific subsets of our data sample showed many similarities between the different countries, and also emphasized differences. In England and in Germany the historical and commemorative approach to the history of the Holocaust is combined with a meta-discourse about accepted and problematic forms of commemoration, in particular controversies about Holocaust distortion and denial. Spanish Twitter users on the other hand often refer to Nazis and the Holocaust in more superficial ways. Debates about denial and distortion play a minor role. The Polish discourse is more “historical,” although it is primarily framed by debates about Poland’s national historical narratives.



CHAPTER 5

INTEGRATIVE DISCUSSION

The discussion is written by:
Nurit Novis-Deutsch

with contributions by :
Tracy Adams,
Shmuel Lederman,
Arieh J. Kochavi

Integrative Discussion

“The Holocaust? The ultimate event, the ultimate mystery, never to be comprehended or transmitted. Only those who were there know what it was; the others will never know. It was easier for Auschwitz inmates to imagine themselves free than for free persons to imagine themselves in Auschwitz. What then is the answer? How is one to tell a tale that cannot be—but must be—told? How is one to protect the memory of the victims? How are we to oppose the killers’ hopes and their accomplices’ endeavours to kill the dead for the second time? What will happen when the last survivor is gone? I don’t know.” (Elie Wiesel. 1978. The trivializing of the Holocaust, New York Times, 75)

“Time has this soothing effect. The Holocaust is an event that my students find inscribed in history. They find it difficult to think of it as of a certain reality. It’s something that happened three generations ago and thus has disappeared somewhere, something they regard as obvious – or so it seems to me – something that was then, in those conditions, those times, but has changed now and has no chance of happening today, because how can ghettos be erected when there’s the Internet, right?” (Maciej, a Polish teacher, 2021)

In this report, we explored the ways in which Holocaust memory is shaped, enacted, and negotiated in five countries in Europe from 2019-2022 across three domains: the public-political, educational, and social media. The concluding section will offer an integration of these sets of findings. Whereas the report chapters offered multidisciplinary perspectives, the discussion proposes an interdisciplinary integration, as we draw the disciplinary strands together, acknowledging, in line with recent scholarship, that the relationship between memory sites is intertwined (Habermas 2022; Staab & Thiel 2022) and that academic dialogue across disciplines may lead to new insights on “wicked problems” that eschew simple solutions (Head & Alford 2015), such as those related to racism, intolerance and antisemitism.

Additionally, with scholars from seven countries, this project was characterized in the introduction as a combination of emic and etic perspectives. Here too, the discussion aims to generate a nuanced picture of the issues at hand by bringing both types of perspectives into shared focus.

The first part of the integrative discussion is structured around three clusters of research questions that were presented in the introduction. Recall that each section of the report offers its own comparison of the national cases within it; here, we focus on the cross-domain comparisons. The second part of the discussion shifts from the descriptive to the normative and offers recommendations organized by five categories of stakeholders: state-level policy makers, educational policy makers, NGOs, Holocaust education training institutions and social media moderators.

5.1. The presence and character of Holocaust memory in our study

We proceed to our first pair of research questions:

- To what extent is Holocaust memory present in public-political, educational and social media discourses on contemporary affairs in Europe?
- Under what circumstances does it surface in the countries we examined and what characterizes its expressions?

Our answer highlights a finding shared across domains and locations:

Overall, the memory of the Holocaust remains alive, but it is diversifying, and in some places is struggling for relevance. One of the common memory practices we found across domains is “relationing the Holocaust.”

We consider each part of this finding separately:

Overall, the memory of the Holocaust remains alive

Seventy-eight years after WWII, the memory of the Holocaust is far from sinking into oblivion, and this is true across all three domains of our study. Although this may seem obvious, it is worth noting in an age of information overload and rapid news cycles (Cushion 2022), since a fate of oblivion has certainly befallen many other important historical events, and the more complex a society is, the more limited its collective memory (Esposito 2008, 184).

While our study of the public-political discourse did not focus on the quantity of Holocaust-related references but rather on interpreting their content, we did note an increase in referencing the Holocaust in media and political circles between 2019, when we began documenting and 2022, when we completed our documentation, in some locations, such as in Hungary and Spain. Where such an increase was not apparent, Holocaust memory was still clearly present and easy to identify in newspapers, political speeches, and parliamentary debates, across the period we studied. In the social media domain, we identified 569,509 Holocaust-related tweets for the five countries we examined, over a period of three months (June–September 2021). In the educational arena, too, Holocaust memory is clearly playing an active role, as attested to by the ninety-five teachers’ reports about Educating about the Holocaust (EaH). Although our respondents were a group of devoted and often best-practice educators who may not represent Holocaust educators at large, it is still striking that all ninety-five of them attested to the high importance in which they hold educating about the Holocaust. Many also described the support for EaH as systemic in their locales. In the public-political domain, we identified hundreds of references to the Holocaust in newspapers, political speeches and parliamentary debates in four of the five countries (discussing the Holocaust was somewhat less common in Spain), indicating that Holocaust memory is far from sinking into oblivion.

Holocaust memory is diversifying and in some places struggling for relevance

The previous data can be deceiving when viewed out of context: While referencing the Holocaust spiked on commemoration days, the everyday discourse about it was mostly comparative, and at times competitive. In several countries, mainly Spain and Hungary, despite its presence, the Holocaust does not garner great attention or time in the public-political discourse and not much on Twitter either.¹ In Europe, recent traumas, tragedies, and even genocides vie for mnemonic attention, and the memory of the Holocaust is growing older by the decade. This is especially true for the younger generation. Nearly 80 years separate the Holocaust from students' and teachers' lives in the 2020's and we found signs that among students the Holocaust is not always perceived as relevant or interesting. Teachers are combatting indifference to the Holocaust, Holocaust fatigue, increasing ignorance, and antisemitic resistance: "Enough of those Jews," one teacher from Poland described the sentiment in her school. In this context, attaining relevance becomes the target, or as a teacher from England put it: "To find references to the students, if possible. [...] to be able to tie it in with their experiences, that would be the most important goal." It is, however, notable that some 80% of teachers reported that once exposed to the topic, most students positively engage with Holocaust memory.

A common memory practice across domains is "relationing the Holocaust"

During the period that we studied, much of the invocations of the Holocaust in the public-political discourse were in response to contemporary events, such as the rise of far-right parties. In Spain, for example, the increase in Holocaust-related discourse was related to the rise of VOX. Among teachers, making the Holocaust "relevant" to students involved bringing it closer to their own lives and times through lessons and discussions. On Twitter, colloquial uses of Nazi or Holocaust terminology abounded in discourses surrounding Covid vaccination and subsequent social re-ordering, especially in Germany and England, where terms such as "Mengele" and "ghettos" served as a shorthand to draw parallels between the Holocaust and Covid restrictions.

This form of remembering can be termed "relationing the Holocaust;" that is, remembering through making relevance, and making relevance through connection. There is a paradoxical element at work: relationing is a form of "co-presence," that locates contemporary Europeans in the same social universe as that of the victims (Kansteiner 2017), but at the same time, it often involves positioning the Holocaust as "the biggest," "the worst" or "the ultimate;" a yardstick that offers a different perspective on the present.

Several psychological needs are served by relationing the past:

1 We did find that in Spain the term "Holocaust" was more common than in other countries, but upon examination we discovered that the term has taken on a secondary meaning in Spanish of "tragedy" and is also used, remarkably, in the context of "The Spanish Holocaust," referring to the persecution and murder of enemies of Franco's dictatorship or Republicans in Nazi concentration camps.

First, analogy-making is a core cognitive ability that allows people to make sense of novel incoming information based on past experiences. Since understanding the relations between people in each situation is critical for drawing successful analogies, the ability to make “relational comparisons” forms a large part of human problem-solving ability. Analogies serve also to communicate one’s understanding of the present to others and are also implicated in higher-order cognitive abilities such as empathy, theory of mind, and comprehending metaphors. (Krawczyk 2012, p. 13).

Second, relationing serves the human needs for connection and relationships. The term “Relationing” connotes the argument of the psychoanalytic relational school (Aron 2013, Mitchell 2014) that reality is conceived through and of relationships. The compelling motivation to be “in relation” is part of what impels teachers, social media users and politicians to engage with the Holocaust, by holding it up close and personal and considering it in relation to themselves, and often to other phenomena that are meaningful to them. Such phenomena may be a contemporary event, a public figure or group, or a subjective experience such as feeling othered and excluded. This form of remembrance often involves holding up some familiar aspect of the Holocaust (e.g., ghettos, starvation, gas chambers or Mengele’s experiments) and using it to shed light on some aspect of contemporary life or on one’s personal experience.

Third, relationing is part of the process of meaning-making (Novis-Deutsch et al. 2021) and includes aspects of sense-making (incorporating multiple events into a web of meanings that makes sense of reality), purpose-making (drawing lessons about one’s goals in life involves locating the self in relation to key events) and significance-making (since significance is determined in relation to other occurrences).

In terms of existing concepts in memory studies, relationing relates to “connective memory practices” (Birkner and Donk 2020, 368), to “multidirectional memory” (Rothberg 2009, 2019), to memory practices that circulate and travel between contexts (Erl 2011, Rigney 2014) and to “memory appropriation” (Adams & Vinitzky-Seroussi 2022). All of these terms imply that memory is by necessity socially and culturally constructed and emerges in a dynamic process of dialogue and contestation that “renders both memories and groups hybrid, open-ended, and subject to renegotiation” (Rothberg 2014, 126). Another term that resonates with “relationing” is “historical analogy,” which also involve drawing analogies between past and present, calling upon the past to make sense of the present, as a kind of “lesson of history” (Edy 1999, Zerubavel 2003). Policymakers have been shown to strategically evoke past events to analyse current circumstances, legitimize, justify, and advocate specific policies or courses of action (e.g., Khong 1992; Noon 2004; Schuman & Rieger 1992) and politicians have been shown to evoke analogies that include strong emotional connotations, to advance their political goals (Blanchette & Dunbar 2001).

While the social and collective aspects of Holocaust relationing have often been emphasized in scholarship, we highlight the individual and personal aspects of relationing as well. We argue that due to its dual role of making sense and communicating it to others, relationing veers between intimacy (“the Holocaust for me is...”; “I connect to the Holocaust through...”) and the public sphere (“Take heed! This event/figure/party is akin to a Nazi leader/the Holocaust/the Nazi party”).

Our study indicates just how prevalent both types of relationing are across the different contexts that we explored: We found Holocaust-relationing in all domains and countries, and in service of many different agendas, from obvious ones such as combatting racism and xenophobia, to promoting animal rights, cautioning against abortions or warning of the perils of climate change.

Relationing was especially common on Twitter's social media platform. This may be due to social media's dynamic and associative nature that promotes divergent thinking, its affinity for the present or its brevity, which lends itself to shorthand rhetorical measures such as analogies, to transmit messages effectively. This reflects the findings of other studies: A study on antisemitism in Europe (Becker & Bolton 2022) identified the Russian attack on the Ukraine and the comparison of Holodomor to the Holocaust as the two most recent topics engendering comparisons on social media. Tweets referring to colonialism in the context of the Holocaust represented a form of relationing that was predominantly multidirectional, using one memory as a medium for another; in Germany and England, 55% of tweets on this topic were identified as multidirectional.

In the educational domain, 66% of the teachers reported comparing or relating the Holocaust in their lessons to other events, situations, and experience, making it one of the more common educational practices we recorded: "I don't focus on historic events, but make them think about the present times," says one Spanish teacher. Teachers made analogies between the Holocaust and a range of topics, from African refugee deportations to the treatment of Uyghur Muslims in China, starvation in Yemen, and bullied LGBT students in schools. The personal angle was important for the teachers themselves as well: While 57% of the teachers had no family legacy related to the Holocaust, many took ownership of EaH by relating the Holocaust to their own life experiences. This included drawing on their identities as members of minority religions or ethnicities, on their experiences of hardship with dyslexia, depression, or on their LGBTQ identity.

Holocaust relationing abounded in the public-political domain as well. For example, we found comparisons of euthanasia and abortion to the Holocaust in the Polish and Spanish right-wing discourse. In Hungary, a widespread practice among political speeches involved co-mentioning the Holocaust victims alongside those of communism. In England we found Holocaust relationing in comparing the situation of Jewish WWII refugees to that of current-day African and Syrian refugees. Co-mentioning in the English case was also about drawing parallels between antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Finally, a counter-narrative was identified too. Opposition to Holocaust comparisons emerged across domains, albeit to a lesser extent. This opposition included several rather different motivations and rationales. In the political public sphere in Hungary, for example, we noted in the speeches of the left-liberal opposition a conspicuous absence of comparisons and co-mentioning, which we related to their criticism of the practice of co-mentioning Nazism and communism by right wing politicians. In western Europe's England and Germany, objections to analogies between the Holocaust and Covid regulations and to other types of Holocaust comparisons appeared in editorials, in political speeches and in tweets. Some teachers opposed any kind of comparison as well. One German teacher said: "I generally believe such comparisons are wrong [...] You just cannot compare [the Holocaust]." Another

German teacher commented: “I find it quite horrible when one compares experiences of people today with experiences of people who have experienced the KZ [Nazi concentration camps]. I find that you can simply not compare it. With anything.”² We related this opposition to comparisons to a motivation to frame the Holocaust as unique (see Fogu et al 2016, Margalit & Mozkin 1996, Moses 2022). We conclude that there are different strategies of meaning-making; some involve connecting through affinity and others involve connecting through juxtaposition, but both are relational.

In contrast to normative terms used in discussing Holocaust memory such as “trivialization,” the term “Holocaust relationing” implies a non-judgmental stance towards the act of drawing comparisons in memory practices and in meaning making. In the social media section, we discussed why relating the Holocaust to other present or past events is often not only a legitimate practice but is an integral part of negotiating the relevance of history to the present. The fact that the UNESCO definition of Holocaust distortion includes not only “blaming,” “delegitimizing” or “smearing” the Holocaust but also “equating the impact of the Holocaust,” (UNESCO & UN 2022, 18) is problematic from this perspective. Additional terms such as “trivializing” or “banalizing”³ can also be problematic. We noted in the social media section that “moral equivalences,” can be distinguished from “procedural equivalences”, implying that not all “equivalences” are equivalent.

This raises an important question for future examination: What criteria might distinguish adequate comparisons, analogy-drawing and relationing from inadequate ones? Are comparing Covid restrictions to the Holocaust inadequate because the impacts and intentions are incomparable or are they adequate because both reflect extreme fear of annihilation? What about the tradition found in some parts of Germany, of comparing the Holocaust to the hardships that the German population suffered during WWII (“the bomb holocaust” in German cities)? Are they inadequate if motivated by a refusal to take responsibility for the Holocaust by means of whataboutism, or does the suffering of innocent individuals who wish to be acknowledged permit this sort of relationing? Such deliberations indicate the need for a well-articulated and nuanced “ethics of comparison,” which might include and intersect such criteria as intentions, mode of argumentation, sensibilities of concerned parties and context of expression in determining the moral worth of Holocaust comparisons.

2 In Germany the question of the legitimacy of “comparing the Holocaust” is subject to a lively educational debate. Some of the teachers we interviewed supported comparisons. One teacher said: “[The educational debate] is always about the fact that the Holocaust is such a unique crime against humanity. But I always say, when they keep on saying that you can’t compare it to anything, [that] if you compare it with the Holocaust, then you mock the victims of the Holocaust. I can’t understand it like that. Because if I’m not allowed to compare it at all, then I don’t need to talk about it anymore! If it was so unique then it won’t happen again.” This last quotation exemplifies the underlying question of Holocaust uniqueness in the debate about Holocaust comparisons.

3 “[Drawing] parallels between the Holocaust and the contemporary matters [...] in many cases can be viewed as a form of trivialization,” argue González-Aguilar and Makhortykh (2022, 1322) while Ascone et al. (2022) in their report on antisemitism in social media, consider social media antivaxxers who position themselves as victims by comparing the actions of the French government in combatting Covid to those of the Nazis, to be a form of trivialization of the Holocaust.

5.2. Differences In Holocaust Memory Between Groups

We move on to our second pair of research questions:

- How do the countries we studied differ from one another in terms of Holocaust memory?
- What categorization scheme best organizes the differences in attitudes towards Holocaust memory? (e.g., historical, political)

In response to the second pair of questions we came to the following conclusion:

The Holocaust is less present in the public-political discourse of some national contexts than in others, but in the education domain it serves as a relatively common denominator. Holocaust memory is different in pan-European and national contexts, and an especially distinguishing aspect of Holocaust memory relates to the political left-right identification of those remembering it, regardless of their nationality.

We consider these four comparative findings one by one:

The Holocaust is less present in the public-political discourse of some nations

We found that while the Holocaust is quite pervasive in the public-political discourse in Poland and Germany, its presence is felt less strongly in the political public spheres of Spain, Hungary, and England.

At one end of the spectrum, we find Poland, where invocation of the Holocaust is recurrent and intensive in politicians' speeches, parliamentary debates and media outlets. Next is Germany, where the Holocaust is present in various discussions on German national identity, moral obligations, antisemitism, relations with Israel and other themes. In England and Hungary, interim countries in terms of the prevalence of Holocaust discourse in the public sphere, the Holocaust is mostly invoked on commemoration days and in discussions about antisemitism. At the other end of the spectrum is Spain, where the Holocaust plays a marginal role compared to other historic episodes. When evoked in Spain, the Holocaust often refers to non-Jewish victims of the Nazis, including the Spanish Republicans deported to concentration camps in WWII. Note that this "ranking of importance" is not fully mirrored in the social media arena. We expound on that in the next section.

Part of this difference can be accounted for by the role that Holocaust memory plays in the national identity-building project of each country. In Germany it lies at the core of its national identity, in fact, some argue that it is the very core of modern German identity (see for example, Maier 1988; Olick & Levy 1997). For Hungary, Holocaust memory and the history of the Jews function more as a repressed aspect of their national identities. For Poland, it is related to a sense of having been falsely blamed for its role in the Holocaust and for Spain and England its role in national identity is more minor.

In the education domain, Holocaust memory is a common denominator

In contrast to the political public and social media spheres, education operates as a common denominator between countries: Not only is educating about the Holocaust a mandatory subject in all five countries we studied, but it goes beyond the teaching of its history and is expected to support value, moral and/or identity education in many of today's schools. It is not surprising that most German teachers noted its crucial role in national identity formation, but even in Spain, a country less engaged with the Holocaust, the social expectations attached to EaH are very high: it is often expected to serve as a panacea not only for Holocaust denial and extreme right attitudes, but also for all expressions of stereotypes, prejudices, and racism. The prominence of EaH in the educational domain could be related to its role in upholding pan-European values and norms, as will be discussed further on in this section, but it might also relate to a lack of time on most present-day school curriculums for value, moral, character, civic and religious education. In many public educational systems in today's neo-liberal age, this is cause for teachers' concern and in some places EaH has been filling this value-education void.

Although there was a consensus among the teacher interviewees about the importance of EaH, a wide variety of topics, methods, and goals are being employed. In the educational section of the report, we identified 12 major categories of topics taught, such as the history of the Holocaust, human rights and the Holocaust, and ethics after the Holocaust. There were 19 categories of EaH pedagogies, including project-based learning, source and multimedia analysis, simulation activities, meeting survivors, expressive arts and performance and class activism projects. The goals teachers set for EaH spanned 18 categories including "Clarify how dehumanization works," "Instil activism," "Connect emotionally to the horror of the Holocaust," "Make students bearers of testimony," "Create good citizens," "Combat prejudice and racism" and "Teach critical thinking." Furthermore, when describing their colleagues, the teachers reported an even wider array of EaH pedagogies and goals, because while many of their colleagues teach about the Holocaust in depth, others teach about it perfunctorily, avoid it or object to it, and those forms of teaching have pedagogies and goals of their own.

Holocaust memory differs on pan-European and national levels

Although our study focused on five countries, the voice of the European Union resonated throughout and indicated that Holocaust memory plays a different sort of role in specific national contexts and in broader European contexts⁴.

The EU considers the Holocaust to be a formative event in European history, and the basis for a shared value system of democratic principles, equality, and human rights, leading to an understanding of the importance of embracing difference. In both goals of the EU – the older goal of forging a pan-European identity based on shared history and culture, and the more recent goal of embracing multiculturalism and difference ("In Varietate Concordia"– "United in diversity"– is the EU's motto

4 A review of additional EU countries would be needed to reach this conclusion with certainty.

since 2000), Holocaust memory plays an important part. This can be seen in mainstreaming the fight against antisemitism across all policy areas,⁵ in the Council of Europe's establishment of Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2002 ("the moving spirit behind the introduction of a Day of Holocaust Remembrance⁶" by the UN in 2005), in its numerous programs for Holocaust commemoration and in its status as permanent international partner of the IHRA.⁷ We found reflections of this EU (and broader UN) perspective on Holocaust memory in all five countries, especially in formal commemorations and in the education domain, as noted in the country-level chapters.

Levy and Sznajder (2002) described the character of this memory as a "cosmopolitan Holocaust memory": A forward-looking way of remembering what transcends ethnic and national boundaries and lays the foundation for global human rights by linking moral categories of "good" and "bad" to a pan-European duty to improve the world. For some nations, identifying with this cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust serves as an entry-ticket to the European Union (Judt 2005). Indeed, most East- and Central-European countries who joined the EU, first or simultaneously joined the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), signalling an acceptance of the EU-promoted values of democracy, human rights consistency and social justice exemplified in the cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust. Table 1 demonstrates this.

Table 1: East and Central European countries' dates of acceptance to IHRA and EU

Country	Accepted for membership in the IHRA	Accepted for membership in the EU	Difference in years
Poland	1999	2004	5
Hungary	2002	2004	2
Czech Republic	2002	2004	2
Croatia	2005	2013	8
Estonia	2007	2004	-3
Latvia	2004	2004	0
Lithuania	2002	2004	2
Romania	2004	2007	3

In contrast to this, in national political contexts Holocaust memory is structured by politicians, and echoed or disputed in the media, in ways that fit the politicians' view of their nation's identity and needs. Thus it surfaces when contemporary issues that relate to "Holocaust lessons" arise. One example of the political use of Holocaust memory is in debating immigration policies. In some Eastern European countries we noted compartmentalization of the two forms of Holocaust memory: political forces focus on cosmopolitan Holocaust commemoration in January (as part of the "Holocaust memory as an entry-ticket to the EU" goal) and for the rest of the year repudiate

5 European Commission. 2020. "[Council Declaration on fighting Antisemitism.](#)"

6 Council of Europe. [Holocaust Remembrance Day.](#)

7 European Parliament. 2020. "[The European Union and Holocaust remembrance.](#)"

anyone who “smears” the good name of their country by implying its tainted past vis-à-vis the Holocaust. This corresponds with a well-established finding, that two parallel forms of Holocaust memory exist in Central and Eastern Europe: a local form of remembrance (Kovács 2016a) and a global form (one that is “expected” by Western countries).

As we shall suggest at the end of the chapter, the shared cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust may be shifting in the public imagination and may not represent the same values as it was founded upon. However, it is still important to distinguish between the pan-European and national country-level memories of the Holocaust.

A distinguishing aspect of Holocaust memory is the left-right identification

One of our research questions pertained to sites of affinity in Holocaust memory: Would most of the variance in Holocaust memory be between nations (and their differing histories and roles in the Holocaust) or between political positions? In other words, would the attitudes of two Polish politicians towards remembering the Holocaust resemble each other more than they would those of two Spanish politicians, or would a far right-wing Polish politician resemble a far right-wing Spanish politician in remembering the Holocaust more than they would a moderate left-wing politician of their own country?

We had initially hypothesized that the best categorizing scheme would be the national-historical roles that each country played in WWII (perpetrator, collaborator, victim, helper etc.). We expected to find that these roles would play the main part in shaping Holocaust memory. However, our findings indicate that the contemporary distinction between political left and political right (with its underlying difference of emphasizing values of conservation versus values of change; Schwartz et al. 2012) was more indicative of attitudes towards Holocaust memory than historical roles played in the Holocaust. People found remarkably similar ways of remembering the Holocaust according to political affiliation, regardless of their national affiliation. We discussed this finding at length in the concluding section of the public-political discourse data. In a nutshell, a rhetoric that eschewed “politics of shame” in favour of a heroic national memory of WWII was shared by Polish and Hungarian nationalists, by German AfD supporters who call for a focus on the heroic parts of German history and by Spanish VOX supporters who resist or deny that the Jews of Spain were victimized by Spaniards during WWII and earlier. Similarly, left-wing media platforms and politicians in each of these countries shared an emphasis on critiquing the dominant, heroic national narrative about the Holocaust and at least in Germany, the UK and Spain, also on framing the Holocaust as part of a larger discourse on colonialism, slavery and human rights. Although national context mattered, the similarities between the way the left in all countries remember the Holocaust were striking, especially when noting that these discussions were nearly non-existent among conservative or centre-line politicians.

We found a similar scheme among teachers’ narratives: in all five countries, teachers reported difficulty in working with students who identify with the far right. For example, a teacher from Hungary reported how right-wing students respond when she begins teaching about the Holocaust: “They start [...] ‘why do we need to learn about such things?’ and [argue] that we should focus a

lot more on [...] so-called national traditions or Hungarian history.” In Poland, opposition to EaH among students and teachers was related to national patriotism: Teachers noted the preoccupation of students and their families with the self-image of ethnic Poles in relation to the Holocaust. The narrow ethno-nationalist definition of Polish national identity, which excludes Jewish Poles from “our” identity and excludes Jewish-Polish victims from “our” memory of WWII, is an example of this. This theme surfaced to a lesser extent in the Hungarian and Spanish cases as well.

In the social media domain, discussions of the Holocaust were often conducted in the context of discussions about far right and nationalist parties and politics. We identified, for example, a strong link between the term “AfD” and “Nazi” in Germany, or between the terms “VOX” and “Holocaust” in Spain. We also found that tweeters in all countries compared political figures to Hitler, Goebbels, and Mengele. This indicates that political distinctions play a key role in Holocaust discourse on social media as well.

When considering the full picture, we find that political values and agendas have a powerful role in shaping Holocaust memory, but they should be seen as part of a broader category of identity conflicts, which are localized and nationalized by nature. Thus, while its memory serves political agendas, the Holocaust is a local political battleground for the power bestowed by collective memory and identity. The use of Holocaust memory on the political-national battlefield is part of the crucial goal of collective memory shaping. Nationality and politics are intertwined in this game, which is rarely about memory of the Holocaust victims per-se and relates, instead, to today’s citizens. In Poland, referencing the Holocaust is about Polish identity in the shadow of the Holocaust. In Hungary, it is about the identity of Hungarians after WWII and so on. Thus, we conclude that Holocaust memory is a tool for shaping collective national identities while also serving more specific political interests.

While history per se may not be the most important factor in how the Holocaust is being remembered, the shaping of Holocaust memory is strongly linked to geo-historical contexts. For example, Holocaust memory has a different “flavour” for countries that belonged to the Warsaw pact and to NATO countries; Nazism (and more broadly, fascism) and communism are considered comparable in several Eastern European countries but not in most of Western Europe. As historian Tony Judt put it: “Europe might be re-united but European memory remain[s] deeply asymmetrical” (2005, 825). Today’s “memory wars” (sometimes termed “*Historikerstreit 2.0*” in Germany, see Rothberg 2022) again set a distance between Western countries that have begun considering the Holocaust in conjunction with broader questions of West-European colonialism, and Eastern countries, where these discussions are uncommon.

5.3. Holocaust Memory Between Public-Political, Educational And Social Media Domains

This section relates to our final question:

- How does contemporary Holocaust memory differ across the three domains? To what extent do they interact with one another?

Having noted at the start of the discussion that these are not three fully distinct domains but rather three facets of the public sphere, each with unique characteristics, we suggest the following conclusion:

Holocaust memory in each domain reflects the goals and nature of that domain, while the correlations between domains are moderated by geo-political context. Specifically, in Western Europe, teachers' attitudes about the Holocaust correspond to those of their political establishment, less so in Eastern Europe.

We break this finding into two sections and describe each separately:

Holocaust memory in each domain reflects its goals and nature

The triggers to engaging in discussion and memory of the Holocaust differ across domains. Generally, a reactive memory culture often surfaces in national majority contexts in reaction to counter-memories by minority groups or individuals. While politicians were guided by their political and national agendas, which can explain the reactive nature of Holocaust memory among them, teachers were guided more by the desire to uphold a professional identity as educators, so they accorded more weight to research, studies and scholarship on the Holocaust than did most politicians or participants on social media.⁸

In public-political discourse taking place in the media (both traditional and social) and other political contexts, statements tended to be made close to an event that *required* respondents to address the Holocaust. Examples include commemorative events such as speeches made around January 27 (Holocaust Remembrance Day) and other anniversaries, planned events such as visits of Israeli dignitaries, and unplanned responses to antisemitic flare-ups. Another trigger to remembering the Holocaust were controversial statements by extremist right wing public figures. Paradoxically then, for those who feel that the gravest danger for Holocaust memory is its being forgotten, far-right movements actually increase the media traffic around the Holocaust.

In contrast, nearly all the teachers that we interviewed initiated teaching about the Holocaust, regardless of special events and Holocaust commemorations. In some places this was mandated by the educational curriculum and might be considered reactive, but when teachers went beyond

⁸ This is not uniformly the case: Many political figures in England did use various studies on the Holocaust or talk about memory initiatives in their public speeches or parliamentary debates and some teachers, especially in Spain, did not strongly rely on academic information in EaH.

the required minimum or shared that any serious teaching about the Holocaust was essentially up to them, they became proactive. For example, some described how they shorten other content units so that more time is left to teach in depth about the Holocaust; others described initiating Holocaust-memory related activism projects that go beyond their call of duty.

On social media, in four of the five countries we explored, most of the Tweets mentioning the Holocaust deal with current affairs and a minority deal with the historical Holocaust. We found that only 11% of Spanish and Hungarian tweets, 18% of the German ones and 30% of the English ones, related to the Holocaust historically. All the rest effectively used Holocaust-related terms to discuss the present, e.g., to argue that Covid restrictions are akin to Nazi policies, or to label far-right parties as Nazis. The one exception was Poland, where 54% of the Tweets were coded as referring to the historical Holocaust. However, both the cases of Poland and Germany demonstrate the amalgamation of the history-related discourse and present-day political affairs on social media: In Poland, historical references to the Holocaust predominantly concerned Poland's role in the Holocaust and issues of Polish identity, with a clear tendency to shift "the Holocaust" to outside of Poland, and in Germany, many of the "current events" tweets referred to debates about trivializing and distorting the Holocaust, thus indicating that history and memory culture still constitute a significant framework for dealing with the Holocaust in Germany.

Some of the differences we found between domains should be attributed to methodological differences in data-collection: Teachers were interviewed personally and had the opportunity to share their personal motivations, goals, and values. For the political discourse, media reports and twitter posts, we could only try to infer these from the data. And while the teachers were reassured of anonymity, Twitter posters and politicians are exposed to the public eye, which changes the nature of their discourse. Teachers volunteered to participate in our study, and it is likely that those with little or no interest in the Holocaust would not have become involved. Political and social media actors reflect a broader base of people, including many less invested in the subject of Holocaust memory. Taking these methodological differences into account, a more accurate way to summarize our finding about domain-related differences would be to state that in each country there is a group of committed educators whose engagement with the memory of the Holocaust differs significantly from that taking place in the public sphere and is not especially affected by it.

Teachers' attitudes about the Holocaust correspond to those of their political establishment in Western Europe, but less so in Eastern Europe

The teachers of our sample were consistently one or two steps to the left of the political centre in their country. This was true for all five countries such that if the majority in the country tended towards the right, the teachers tended towards the left, and if the majority was centre or left leaning, the teachers in our sample leaned further left still. While this could be an artifact of the sample, it could also reflect the fact that Holocaust educators tend to be more left-wing, or that teachers in general tend to be more left-wing than the general public.

Tracing the correspondence between government and educator attitudes to Holocaust memory indicated that nearly all teachers expressed a great deal of autonomic thought and action. We had

originally hypothesized that teachers would willingly assume the role of the “ruler’s mouthpiece;” but this turned out to be moderated by political context. In Germany, politicians and teachers seemed to be talking in harmony and reflecting the same messages of atonement and memory-work. England and Spain did not present especially dramatic differences between government and education either. In both cases, teachers expressed a strong dose of criticism of their governmental policies on other topics, and in others they made a point of distancing their teachings about the Holocaust from political agendas. One teacher from England said: “To me, the Holocaust is the Holocaust. It is not politics now. [...] I think education about the Holocaust is enough. And what is happening politically is almost a bit of a smokescreen, perhaps.”

A different story altogether was heard by the teachers we interviewed from Poland and Hungary. These respondents were clearly at odds with their governments’ policies. They opposed national policies about immigrants or refugees and would liked to have drawn from the Holocaust lessons about welcoming immigrants and cultivating diversity. Additionally, in Hungary, the teachers called for a deeper self-reflection about their country’s role in the Holocaust, as Hungary joined the Axis powers in 1940 and effectively collaborated with Nazi Germany. The situation was different in Poland, as the Polish government in-exile did not collaborate with Nazi Germany. However, Polish teachers did call for an introspection about and change of the *attitudes* of Poles towards Jews. To offer one illustration of this discrepancy in Poland, consider the case of the Polish Minister of Education and Science, Przemysław Czarnek, who in March 2021 disparaged Jan Grabowski and Barbara Engelking’s monumental book “Night without End” (2022) as an “anti-Polish, Nazi rag.”⁹ Meanwhile, in our interviews, quite a few of the Polish teachers had read Grabowski and Engelking’s book and found it to be informative and important. One teacher described how he shares insights from the book with his students, another thought it should be assigned reading, and a third teacher said: “So what if some MP attacks Jan Grabowski?”

This and other examples discussed in the education section indicate that in some way, Holocaust educators in Poland and Hungary do not reflect the voice of their regimes and often oppose them. We can relate this to the level of civil liberties in these countries. As noted in the introduction, a report by Freedom House 2022 shows a clear difference between the levels of political rights and civil liberties in Hungary (59) and Poland (81) in comparison to those of Spain (90), UK (93) and

9 Here are the Minister of Education’s words in Polish, followed by a translation into English: “Pojawiły się natomiast różnego rodzaju antypolskie szmatławce, jak to «Dalej jest noc» i inne tego typu rzeczy, które, uwaga, finansowane były z Narodowego Centrum Badań Naukowych [!] jeszcze w 2014-2015. Nie na te badania, [ale] na autentyczne, rzetelne badania musimy przeznaczać środki państwa polskiego, bo to się będzie przekładało na poziom nauczania nauczycieli historii [na uczelniach], a później dzieci w szkołach.” In English this translates as: “Instead, all sorts of anti-Polish rags have appeared, such as ‘Night Without End’ and other such things, which, mind you, were funded by the National Centre for Scientific Research (sic) back in 2014-2015. It is not for this research, [but] for authentic, reliable research that we need to allocate the resources of the Polish state, because this will translate into the level of teaching history teachers [at universities] and later children in schools.” This can be heard on [Polish Radio](#) (from 4 min. 40 sec. to 5 min. 10 sec): This statement was reproduced on various media, among them Leszczyński, Adam (March 24 2021). [Czarnek: „Dalej jest noc” to „antypolski szmatławiec”. My finansujemy badania polskiego bohaterstwa. *Oko.press*.](#)

Germany (94) (Smeltzer & Buyon 2022; Repucci & Slipowitz 2022). Other indices indicate similar patterns.¹⁰ The teachers' political orientation and opposition to their government's policies in Eastern Europe related to their EaH goals. Many of them emphasized goals of critical reasoning, nuanced perspective-taking, promoting human rights, equality, freedom, activism and tolerance. When their government's policy seems to them to fall short on these counts, they practice the lessons they have been teaching their students in EaH classes and stand up to injustice.

Recall that the teachers spoke not only of themselves but also of the broader group of colleagues and school leaders surrounding them. According to their descriptions, the broader group of colleagues and principals demonstrated a clear "chilling effect" of governmental policy on their teaching. Several of the Polish and Hungarian teachers that we interviewed reported that, while they themselves continue to teach about the Holocaust in ways that they see as historically accurate and compatible with their values, some of their colleagues are being more careful about what they teach and devote less time and effort to such a contested subject. Even the respondents themselves could at times be affected by this chilling effect.

In sum, the committed Holocaust educators in the Eastern European countries that we interviewed, function as guardians of a cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust. Meanwhile, some politicians and social media activists distance themselves from this cosmopolitan Holocaust memory. As a corollary, the more politicians use and manipulate Holocaust memory, the larger the gap between the teachers and the politicians in that country, in terms of how they remember and narrate the Holocaust.

Finally, in Western Europe, we find an interesting convergence between the educational and public-political domains regarding criticisms of systematic or institutional flaws in social and political structures that enabled the Holocaust: both the educational and public-political discourse tend to unite in turning away from such topics. While academics have for some decades been exploring the connections between the Holocaust and colonialism and systemic racism (e.g., Moses 2022; Rothberg 2022) as well as bureaucratic evils sanctioned by power groups, governments, teachers, politicians, and media outlets in our study rarely discuss such issues (An exception we found is Germany, where these topics received attention in cultural and some media venues). In most of the case studies in Western Europe that we explored, teachers emphasize the individual rather than call for social awareness and activism. Either the psychological perspective has overpowered the sociological one in school pedagogy or educators do not become activists until a certain threshold of withholding freedom is crossed. Arguably, at the state level, Holocaust memory has not been doing much for promoting systemic human rights protection. Rather, remembering the Holocaust seems to be associated with critiques of individual prejudice and antisemitism, and with commemorating

10 According to The Human Freedom Index 2022 (co-published by the Cato Institute, the Fraser Institute, and the Liberales Institut at the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom) national Human Freedom Scores were as follows: Hungary 7.73; Poland 7.96; Spain 8.56; Germany 8.73; UK 8.75; According to the Democracy Index 2021, the scores are: Hungary 6.5; Poland 6.8; Spain 7.94; UK 8.1; Germany 8.67. As can be seen, despite minor differences, the order remains very similar.

the victims to ensure that the Holocaust is not forgotten. This may be related to the conservative agendas of the people and institutions in leadership positions. It seems easier to point out extremism than to uncover “the banality of evil,” and it is a huge challenge to socialize students to society and at the same time critique that society, but, as we shall suggest in the recommendation section, this is exactly what is required for EaH to be effective.

5.4. Study Limitations and Venues for Future Research

Although this study purposefully selected five countries with different historical trajectories during the Holocaust and in its aftermath, these countries by no means make up the full picture of Holocaust memory in Europe. Additional countries, such as France, Italy, Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Greece, Holland, Denmark, and Sweden could offer additional missing pieces of the European puzzle since each of these, and other countries, played a different role in the Holocaust and in WWII. One way to expand this study and validate some of its findings in the future would be to explore patterns of Holocaust memory in some of these additional countries.

Another aspect that was not covered in this study is the interaction between travelling Holocaust memory (Erlil 2011) and the kinds of bounded mnemonic communities¹¹ we explored in this study. A case in point is the way American Holocaust memory crosses the Atlantic and shapes Holocaust memory in Europe, for example, through the translated educational materials prepared by the Holocaust Washington museum, or through American films. Israel too is shaping Holocaust memory, for example, through Yad Vashem teacher training programs. Both affect the ways that Europeans see the Jewish community and commemorate the Holocaust, but these cross-cultural sources were not explored in this study, and await future studies (see e.g., Dorr et al. 2019).

Our methodology involved in-depth exploration of relatively small data sets. While we believe that this is a necessary first step for generating insights and detailed understanding of our complex research questions, the next step should be to apply a narrower and more focused analytic framework to broader datasets. For example, the teacher interview findings could be transposed into survey questions that can be widely distributed to allow for generalization. In exploring social media, a multiple time-point design can allow for tracing the characteristics we identified over time. And, with Twitter’s platform now facing an uncertain future following its change of ownership,¹² future research would be well-advised to apply these research questions to additional social media

11 “Bounded mnemonic communities” is a term that indicates that broader social structures, such as families, organizations, ethnic groups and nations, “all engage in practices of commemoration that serve to define a common identity and delineate the boundaries of a specific social institution” (Coraiola et al. 2018). Bounded mnemonic communities often have specific rituals or practices associated with the transmission and preservation of their shared memories, and these memories may be an important part of the group’s identity, sense of community, and collective meanings (Zerubavel 2003).

12 In October 2022, Elon Musk completed the acquisition of Twitter. Twitter’s early weeks under its new owner have been characterized by firings and resignations of executives, reforms and changes to company policies, indicating an uncertain future for this social media platform, see: Darrell M. West, “[The future of Twitter: Four scenarios](#),” Brookings website, November 22, 2022.

platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and Telegram. In future studies we recommend focusing research efforts on two kinds of social media venues: First, ones that tend to promote extremism by lacking targeted content moderation or community guidelines related to the Holocaust (e.g., Telegram. UNESCO's recent 2022 study found that 49% of all relevant material on this platform featured Holocaust denial or distortion¹³) or dark web venues where various Holocaust denial and conspiracy theories are propagated (Topor 2022). Second, ones that reflect mainstream, or "ordinary" people's opinions about the Holocaust, such as Facebook and Tik Tok. The combination of the two could highlight the differences between these various Holocaust memory tracks on social media.

Finally, future studies could look at additional regions of memory. These could include memory sites such as museums and monuments, touristic memory, books, podcasts, movies, advertisements, song clips, and other forms of cultural production, religious institutions, youth movements and other organizations that negotiate memory for their members, school students, influencers and celebrities whose impact far exceeds their levels of historical expertise, Holocaust memory scholars and experts, and the public at large.

It is also recommended to search for Holocaust memory references in places that are not commemorative and in discourses where the Holocaust is not the subject. Much could be discerned from analysing loci where Holocaust memory manages to create an impact without being the focus. For example, Holocaust references can be identified and analysed in ordinary, everyday speeches of politicians, to assess its full cultural impact. (See Adams 2022 for an example). In sum, a complete review of Holocaust memory in Europe today would span formally structured settings of law and legislation all the way to inadvertent expressions of Holocaust memory in daily life.

Finally, we note that Holocaust comparisons can serve different goals, some of them (e.g., promoting relevance, connecting) more worthy than others (e.g., competitive victimhood, belittling the Holocaust). An applied "ethics of comparisons" could help teachers, politicians, social media moderators and other policy makers navigate such comparisons (See Margalit 2009 for a philosophical treatment of the topic).

5.5. Conclusion

Nearly eighty years after it ended, the ripple effects of the Holocaust are formidable. Today we are witnessing an ironic situation, wherein, instead of forming a backbone of solidarity and tolerance for Europe by rejecting fascist and intolerant voices in society and coming together around shared humanistic values, the memory of the Holocaust is gradually morphing into a reflection of the divisiveness and othering taking place at the start of the 21st century, as it becomes a game-piece on the political board. As the conviction took hold among the public that the Holocaust was an unrivalled historical catastrophe, its political currency value rose. Consequently, parties on both

13 ["UNESCO social media study exposes virulent Holocaust denial and distortion."](#) UNESCO website, July 13, 2022.

sides of the political map began appropriating its memory for their own ends. Meanwhile, the insistence that nothing can ever compare to the Holocaust led to a backlash in the form of blaming the victims for manipulating Holocaust memory for their own gain, becoming another source for today's surge of antisemitic sentiment. In 2002 Levy and Sznajder explained:

What has pushed the Holocaust to such prominence in public thinking relates to the need for a moral touchstone in an age of uncertainty and the absence of master ideological narratives. It has become a moral certainty that now stretches across national borders and unites Europe and other parts of the world (p. 93).

In the social media section of the report, we included in this “moral remembrance” an element of self-criticism towards the past that expresses a duty to remember, while emphasizing “justice for victims” and tying Holocaust memory to human rights. However, somewhat ironically, today this memory seems to figure in vehement political clashes and is used in ways that repudiate its moral intentions.

While our study points to uses and misuses of the memory of the Holocaust, it also demonstrates its associative power, and with this we return full circle to our first finding, that the memory of the Holocaust is alive, if struggling in places. Relationing the Holocaust, the common mnemonic practice that we identified across domains, reflects the way the Holocaust has taken hold of public imagination and ensures that it remains relevant in the 21st century. In politics, culture, education, and social media, referencing the Holocaust is commonplace. When some people argue that laws that limit immigration and refugees are “like the Holocaust” or when others write that Covid vaccines are like “Mengele’s experimentation”, it is because their collective network of associations is triggered by the perceived horror of these events and relates it to the event that is, to them, the ultimate evil: The Holocaust. Such cognitive schemata are triggered by concepts prevalent in pop culture and in Holocaust iconography (Ebbrecht 2010) such as concentration and death camps, murder by gas, striped prisoner uniforms, the yellow stars of David, the number six million, etc. The common denominator to all these concepts seems to be their uniquely memorable aspects, in that they fly in the face of our core beliefs about morality and humanity, raising a sense of horror. Thus, relationing is a force for remembering and engaging (see Kansteiner 2017, for an elaboration of this argument in the digital context). However, two challenges must be noted: First, as the Holocaust becomes a relational yardstick for all evil and horror, it may lose its own memory-space in becoming a point of reference for other tragedies. Second, present-day threats to what is perceived as the “true and good order” of things (e.g., climate change, a pandemic, a significant increase of immigration and refugees and wars) have associatively led to a shift in Holocaust memory that relates it to threat, unsettlement, and fear, rather than to moral imperatives for social activism and human rights. If it must instil fear, let the “Holocaust schema” trigger a different set of warnings, ones that stem from the insights that humanity gained from that dark time: That democracy is both valuable and fragile; that we must vigilantly safeguard it and the rights of the minorities it protects; that racism blinds us to our shared humanity; that ethnocentric nationalism poses a danger to the wellbeing of all. These warnings are as relevant to humanity today as they were in 1933 and this time, we should heed them on time.

While Holocaust memory has always been implicated in the fear of its reoccurrence, we should be mindful that pedagogies of fear (Kizel 2015) can silence people and paralyze their action. Rather than present the Holocaust as so unique that it can only lead to awe and silence, we hope that Holocaust memory in Europe's future will lead to engagement through conversation and dialogue and will become a source of growth, activism and outreach towards a better future for all.

5.6. Recommendations

In this part of our report, we shift from the descriptive to the prescriptive. Recommendations are contingent on data interpretation, which invariably involves attitudes and values about what is good and desirable. While our findings can be used to inform policies in various ways, the recommendations we offer are based upon the following normative principles:

- 1 Intentional distortion of Holocaust memory for purposes of personal, collective or political gain should be avoided.
- 2 Holocaust memory should primarily serve goals of humanistic growth and flourishing.
- 3 Holocaust memory should remind us of the value and fragility of democracy, the importance of human rights and accepting difference and the power of opposing injustice.
- 4 Holocaust education should be based on factually accurate and academically grounded historiography, as much as possible.
- 5 Holocaust education should entail practicing national self-criticism, including a self-critical examination of the role of antisemitism in nation-building. Educational philosopher Lamm (2000) argued that the only viable way to combat cultural chauvinism is by helping students examine their own culture critically. In the context of the Holocaust, national self-reflection and criticism involves examining the roles that their nation and its members played in the Holocaust and reflecting upon them.

The following recommendations are organized according to five categories of stakeholders:¹⁴

Recommendations for State-Level Policy Makers

We suggest that states –

- Consider whether and how the Holocaust is remembered today in their respective countries and what effects these official contemporary forms of remembrance have on the attitudes of their citizens towards the Holocaust, minorities and democracy. Some forms of remembrance seem to be more closely aligned with a climate of acceptance and tolerance than others, specifically, forms of memory that relate to learning to accept otherness rather than to focusing on the nation's victimhood or pride are more likely to promote acceptance and tolerance.

¹⁴ We acknowledge the contributions of previous research reports to these recommendations, including those offered by the IHRA, the FRA, UNESCO, and the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education.

- Conduct an evaluation of existing EaH programs in collaboration with experts designing and implementing similar projects, if such an evaluation has not been executed in the recent past.
- Consider translating and disseminating this report in the relevant countries, and circulating its recommendations among international organizations, political entities, education policy makers and other educational agents, and activists of non-governmental organizations.

Recommendations for Educational Policy Makers

We recommend that educational policy makers –

- Evaluate existing curricula being used in public schools that touch upon EaH with a view to determine whether they present an age-appropriate and historically accurate history of the Holocaust and of antisemitism, overall and in the context of their country.
- Use experts in EaH to develop and/or implement curricula when making decisions about what and how to teach about the Holocaust.
- Treat EaH as a whole-school interdisciplinary endeavour. EaH should be approached through different subjects of social and human sciences: in History, contextualize the historical facts; in Philosophy, work on ethical and political reflection; in Language Arts and Literature, relate to first-hand narratives of the Holocaust, in Civics, discuss the role of democracy, rights and activism in preventing future genocides, and in Arts, engage on a personal and creative level with Holocaust memory. To transform the curriculum from multi-disciplinary to inter-disciplinary, “integration units” that promote reflection and encourage students to integrate subjects through shared themes, should be added to the curriculum (Novis-Deutsch et al. in press).
- Bear in mind the enormous change in students’ sources of information on the Holocaust due to the digital era and pay attention to what they learn from digital and social media.
- Examine to what extent institutions training future teachers provide sufficient knowledge of the history of the Holocaust and pedagogical training for EaH in a way that can empower teachers and support their aim of preparing students for life in the 21st century.
- Empower the wider community of educators in the field of EaH by encouraging cross-cutting collaborations between nations, NGOs, museums and memorial sites in relation to the Holocaust and its memory. Our study demonstrates the powerful impact that such collaboration can have, beyond the strength of any single organization or initiative.
- Encourage critical national self-reflection and teach students how to stand up to injustice through activism and opposition to tyranny, if and when they may witness it in their lives.
- One of the findings of this study related to the importance of internal freedom in determining the roles people played in the Holocaust, and also among teachers today in places where educational freedom is limited. We suggest proactively promoting teachers’ and students’ internal “freedom quotients” (Cave 2015) by teaching them how to strengthen their “free will muscles.” This can be done by learning to generate options, to choose between them in a principled manner and to carry out these choices as actions.
- Provide input to authors, editors and publishers who publish textbooks in relation to their historiography and pedagogy of teaching about the Holocaust.

Recommendations for Non-Governmental Organizations

We suggest that NGOs –

- Facilitate further programs and projects targeting wider public circles in reference to Holocaust memory and counteracting racism and prejudice.
- Establish an education incubator that will focus on creating a supportive and productive environment for the development of international initiatives in the areas of pedagogy, education and technology, which address prejudice and racism, including the phenomenon of global antisemitism. Such an initiative could nurture innovative and creative projects that deal with racism, prejudice and antisemitism in different countries; identify and attract talented and resourceful people and provide them with the supportive environment and necessary professional tools to turn their ideas into reality; initiate and lead think-tanks to address ethnocentric, antisemitic and intolerant trends and work in cooperation with global organizations active in the field to promote pluralism and acceptance.
- Develop public events or intensify existing ones that, with the help of social media, can influence the public sphere to actively and rapidly counteract racism of all kinds including antisemitism and Holocaust denial.

Recommendations for Institutions of Pre-Service and In-Service EaH Training:

We recommend that the institutions –

- Provide future and current state representatives, educators and trainers with up-to-date insights and research-based historiography of the Holocaust with the intention of diminishing existing discrepancies between academia, public policies and schools.
- Be encouraged to train Holocaust educators to respond to the challenge of Holocaust memory relevance. Although EaH should always start with the historical past, it should also include discussions of new forms of discrimination, racism, antisemitism and fascism, and teach how to promote and protect democracy and human rights, to make Holocaust memory relevant for our times.
- Teachers and teachers-in-training should be offered a range of new pedagogies and digital tools in EaH that focus on students' reflexivity, critical thinking, and social awareness. A supportive environment that compensates teachers who want to promote such projects for their time, offers them resources and supports their autonomy – can help more teachers take ownership and become proactive in EaH.

Recommendations for Social Media Moderators

We recommended that social media moderators and policymakers –

- Focus on the tactics that enable a wider audience to access information about the history of the Holocaust and the negative effects of antisemitism, racism, prejudice and intolerance on society.
- Approach websites and social platforms to encourage online petitions and campaigns against prejudice of all sorts including antisemitism and Holocaust distortions or denial.

- Cooperate with civil society to help promote public events relating to Holocaust remembrance and challenge official, distorted historical narratives of the Holocaust when needed.
- Develop affinity spaces effectively. Affinity spaces are locations where groups of people are drawn together because of a shared, strong interest or engagement in a common activity (Gee 2005). Social media offers this sort of affinity space and connectivity for people interested in the history of the Holocaust and in activities for its preservation. This could be a useful space to promote such engagement. A focus of Holocaust memory organizations in social media should be less on fighting Holocaust denial or distortion and more on promoting affinity spaces. This recommendation aligns with the current practices of Facebook and TikTok, that redirect users who make antisemitic comments to the “About Holocaust.org” site. Several studies (Ozalp 2021; UNESCO 2022) support the efficacy of this practice.

To conclude our recommendations, we note that remembering the historical Holocaust is best done through educational channels in synergy with political and public administration will, policy makers, self-governmental and religious leaders’ effort. Policy makers debating how to best use funds to encourage a memory of the Holocaust should consider the values and goals reflected in different memory spaces as described in the findings.



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The Researchers of This Project

(in alphabetical order)

Tracy Adams is a postdoc researcher at the Weiss-Livnat International Center for Holocaust Research and Education, University of Haifa, and a research affiliate at the Department of Sociology at Yale University. Her research interests include the intersection of memory, conflict, culture, and politics, and her research has appeared in journals including the *British Journal of Sociology* and *Memory Studies*. She is currently working on a book manuscript entitled *Memory as Currency*.



Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, professor of Culture and Religion Studies, teaches at the Institute of European Studies of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. She has published, among others: *Islands of Memory: The Landscape of the (Non)Memory of the Holocaust in Polish Education from 1989 to 2015* (2020), *Me Us Them: Ethnic Prejudices Among Youth* and *Alternative Methods of Education. The Case of Poland* (2003).



Misha Brenner has a B.A. in Psychology from the University of Maryland and is currently enrolled in a M.A. program in Political Science at Hebrew University. His research interest is in political psychology, specifically around religion, social media, and support for democratic norms. He also works as a digital campaign manager for Spetz Tech.



Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Communication & Journalism and at the European Forum of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He has published extensively on the mediation of Holocaust memory in visual culture, in particular in social media and digital media environments. He is a consortium member of the EU-funded research projects “Visual History of the Holocaust. Rethinking Curation in the Digital Age” (2019–2023) and “MEMORISE: Virtualisation and Multimodal Exploration of Heritage on Nazi Persecution” (2022–2025).



Anikó Félix is a Sociologist who received her PhD in Sociology from Eötvös Lóránd Science University, Budapest, Hungary. Her main fields of expertise are the contemporary far right movements with a focus on gender aspects, far right radicalization and antisemitism. Dr. Félix has worked for political think-tanks as a political analyst and led several education and public awareness projects of different NGOs. She is currently cooperating with international organizations such as the World Jewish Congress and the European Union on several projects.



Piotr Forecki is an associate professor at the Faculty of Political Science and Journalism at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. His research interests include collective memory of the Holocaust

and Holocaust distortion, antisemitism and anti-Jewish violence before and after World War II, the question of Polish complicity in the Holocaust and antisemitic rhetoric in public discourse.



Maximilian Hauer studied Philosophy and Sociology in Leipzig and Vienna and holds an MA from Leipzig University, Germany where he is currently a PhD. candidate. In his dissertation, he works on the concept of alienation in German Idealism. His sociological research interests include political ideologies of inequality, nationalism and gender relations. Recent publications include *Seuchenjahre. Orientierungsversuche im Ausnahmezustand* (Vienna 2023) and various articles published in academic journals.



Wulf Kansteiner is Professor of Memory Studies and Historical Theory at Aarhus University in Denmark. His work addresses four overarching themes: the methods and theories of memory studies; the role of visual media -- TV, film, digital culture -- in the formation of cultural memory; post-narrativist historical theory; and Holocaust and genocide history, memory and historiography. Kansteiner is co-founder and co-editor of the Sage-journal *Memory Studies* and President-elect of the Memory Studies Association (MSA).



Arieh J. Kochavi is professor of modern history at the University of Haifa, Israel. He is the founder and head of the Weiss-Livnat International Center for Holocaust Research and Education, and founder and Chair of the editorial board of The Journal of Holocaust Research. Among his books are *Prelude to Nuremberg: Allied War Crimes Policy and the Question of Punishment* (1998); *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948* (2001); and *Confronting Captivity: Britain, the United States, and their POWs in Nazi Germany* (2005).



Shmuel Lederman is a research fellow at the Weiss-Livnat Center for Holocaust Research and Education at the University of Haifa and teaches at the University of Haifa and at the Open University of Israel. He also serves as the Assistant Editor of the journal *History & Memory*. His research interests include political theory, genocide studies, and the Israeli-Arab conflict.



Adam Musiał is an independent educator with 22 years of secondary-school teaching experience. He has taught about the Holocaust to secondary-school and university students, as well as teachers, from Poland and abroad, and collaborated educationally with numerous Polish and foreign institutions.



Nurit Novis-Deutsch is a lecturer at the Department of Learning and Instructional Sciences at the University of Haifa in Israel. She is a scholar of social cognition and moral development in educational settings. Her research interests include pluralism and pluralistic reasoning; educating about the Holocaust; interdisciplinary education and religious meaning-making. Her studies have been published in a variety of international journals and books in the fields of psychology, education and religion.



Marta Simó is a researcher and associate lecturer in Sociology and Intercultural Education at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and Universitat de Barcelona. She is currently working on several international and national projects about intercultural dialogue, combatting discrimination, and memory. She also is a consultant of Holocaust Education and Human Rights Education for Governmental Organizations.



Anat Weiner is currently the director of the Weiss-Livnat International Center for Holocaust research and education and of the MA Program in Holocaust Studies. Previously, she was the editorial manager of the Journal of Holocaust Research and of Dapim- Studies on the Holocaust. Anat is a graduate of the Weiss-Livnat International MA program in Holocaust studies at the University of Haifa.

About "Sites of Tension"

Holocaust memory in Europe is shifting and diversifying, often in conflicting ways. This report is the culmination of a comparative and multidisciplinary study aimed at exploring these contemporary shifts in Holocaust memory in five European countries that played very different roles during the Holocaust, and whose post-WWII histories differed too: Poland, Hungary, Germany, England and Spain.

The study took place from 2019-2022 and offers a snapshot of Holocaust memory at the start of the 21st century. In addition to the rise of far-right political parties, antisemitic incidents and crises around immigration and refugees, this period was also overshadowed by the Covid pandemic and its ensuing economic instability.

Our central guiding question was: How do experiences of the present relate to the memory of the Holocaust? Do they supersede it, leading to the gradual fading from memory of the mass-murder that shook the twentieth century? Do they reshape it,

shedding new light on its lessons? Is the meaning assigned to present-day events shaped by its metaphors and symbols, or perhaps the present and the past engage in multidirectional dialogue over diverse memory platforms?

To explore this question and other questions about the extent to which Holocaust memory is present in European public discourses, the circumstances in which it surfaces, and the differences in its expressions in the countries we examined, we focused on three complementary domains that

serve as memory sites: the public-political, Holocaust education and social media. We used a between/within analysis matrix of the countries and the domains, to understand how Holocaust memory is expressed in these countries.

We found that while the memory of the Holocaust remains alive, in some places it is struggling for relevance. A common memory practice that surfaced across domains was "relating the Holocaust," a variant of multidirectional memory. We also found that a distinguishing aspect of Holocaust memory relates to the political left-right identification of subgroups within countries. There were also interactions between domains and countries, for example, in the countries we explored in Western Europe, teachers' attitudes about the Holocaust corresponded to those of their political establishment, but this was not the case in Central and Eastern Europe.

This report is intended for Holocaust and memory scholars, educators, commemorators, policymakers, journalists and anyone interested in deciphering the complex intersections of past and present. The report culminates with a series of recommendations for various policymakers, NGOs, educational organizations and social media moderators.

