IHRS The Institute for Holocaust Research in Sweden

Holocaust Exhibitions and Memory Culture

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Karin Kvist Geverts (ed.)

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Content

Introduction

Karin Kvist Geverts

This edited volume is the second in the series of Conference Proceedings by the Institute for Holocaust Research in Sweden (IHRS). The IHRS was founded in 2021 by Joel and Ulrika Citron, children of Holocaust survivors who came to Sweden after the war, with the aim to initiate and conduct research on all aspects concerning the Holocaust and to spread new research to a wider audience. The volume contains papers and poster presentations from the annual conference which IHRS arranged in November of 2024 in collaboration with The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies (HL-senteret), in Oslo, Norway. The theme of the conference was *Holocaust Exhibitions and Memory Culture*.

Scandinavia's first Holocaust memorial museum, the HL-senteret, opened its main exhibition in 2006. In June 2023, The Swedish Holocaust Museum opened in Stockholm. The year after, the Dutch National Holocaust Museum opened to the public in Amsterdam and HL-senteret began its work towards re-creating a new permanent exhibition. 2025 commemorates 80 years since the Holocaust ended, and while there has never been so many Holocaust Museums in the world as today, there are hardly any survivors left to bear witness. The IHRA International Memorial Museums Charter reminds us that memorial museums are responsible for protecting the dignity of the victims from all forms of exploitation and to ensure, beyond conventional history lessons, and that the interpretation of political events inspires critical, independent thinking about the past. But how can this be done? How can we tell the story of the Holocaust today? These and other questions were at the center of the conference.

The programme contained one keynote, four paper sessions and a round table. It also included poster presentations where museum professionals and authors presented their work. The introduction was held by the hosts of the conference, Director of HL-senteret, Professor Jan Heiret together with Director of IHRS, Associate Professor Karin Kvist Geverts. The keynote lecture was held by Professor Emile G. L. Schrijver, General Director of the Jewish Cultural Quarter in

Amsterdam. His lecture was called "Developing and opening Amsterdam's National Holocaust Museum in a politicised era: curatorial challenges and critical choices". Professor Schrijver urged the importance of nuancing the story and tell it from different perspectives using objects, for instance buttons to create an installation about the extermination camp Sobibor. The last thing that people touched was a button before they got undressed, so they asked the designers to create an installation of the buttons. He also stressed the importance of being accurate and not to be afraid of public debate; if you develop a Holocaust Museum you will get in the line of fire. He makes sure he deals with the press and let his curators and historians deal with the content. He wants the museum to have agency and therefore train the staff to deal with difficult questions.

The first session focused on the theme of exhibitions chaired Dr. Carl Emil Vogt, (HL-senteret), and included papers by Dr. Steven Luckert (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), *Curating Holocaust Exhibitions in the 21st Century*, Dr. Britta Z Geschwind (Swedish Holocaust Museum), *A Swedish Holocaust Museum; why here, why now?* and Dr. Ingvild Hagen Kjørholt (NTNU), *Texts and contexts of Holocaust exhibitions*. Dr Luckert's paper is included in this volume.

The second session focused on the theme of education chaired by educational leader Elise Grimsrud Christensen, (HL-senteret) and included a co-authored paper by Dr. Fredrik Stenhjem Hagen, Professor Claudia Lenz, Dr. Vibeke Banik and Dr. Anders Kjøstvedt (MF Vitenskapelig høyskole, Universitetet i Sørøst-Norge, Høgskulen på Vestlandet, Oslo Metropolitan University), *Holocaust education after October 7th* and a paper by Dr. Silvia Goldbaum Tarabini (Danish National Archives), *"When the calendar showed 27 February 1944, I perished. I was only 60 years old." Education about the Holocaust. A Danish example of worst practices*. Both papers are included in this volume.

The third session focused on narratives and experiences and was chaired by Dr. Anette Homlong Storeide (HL-Senteret) and included papers by Dr. Susanne Barth (Södertörn University), *Victims Ignored? A Case Study on the global Absence of public Memory Culture on Nazi Forced Labour Camps for Jews in Silesia and individual Initiatives to commemorate them* and a co-authored paper by Dr. Ingeborg Hjorth and Dr. Nina Helene Skogli (both Falstad Centre), *Striking the Balance: Approaches to Bridging Historical Narratives and Contemporary Relevance in Memorial Museum Exhibitions*. Dr. Barth´s paper is included in this volume.

The fourth session focused on the theme perspectives and representation and was chaired by Dr. Karin Kvist Geverts (IHRS) and included three papers by Dr.

Karianne Hansen (Arkivet), *Beyond "Planet Auschwitz": Shifting spatial perspectives on the Holocaust in Norway*, Professor Joanna Michlic (Lund University), *The Difficult Past in the Life of Child Holocaust Survivors* and Dr. Jon Reitan (NTNU), *The Sea, the Ships, and Spaces. Exploring Maritime Holocaust Landscapes*. All three papers are included in this volume.

As a way to include museum professionals and others who have worked on exhibiting, collecting and documenting the Holocaust, the conference also included four poster presentations. Curators Yael Fried and Elin Thomasson (Swedish Holocaust Museum), presented their work on *Collecting for the new Swedish Holocaust museum*. Author Pia-Kristina Garde presented her life-long work on documenting survivors in the poster *How do you include them – the other survivors?* Architect Joanna Zawieja, Dr. Rebecka Katz Thor and Deputy Director Dr. Niclas Järvklo (all from the Swedish Holocaust Museum), presented *A Permanent Site for the Swedish Holocaust Museum*. Archivist Dr. Riccarda Henkel (Landesarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt), presented their digital educational material *From the Archives into the Classrooms. The educational programme of the State Archive of Saxony-Anhalt*. All but the poster on a permanent site is included in this volume.

Finally, the conference ended with a round table on *Challenges and possibilities for Exhibiting the Holocaust today* chaired by Professor Jan Heiret (HL-Senteret). The panel included Dr. Steven Luckert (USHMM, USA), Professor Emile Schrijver (National Holocaust Museum, Amsterdam), Dr. Ingeborg Hjorth (Falstad Centre, Norway), Dr. Karianne Hansen (Arkivet, Norway) and Dr. Rebecka Katz Thor (Swedish Holocaust Museum, Sweden). The panel discussed the importance of using the strength of museums, i.e. to stick to your role, be reliable in facts, create a safe space for unsafe ideas and leave the activism for others.

The IHRS and the HL-senteret would like to thank all the presenters, panelists, chairs and the audience for interesting discussions during the conference. A special thanks goes to senior researcher Dr. Anette Homlong Storeide and Dr. Lars Lien at HL-senteret for a good cooperation with all the preparations before the conference and to Peder Hellberg for solving practical problems during the conference. With this, I wish you a good read.

Curating Holocaust Exhibitions in the 21st Century

Steven Luckert[1]

INTRODUCTION

On April 22, 1993, at the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Elie Wiesel reminded the assembled heads of state and other attendees about our collective duty: "For not only are we responsible for the memories of the dead, we are also responsible for what we are doing with those memories". "A museum", he added, "is a place. . . that should bring people together, a place that should not set them apart".[2] Wiesel envisioned an institution that would unite people from various backgrounds, speaking different languages, in memory. But it was not just about the past. It was about learning from the past to prevent mass violence and genocide in the present and in the future.

Since 1993, much has changed in the field of Holocaust studies and in the museum landscape. Today, there are several hundred Holocaust museums and centers around the world. The Holocaust and genocide studies are part of the university and high school curricula around the United States and elsewhere. The scholarly and popular interest in the Holocaust has become a global phenomenon.

Political leaders around the world have come to recognize the Holocaust as a pivotal event in history. On January 27, 2000, fifty five years after Soviet troops liberated the Nazi killing center of Auschwitz-Birkenau, leading representatives of 46 countries met at the Stockholm International Forum to foster Holocaust education, remembrance, and research. In its declaration, the signatories stated:

> The Holocaust (Shoah) fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilization. The unprecedented character of the Holocaust will always hold universal meaning. After

1 Steven Luckert is Senior Program Curator, William Levine Family Institute for Holocaust Education at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

2 See Elie Wiesel´s remarks at the Dedication Ceremonies for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, April 22, 1993, https://www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum/mission-and-history/wiesel

> half a century, it remains an event close enough in time that survivors can still bear witness to the horrors that engulfed the Jewish people. The terrible suffering of the many millions of other victims of the Nazis has left an indelible scar across Europe as well.[3]

Out of these efforts arose The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), an intergovernmental organization composed of 35 nations, which is tasked with addressing Holocaust-related issues and the genocide of the Roma. It has been active in confronting antisemitism and Holocaust distortion and denial. [4] Complementing the work of the IHRA is the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) which has greatly enhanced international cooperation among museums, scholars, and archives through workshops and information sharing. In articulating its mission, EHRI spelled out the important legacy of the Holocaust for western society.

> Modern, democratic Europe developed out of the ashes of Auschwitz. It is therefore crucial that research into the Holocaust continues to progress. Only thus can our history's darkest chapter be reread and refined by new generations. For Europeans to understand this shared past, the endeavour must transcend national borders.[5]

In the aftermath of the Stockholm Conference, other international organizations began to recognize the importance of the Holocaust as a foundational event not just for Europeans, but for nations around the globe. In 2005, the United Nations General Assembly established January 27th as International Holocaust Remembrance Day to "mobilize civil society for Holocaust remembrance and education, in order to prevent future acts of genocide."[6] Ten years later, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum partnered with UNESCO to create the International Program on Holocaust and Genocide Education (IPHGE) to support educational stakeholders from all over the world to develop long-term initiatives that can contribute to institutionalizing education about the Holocaust and genocide in their respective country.[7]

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[3] The Stockholm International Forum Conferences (2000-2004), (2006: Regeringskansliet, Stockholm), available online at https://www.government.se/contentassets/66bc8f513e67474e96ad70c519d4ad1a/the-stockholm-international-forum-conferences-2000-2004

[4] On the IHRA see https://holocaustremembrance.com/what-we-do

[5] On EHRI see https://www.ehri-project.eu/about-ehri/

[6] See the General Assembly, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 1 November 2005, https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/60/7

[7] UNESCO, "International Program on Holocaust and Genocide Education", https://www.unesco.org/en/teaching-holocaust-genocide/iphge

This surge in international interest in the Holocaust has greatly benefitted and challenged museums to adapt to changing environments. Attendance at Holocaust institutions and memorials, physically and online, has dramatically increased in the 21st century. In 2019, some 2.32 million people visited the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the vast majority of them from outside of Poland.[8] The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has seen more than 50 million visitors since opening in April 1993; more than 11 million of these visitors were school-age children.[9] Both the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem each receive a million visitors or more per year. Few would have imagined such numbers twenty years ago.

Just as remarkable are the numbers of people who visit Holocaust museums via the Internet or social media. New communications technologies have helped to spread information about the Holocaust globally and to alert populations to the dangers of mass atrocities and genocide. When the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened in 1993, the Internet was relatively new and few museums had their own dedicated websites. Today, the digital landscape has completely changed. Now most museums have a social media presence, which enables them to quickly provide resources to interested parties around the world. In 2024, almost 34 million people visited the USHMM's various websites; 57.5% of these online visitors came from countries outside of the United States. The Museum's online resource, the Holocaust Encyclopedia, received more than 26.5 million visits from more than 100 countries.[10]

Due to the robust growth of the digital space and Holocaust memory, scholars have turned their attention on how museums and other institutions can better develop education strategies to adjust to online audiences. In November 2024, the Landecker Digital Memory Lab was launched at the University of Sussex to ensure "a sustainable future for digital Holocaust memory" by "creating a community informed by transdisciplinary exchange, rigorous research, and an inclusive global outlook."[11] Holocaust museums and memorials have embraced social media as a means to engage younger audiences with their work, to spread accurate historical information, to combat Holocaust distortion and denial, and to raise awareness of

[8] See the Auschwitz Birkenau Memorial Museum webpage for more information, https://www.auschwitz.org/en/press/basic-information-on-auschwitz/

[9] See United States Holocaust Memorial Museum webpage for more information about the museum, https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-kits/united-states-holocaust-memorial-museum-press-kit

[10] Ibid.

[11] See Landecker Memorial Lab, "Mission Statement", https://www.digitalmemorylab.com/what-we-do/

contemporary mass atrocities and genocide.[12] With over 1 billion people regularly using social media, outreach to these audiences will be crucial for museums.

But it is not just museums that are changing, our visitors are changing as well. The visitors who went through the USHMM in the 1990s are not the same ones who will visit the Museum in 2025. Indeed, millions of our visitors today were not even born in 1993. Museum-goers bring their own sets of values and questions, some of them framed by contemporary crises or politics. Demographic changes in Europe and the United States mean that our visitors will continue to become more diverse in terms of ethnic, national, and religious backgrounds.

The passage of time not only brings new audiences to Holocaust museums, however, it also brings with it other significant challenges for Holocaust museum curators. The witness generation of Holocaust survivors, soldiers and civilians who saw first-hand evidence of Nazi atrocities are rapidly disappearing. Many of them were among the most active in keeping alive Holocaust memory through public speaking, memoirs, and generous support for Holocaust institutions. Coupled with this tremendous loss is the fact that younger audiences are separated by generations from these tragic events and often have incomplete or faulty knowledge of the past.[13]

Today, perhaps more than ever before, museums are trying to discover who their visitors are and what engages them. Visitor testing and user experience (UX) are now standard practice in many museums. Curators and other museum professionals want to know what drives people to go to their institutions and why. Do they have a personal connection to the Holocaust? Or is the visit just a destination stop on their tour of the city? Or is it the appeal of what some scholars refer to as "dark tourism"?[14] Such testing now goes beyond summative evaluations of an installed

[12] Manca, Stefania. (2021). Use of Social Media by Holocaust Museums and Memorials. IHRA Project Report, https://holocaust-socialmedia.eu/wp-content/uploads/Report-Survey_museums.pdf; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Statement, Leveraging Social Media for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention, December 11, 2024, https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/blog/leveraging-social-media-for-genocide-and-mass-atrocity-prevention

[13] Over the past decades researchers have surveyed audiences about their knowledge with varying results, see, for example PEW Research Centre, "What Americans Know about the Holocaust", https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2020/01/22/what-americans-know-about-the-holocaust/; PBS News, "Why so many Americans know little about the Holocaust", https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/why-so-many-americans-know-little-about-the-history-of-the-holocaust; ROPER Centre, "Public understanding of the Holocaust, from WWII to today", https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/public-understanding-holocaust-wwii-today; Susan Welch, Emily Kiver, U.S. Public Knowledge about the Holocaust Then and Now, *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 137, Issue 4, Winter 2022, Pages 741–764, https://doi.org/10.1002/polq.13417; The Crucial Role of Holocaust Education, Remarks, Ellen Germain, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, High Level Intervention at the OSCE Conference on Addressing Antisemitism, Session III: Prepare: Role of Education, Public Awareness, and Dialogue, Helsinki, Finland, February 11, 2025, https://www.state.gov/the-crucial-role-of-holocaust-education/

[14] Lennon, J. J., & Foley, M. (1999). Interpretation of the Unimaginable: The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C., and "Dark Tourism". *Journal of Travel Research*, 38(1), 46-50. https://doi.org/10.1177/004728759903800110 (Original work published 1999); Oren, G., & Shani, A. (2012). The Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum: educational dark tourism in a futuristic form. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 7(3), 255–270. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873X.2012.701630; Soulard, Joelle, William Stewart, Marcy Larson, and Eve Samson. "Dark tourism and social

exhibition but can shape the ways in which we approach a particular theme. Not all audiences respond in the same way. User experience, which has been used successfully in the commercial world, has now become an essential tool in museums.[15]

User testing can better inform us on how visitors navigate an online exhibition or if there are different generational responses to particular themes, color palettes, or even exhibition titles. It also can help us create better exhibitions. Some years ago, we learned from younger visitors to the Museum that that they did not understand what the words "Communism" or "Fascism" meant. We had taken for granted that all audiences would know these 20th-century ideologies, but we had overlooked the fact that many of our younger visitors were born after 1991, when the Soviet Union fell. Now we make a concerted effort to explain rather than assume pre-existing knowledge on the part of our visitors.

Likewise, many museums are using readability tools to make exhibition labels, online text, and other materials more accessible to broader audiences. Curators are now encouraged to write in a less academic and more concise, simpler fashion to reach the broadest audiences. Recent studies indicate that visitors may spend only 2-10 seconds reading a piece of text before moving on. Thus, museums need to get their key messages across in the first few sentences. Likewise, it is generally accepted that after 30–45 minutes visitors begin to experience "museum fatigue," which diminishes their capacity to take in more information or objects.[16]

All this presents particular problems for curators of Holocaust exhibitions, which often require much more explanation, detail, and nuance to address the complexities of this history.

Let's consider a few challenges that Holocaust curators face in the 21st century. Should one adopt a transnational or national approach to the presentation of this history? Since the Stockholm Declaration, scholars, educators, and museums have recognized the importance of seeing the Holocaust as an event that transcended

mobilization: Transforming travelers after visiting a holocaust museum" *Journal of Travel Research* 62, no. 4 (2023): 820-840; Magano, José, Jose A. Fraiz-Brea, and Ângela Leite. "An exploratory study on the motivations behind visiting the Holocaust Museum of Porto." *Sustainability* 14, no. 24 (2022): 16780

[15] Ellie King, M. Paul Smith, Paul F. Wilson, Janet Stott & Mark A. Williams (2023) "Creating Meaningful Museums: A Model for Museum Exhibition User Experience", *Visitor Studies*, 26:1, 59-81, DOI: 10.1080/10645578.2022.2129944,

[16] Judy Rand, "Less is More. And More is Less," American Association of Museums Annual Conference, Washington DC. 2016; Stephen Bitgood, "When is "Museum Fatigue" Not Fatigue?, *Curator The Museum Journal*, (January 2010), 193-202; https://museumsandheritage.com/advisor/insights/museums-need-write-conversational-text-inclusive/ https://exhibits.si.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/SI-Guide-to-Interpretive-Writing-for-Exhibitions.pdf https://id.humanrights.ca/text-writing-standards-for-exhibits/readability/

national borders. Yet translating this idea into a museum exhibition is daunting. No Holocaust museum can be encyclopaedic in its narrative nor should it try to be.

Curators need to carefully define what the geographical and chronological boundaries of the transnational storyline are to be. Should one attempt to cover all of the European continent in equal measure? And when should the exhibition begin, with the Adolf Hitler's appointment as chancellor of Germany in January 1933 or with World War I and the political turmoil that followed in its wake? Perhaps the narrative should go back even further to address the impact of colonialism, race science, and antisemitism on European culture? Ending the storyline is no less challenging. Should the narrative conclude in May 1945 with the destruction of Nazi Germany or with the postwar trials of Nazi leaders and collaborators? Or should one address issues of contemporary genocide and mass atrocities?

The danger of being so broad and inclusive is that it can cause "information overload," in which visitors become confused or distracted by the overwhelming amount of detail. The main messages can get lost in the mountains of details that the visitor is confronted with. In this sense, narratives that focus on the role of one nation during the Holocaust make it easier for visitors to absorb emotionally and cognitively. Visitors are often more engaged with a simpler narrative, written in an engrossing way, that allows them to successfully interact with the objects and the history. Holocaust history then becomes part of their collective history and memory. That being said, focusing too narrowly on the role of the nation state can obscure or distort the scale of the Holocaust.

When the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was in the early stages of development, its founders had to address the fundamental question of why it was necessary to have such a museum in Washington, DC. Some critics asked why have an institution on the National Mall that addressed a massive human tragedy committed in Europe some fifty years before? In its report to President Carter, the President's Commission on the Holocaust spelled out the reasons why the museum was part of American history:

> Americans have a distinct responsibility to remember the Holocaust. Millions of our citizens had family ties with its victims, our armies liberated many concentration camps and helped rehabilitate their inmates, and many thousands of survivors have since made their homes in this country. On the negative side, although the United

> States assumed a leadership role in rehabilitation after the war, our failure to provide adequate refuge or rescue until 1944 proved disastrous to millions of Jews.[17]

While such an approach does not exclude the transnational aspect of Holocaust history, it allows American visitors to reflect upon their own history and their responsibilities today as citizens in a democratic society.

Holocaust museums generally succeed when they create a sense of responsibility and empathy with the victims. Often this has been done by personalizing the history by showing the Holocaust's impact on an individual or family. More recently, Holocaust museums and scholars have begun exploring the notion of multiperspectivity as a way of understanding human actions through different lenses. While traditionally, Holocaust museums have approached this history through the eyes of the victims or witnesses, museums now are exploring ways to examine why ordinary people throughout Europe, and the United States, acted the way they did during the 1930s and 1940s. Much of this is derived from newer scholarship that goes beyond the perpetrator/victim dichotomy and even beyond the victim/perpetrator/bystander paradigm to examine the grey zones of human behavior.

Presenting Holocaust history or events with a view towards multiperspectivity, however, has its own set of problems. Using this approach in an exhibition has the possibility of confusing visitors or at worst seemingly justifying the behavior of perpetrators, collaborators, and other beneficiaries of the Holocaust, while at the same time minimizing the stories of the victims. Seeing these events from a variety of perspectives does help us understand the whys of the Holocaust. Properly done, it can explain why some Europeans chose to become perpetrators, while others engaged in resistance and rescue, and why many more chose to remain either indifferent to the sufferings of their neighbors or reap direct or indirect benefit from the persecution of some groups without becoming perpetrators. Such perspectives can challenge those national narratives distort history, while omitting, disguising, or minimizing other more unseemly aspects of human behavior during the Holocaust.

Curating Holocaust exhibitions in the 21st century is and will continue to be a daunting endeavor. Museums have the benefit of decades of scholarship,

[17] President's Commission on the Holocaust, *Report to the President*, September 27, 1979, (Washington, DC: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, reprinted June 2005), 6.

international cooperation among museums, archives, and educational institutions, as well as new technologies that were not available in the 20th century. Yet we must undertake the task of educating present and future generations of museum-goers with the same sensitivities as our predecessors. The obligation to remember the Holocaust is our responsibility to the victims and to the next generations. "A memorial unresponsive to the future would also violate the memory of the past".[18]

[18] President's Commission on the Holocaust, *Report to the President*, 14.

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Holocaust Education after October 7th

Vibeke Kieding Banik, Fredrik S. Hagen, Anders G. Kjøstvedt, & Claudia Lenz[19]

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN A CHANGING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Globally, Holocaust Education has become increasingly important in the last three decades, with the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust in 2000 as a historical turning point. The conference's final document, and the founding document of what was to become the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), states that "the unprecedented character of the Holocaust will always hold universal meaning".[20] The development of Holocaust Education is thus not only driven by an interest in the genocide itself. In the curricula of many countries, including Norway, teaching about the Holocaust is linked to teaching about human rights, anti-racism and the prevention of political extremism.[21] Hence, Holocaust Education is not only about learning *about* the genocide but also learning *from* it. However, with the historical events moving further away from today's lived experience, and the last eyewitnesses passing away, the question becomes pertinent how to make sure that the universal message of the Holocaust is still rooted in the particular historical experience.[22] Moreover, as Holocaust Education was created in specific historical and political contexts, changes in these contexts will have an impact on how it is conceptualized and what kind of practices it will result in at a classroom level. Which topics, debates and conflicts in the present will be decisive for which aspects of the Holocaust will be highlighted, and how these will be made meaningful for the present? Which identifications will be offered and which lessons from the past will be taught?

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20 IHRA. "The Stockholm declaration". (IHRA 2000) https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/stockholm-declaration

21 Norwegian Ministry of Education, "Curriculum for Social Studies", (Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2020)

22 V. F. Kalsås & C. Lenz: "Å undervise om Holocaust. Utfordringer og innganger". I: Kalsås og Lenz (red.), Å undervise om Holocaust. Utfordringer og innganger, Universitetsforlaget, 2024, p. 3-16.

The starting point for our research is a political world where Holocaust memory is used in increasingly different ways to give different political arguments, and where it is unclear to what degree teachers could resist outside pressure to change their way of doing Holocaust Education. In addition, the Holocaust has become a symbolic representation of evil beyond the actual genocide.[23]

The idea for this study emerged in early 2024, about half a years after the October 7th Hamas attacks in Israel and into the war in Gaza. On many occasions, we observed comparisons between the situation in Gaza and the plight of the European Jews during the Second World War in social media and public discourse. This was reinforced by the accusations from the government of South Africa, UN representatives, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch that a genocide was taking place in Gaza.[24]

Inspired by the recent changes to the National Curricula of Social Studies in Norway, a subject which also includes history, where renewed emphasis has been placed on the importance of drawing parallels between the past and the present, we wondered whether and, if so, to what extent the present conflict between Israel and Hamas influenced the teaching of the Holocaust in the history education in Norwegian schools. Our research question was:

> Have the attacks in Israel on October 7th 2023, and the subsequent war in Gaza changed how teachers reflect upon their own teaching about the Holocaust?

By asking teachers in primary and secondary school (years 1–13) to reply to a questionnaire distributed on social media and elsewhere, we received 75 answers that we will, after providing a brief overview of Holocaust education in Norway, analyse and discuss in this article.

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN NORWAY

While only being a formal part of the curriculum since 2020, teaching and learning about the Holocaust has gained increased attention in Norway since the late 1990s.

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[23] Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider. "Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory." *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002): 87–106; Zehavit Gross. The Process of the Universalization of Holocaust Education: Problems and Challenges. *Contemporary Jewry* 38 (3), s. 5-20, (2018). https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12397-017-9237-2. Thomas Pegelow Kaplan, "The Universalisation of the Holocaust as a Moral Standard", in *Beyond "Ordinary Men". Christopher R. Browning and Holocaust Historiography*. Kaplan, T. P. Matthäus, J. & Hornburg, M. W. (eds.) (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2019 p. 159-175).

24 Stortinget. "Representantforslag om å definere Hamas sitt angrep på Israel 7. oktober 2023 som folkemord" Dokument 8:79 S (2024-2025) (Stortinget 2023).

In addition to learning about the Holocaust in classrooms, thousands of pupils have travelled to former concentration camps, visited the two Norwegian Jewish museums and other institutions that thematize the Holocaust, or taken part in commemoration of the International Holocaust Day as a part of their learning.[25]

The purpose of learning about the Holocaust in Norwegian education is twofold. In addition to learning about the historical event and its causes, knowledge about the Holocaust is expected to have a preventive effect on political extremism. A competence aim in the curricula of Social Studies for pupils leaving 10th grade states that they are expected to be able to explain "the causes and consequences of terrorism and genocide, such as the Holocaust, and reflect on how extremist attitudes and extremist acts can be prevented".[26] While the Holocaust is mentioned as an example of a genocide, there is no doubt that the competence aim is a written statement on an already established practice of teaching and learning about the Holocaust. Further, trips to Auschwitz and the commemoration of the International Holocaust Day are also regarded as measures to prevent racism, antisemitism and extremism, despite a lack of clear understanding as to how learning will take place.[27] Thus, the approach of learning *from* rather than learning *about* is one characterization of Holocaust education in Norwegian schools that makes the question of the impact of October 7th and its aftermath an interesting topic to study.

METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

As stated, our starting point was comparisons between the ongoing war in Gaza in the aftermath of the October 7th 2023 attacks in Israel and the Holocaust in public discussions and media. The data of this study have been generated during the spring and summer of 2024. This temporal situatedness of our study is important, as the war later has emerged in a way that by the time of the publication of this paper is characterized as an ongoing genocide by leading genocide scholars, while the ruling

25 Vibeke K. Banik & Anders G. Kjøstvedt: "Kollektive minner og universalisering. Holocaust i den nye norske læreplanen for grunnskolen", *Nordidactica - Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* 12:3 (2022), p. 149-170.; Fredrik S. Hagen, *Antirasisme etter Auschwitz. Didaktiske refleksjoner om Holocaust som antirasistisk verktøy i den norske skolen* [PhD thesis]. Vestlandet University College, 2022.

26 Ministry of Education: Curriculum for Social Studies (SAF01-04). https://www.udir.no/lk20/saf01-04?lang=eng

27 Marita Nygård: Holocaust som lærepenge? Moralsk avkobling og muligheter i klasserommet, i V. F. Kalsås & C. Lenz (red.), *Å undervise om Holocaust. Utfordringer og innganger*, p. 39-55. Universitetsforlaget, 2024; Ola Flennegård: Creating a youth ambassador: A critical study of a Swedish project on teaching and learning about the Holocaust, *Holocaust Studies* 30:1 (2024), p. 84-107. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2022.2136385; Kyrre Kverndokk: "Eg veit eg burde grine, alle dei andre grin jo." På skoletur til Auschwitz. I Lenz, C. & Nilssen, T. R. (red.). Fortiden i nåtiden. Nye veier i formidlingen av andre verdenskrigs historie. Universitetsforlaget (2011), p. 145-162; Marita Nygård: «Vi må aldri glemme...» Holocaustdagen som arena for erindring om utryddelsen av de europeiske jødene blant skoleungdom i Norge. *DIN -tidsskrift for religion og kultur*, 11:2 (2019), p. 87–112.

of the International Court of Justice (ICC) will determine the question legally. When recruiting informers to our study, we were looking for teachers with experience in teaching about the Holocaust both before and after October 2023. We twice posted a request in different social media fora for Social Studies teachers, as this is the subject in which the Holocaust is taught in the Norwegian educational system. Additionally, we included an invitation to take part in the survey in a digital newsletter from The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies. This snowball method resulted in 75 answers. Only those who wanted to participate in an interview later in the project were known to us by name.

The digital questionnaire included a mix of preset and four open questions. In accordance with codebook thematic analysis, we sorted and coded our data based on both its content and our pre-existing knowledge on Holocaust education.[28] The codes are inductive, and rather than based on a research question or the interview guide, they are based upon a close reading of the answers as well as our experience with Holocaust didactics, particularly the universalisation of the Holocaust.[29] The answers were coded individually by the authors before we together identified and agreed on a set of themes and sub-themes that characterized the dataset, and in which we placed the answers in the open questions as well as the results of the preset ones. Some of the open answers were of such a nature that they were placed in two or more (sub-)themes. The themes were if and why the teachers have made changes in their teaching of the Holocaust post October 7th 2023, to what extent the pupils are concerned about the conflict between Israel and Palestine, and if and to what extent the teachers put a thematic emphasis on genocide during the Second World War versus what is taking place in Gaza today.

As in Norwegian society in general, it was difficult to find formulations that covered the seriousness and brutality of the conflict post 7th October 2023 in a manner that is acceptable to all involved parties, including those who see the present war in Gaza as a genocide of the Palestinian people, and those who completely disagree with this interpretation. A few of the answers in the questionnaire reflected

28 Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Toward Good Practice in Thematic Analysis: Avoiding Common Problems and Be(Com)Ing a Knowing Researcher." *International Journal of Transgender Health* 24, no. 1 (2023): 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597.

29 Michael Gray "*Contemporary Debates in Holocaust Education*". (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK : Imprint: Palgrave Pivot 2014).Stuart Foster, Alice Pettigrew, Andy Pearce, Rebecca Hale, Adrian Burgess, Paul Salmons & Ruth-Anne Lenga, "What do students know and understand about the Holocaust? Evidence from English secondary schools" (UCL Center for Holocaust Education, 2016). Pettigrew, A. "Limited Lessons from the Holocaust? Critically Considering the 'Anti-Racist' and Citizenship Potential." *Teaching History*, no. 141 (2010): 50–55.Pettigrew. "Why Teach or Learn About the Holocaust?" *Holocaust Studies* 23, no. 3 (2017): 263–288. https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2017.1296069.Salmons, P. "Universal Meaning or Historical Understanding? The Holocaust in History and History in the Curriculum." *Teaching History* (London), no. 141 (2010): 57–63.

this, and in particular those who regarded the questions as "too Israel friendly", as we were criticised for using formulations such as "war" and "conflict" instead of an "ongoing genocide". However, these replies enabled a better understanding of such positions and reasoning.

Despite the difficulties in formulating neutral questions and a low response rate, we believe that the responses have certain traits worth exploring. In addition, we recognize that words have different connotations, some of which are impossible to reconcile. While we will continue to use expressions such as "war" and "conflict", we recognize that there is a great variety in the interpretation of the October 7th 2023 attacks in Israel and the subsequent war in Gaza. However, since it is not our intention to study the conflict as such, but rather if and to what extent notions of the conflict influence the teaching on the Holocaust, we argue that our choice of wordings are suitable.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Teaching about the Holocaust never takes place in a vacuum, and ever since the end of the Second World War, our interpretation of, and teaching about, the genocide is always shaped by the societal contexts in which it takes place. This is of course not unique to the Holocaust, but unlike other historical subjects, Nazi Germany's genocide on European Jews during the Second World War is increasingly understood as a universalistic historical event, meaning that learning about it serves additional purposes beyond the strictly historical. These additional purposes are typically connected to learning about Human Rights, the development of anti-racism and the combating of other prejudices, as well as the prevention of political extremism.[30] The strong prevalence of the universalistic outlook in Holocaust education, however also implies the risk of losing out of sight the particular historic background, and here, specifically, antisemitism as an ideological force behind the Holocaust and the Jewish experience of persecution.[31]

The increasing universalization of the Holocaust since the 1990s has inspired scholarly debate about the ultimate purpose of teaching about the Nazi genocide of the Jews, and we may identify two different positions: one in which *learning about*

30 Thomas Pegelow Kaplan: "The Universalisation of the Holocaust as a Moral Standard", in T.P. Kaplan, J. Matthäus & M.W. Hornburg (eds.): *Beyond "Ordinary Men". Christopher R. Browning and Holocaust Historiography* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2019), p. 159-175; Zehavit Gross: "The Process of the Universalization of Holocaust Education: Problems and Challenges", *Contemporary Jewry* 38:3 (2018), p. 5-20.

31 Ola Flennegård. "When antisemitism is left out: Swedish teachers' educational strategies and students' understanding of the Holocaust during a study trip to memorial sites." *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 1–14 (2024).

the Holocaust is emphasized, and another where *learning from* the Holocaust is the major concern. These views are not entirely mutually exclusive, as neither of them denies the need for historical knowledge in itself, or the validity of historical lessons from a historical event of this magnitude. Rather, the differences are expressed in where the emphasis is placed; on the historical event itself or on the lessons that may be learned from it.[32]

Given the fact that several studies have argued that students find it difficult to contextualize and understand the reasons why the Holocaust happened,[33] criticism has been raised against a too strong emphasis on the *learning from*-perspective. Salmons and Chapman have both argued that contextualizing the Holocaust too closely, with issues relevant to contemporary society, may contribute towards making this historical event even more difficult to understand for students.[34]

The major scientific trends briefly outlined above also frames our study, as we are interested in discussing how contemporary events that receive a lot of media attention influences how Norwegian Social Studies and History teachers reflect upon their teaching about the Holocaust, and whether they make adaptations to how they teach about the Holocaust in line with contemporary events like the October 7th 2023 terror attacks in Israel and the subsequent war in Gaza.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our main findings can be placed in three main areas:

1. THE HOLOCAUST IS INTERESTING AND RELEVANT

A large proportion of teachers reported that the pupils find learning about the Holocaust interesting. About half of the respondents stated that the interest was the same as before October 7th, while respectively 43 percent and 10 percent stated that their pupils were "a bit more interested" or "a lot more interested". While two-thirds of the teachers stated that their pupils link the present conflict to the Holocaust, seeing the "long lines" between the two, the increase in interest in the

32 On this debate, see Michael R. Marrus, *The Lessons of the Holocaust* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016); Paula Cowan & Henry Maitles, *Understanding and Teaching Holocaust Education* (London: Sage Publications, 2017) and Stuart Foster, Andy Pearce & Alice Pettigrew (eds.), *Holocaust Education. Contemporary Challenges and Controversies* (London: UCL Press, 2020).

33 For the Norwegian context, see Hagen 2022. See also the British studies Stuart Foster et al., What do students know and understand about the Holocaust? Evidence from English secondary schools (London: UCL Center for Holocaust Education, 2016) and Alice Pettigrew, "Why Teach or Learn about the Holocaust?", Holocaust Studies, 23:3 (2017), p. 263-288.

34 Paul Salmons, "Universal Meaning or Historical Understanding", Teaching History 141 (2010), p. 58-63 and Arthur Chapman: "Learning the Lessons of the Holocaust; A critical exploration", in Stuart Foster, Andy Pearce & Alice Pettigrew (eds.): Holocaust Education. Contemporary Challenges and Controversies (London: UCL Press, 2020), p. 50-73.

Holocaust among the pupils suggests that the present-day situation has sparked an overall interest in learning about atrocities in the past. Some of the open answers confirm this, such as the teacher who wrote that the pupils wanted to know more about what happened during WW2 and how this resulted in the establishment of Israel. Another stated that the pupils had become more interested in the concept of genocide and the use and abuse of history. A third argued that the atrocities in Gaza today helped the pupils to understand the atrocities during WW2. Another stated that teaching about the Holocaust had made the pupils more aware of the complexity of the conflict between Israel and Palestine, and contributed to a wider understanding of it.

When it comes to the students affective response to the topic, about 60 percent stated that their pupils reacted "as before" when learning about the genocide, while one third stated that their pupils reacted positively. Only four teachers stated that their pupils had reacted negatively. In our sample, a resistance against Holocaust education among students due to the ongoing conflict, thus seemed to be the exception.

2. GAZA AND THE LINK BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT

In our material, the war in Gaza is a prevalent topic when teachers describe how they draw lines between past and present, with the concept of genocide as a pivoting point.

Several teachers stated that they, also before the current situation, had related teaching about the Holocaust to contemporary human rights violations and genocides. It thus seems to be consistent for many of those teachers to relate their teaching about the Holocaust to the ongoing war in Gaza. However, there is a difference between those teachers who report that their pupils were wondering if the same "was happening then as now", and those who presuppose an ongoing genocide in Gaza in their teaching.

In several responses, teachers state that they have an open or explorative approach to the question, preferring to reflect with their pupils on the question on whether there is a genocide going on or not. In contrast, other teachers have a quite normative position towards how the students should conclude. One argued that "only the brightest pupils" realize that this is "history repeating itself", and thus show disappointment about those who didn't make this conclusion.

Many argued that the recent developments in Gaza enabled a comparative approach when teaching about the Holocaust. Some discussed the concept of

genocide through comparison between the Holocaust and (among other conflicts) the war in Gaza. One stated that every pupil compared Gaza and the Holocaust, and that they see both as genocides. Another wrote that he/she had tried to find parallels and comparisons between then and now in order to create a historical consciousness around the topics.

Among those teachers who made the link between the Holocaust and Gaza, we could observe tendencies of equating Israel and Nazi Germany, in the words of one respondent: "what Israel now does is similar to what the Nazis did". Another stated that a "new genocide and ethnic cleansing, not unlike what Hitler himself wanted" now took place, and added that just like Hitler, the "extreme far right government in Israel" want a state without Palestinians and a "lebensraum". Thus, a terminology describing the Nazi ideology and mechanisms of the annihilation of the Europeans Jews is used to describe Israeli warfare and its assumed underlying ideological motives.

As a consequence, several responses include reflections on perpetrators and victims. One teacher refers to the "paradox that the victims of the past have now become the perpetrators", and thus equates today's Israel's political leaders with Jews in the past in a logic of victim-perpetrator reversal.

Another deliberately related Holocaust and Gaza, among others, by explaining the latter by "those who are hit as children, often hit children as adults". Related are statements like "how can Israel (or the Jews) act like it does given their own history" – implicitly referring to the Holocaust. However, such pseudo-psychological explanations are exceptions.

Even if such pseudo-psychological explanations are exceptions, several teachers report that they have discussed if this is the case with their pupils. One teacher wrote that the pupils could not comprehend how there could be a recurrence of genocide, now committed by the Jews [sic]. There is no indication that this problematic generalization was corrected by the teacher, but rather that it reflected the teacher's own point of view.

However, it is important to mention that there are a few examples of teachers in our material, who very outspokenly reject the connection between the Holocaust and the war in Gaza – one even calling it "idiotic".

3. A CHANGE IN DIDACTIC AND OTHER APPROACHES IN TEACHING?

Two-thirds of the respondents had not changed their teaching about the Holocaust in light of October 7th and its aftermath. Given the high interest in the historical

subject among pupils, many may not have any reasons for changing what they likely regard as successful teaching. Some stated that a change was unnecessary because the war in Gaza and the Holocaust are unrelated - the former a present event, the latter a historical one. In contrast to this, another teacher wrote that while he/she previously had treated the two topics in different semesters, he/she now considered teaching the two in the same semester, as the students then would have a foundation to draw parallels between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and "war and conflicts in the 20th century".

Those who had made changes in their teaching post October 7th stated various reasons. One teacher considered what happened in Gaza so grave that the topic of the Holocaust was overshadowed in the teaching. In contrast, another focused less on both topics because of an Israeli pupil. A common denominator is an enhanced focus on dehumanizing language, then and now, and its consequences.

Interestingly, only a few mentioned that they had focused more on antisemitism now than before.

As briefly mentioned above, the interest in the present conflict varies among pupils, as in society in general, from being very interested to indifferent. However, only very few teachers stated that they had changed their teaching *due to* their pupils' strong opinions (either way) of the present conflict. One stated the presence of an Israeli pupil as the reason for toning down teaching about both the Holocaust and the conflict between Israel and Palestine, assumedly because she/he feared that this connection in itself, or the potential classroom dynamics, could be stressful for this student.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

2025 marks the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz as well as the end of WW2. The time that has passed since the event has situated the event in history and not in personal memory. For some pupils, there is also a distance in place, as their families originated in places where the memory of the Holocaust has had less of an impact. This is the context in which the teachers in our study do their work, and in which they make their choices of what to teach about the Holocaust, how to teach about the Holocaust, and how to facilitate that students engage in meaning-making processes related to the topic.

As reflected in the competence goal of the curriculum of the history subject, links between past and present are supposed to be part of this meaning-making. As the

public debate on the war between Israel and Hamas was intense, with references to the Holocaust made both by those supporting Israel and those supporting Palestinians, it does not seem surprising that the connection is also made in the classroom. While the findings of our study indicate that the majority of teachers have not changed their way of teaching about the Holocaust in this situation, we find an increased focus on "learning from the Holocaust" among those who chose to make the link to the conflict.

Given that we did not mention "genocide" in our questionnaire, the frequent use of the word in the open answers is interesting and illustrates that this concept serves as a kind of bridge-builder between past and present. While some teachers describe a more explorative approach to this question, the war in Gaza undoubtedly functions as an example of a genocide for many of the responding teachers. However, it sometimes becomes unclear if the initiative for making comparisons between the Holocaust and the war in Gaza comes from the pupils or the teacher.

We observe some worrying tendencies among those who unambiguously presume that a genocide is taking place in Gaza. The preoccupation with the present conflict as a "new genocide" in some cases leads to an identification with the historical genocide.

When the war in Gaza is presented as a genocide, *on par* with the Holocaust, this can lead to misrecognitions of the historical event, and even to its distorted representation. We regard this to be the case when teachers engage students in reasoning about why the Israeli government hasn't learnt any lessons from the Holocaust or how Jews (sic) have transitioned from victims to perpetrators in a genocide.

The universalization of the Holocaust and *learning from* the Holocaust thus must be balanced against the particular, Holocaust as a genocide against Jews, based on antisemitism as an ideology. This connects to the Stockholm Declaration that assigns universal significance to the Holocaust, but firmly anchors it in the historical events. As the conflict has developed and changed since our study was conducted, we believe further research into this topic is necessary.

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"When the calendar showed February 27, 1944, I perished. I was only 60 years old." Education about the Holocaust. A Danish example of worst practices

Silvia Goldbaum Tarabini[35]

INTRODUCTION

Since June 2019 Denmark is part of Gunter Demnig's decentral art monument, *Stolpersteine*. From the first stones were laid in Copenhagen to commemorate Danish victims of the Nazi occupation, about 150 stones are now placed all over the country, a still growing number. Most for Jews who either died in Ghetto Theresienstadt, drowned underway to Sweden, committed suicide or survived, as well as for stateless Jewish refugees expelled from Denmark and killed in camps in the Third Reich. Stones are also laid for other victims of the Nazi policies: resistance fighters, Communists, and members of the police force.[36]

The Jewish prisoners counted 472 men, women, and children, deported on four transports, and except for two of the men, all arrived at Ghetto Theresienstadt. During the 18 months of incarceration, 51 adults died as did two babies, who were born there by women deported from Denmark. Furthermore, two men were killed, one in Majdanek, and the other in Auschwitz-Birkenau.[37]

In the context of *Stolpersteine*, The Danish Jewish Museum and the City Archives of Odense have developed teaching material about some of the Jewish victims. This material, developed with support from the Danish Ministry of Education, is meant for students in lower and upper secondary schools. It includes written material and a smartphone app, both containing "stories" told in the first person as if told by the victims. Whereas the app only functions near a *Stolperstein*, the written material is

[35] Silvia Goldbaum Tarabini is a historian and researcher at the Danish National Archives.
[36] See more at https://snublesten.dk and https://www.snublestenfyn.dk
[37] For details about the fates of Michael Rubin Singerowitz and Schmul Sender Jonisch, see Silvia Goldbaum Tarabini Fracapane, *The Danish Jews in the Holocaust. Life and Death in Theresienstadt Ghetto*: (Routledge 2021), pp. 268–272.

available online.[38] The content is almost identical, except that in the app, the "stories" are read aloud, and some accompanied by portraits, manipulated so the person moves a bit.[39]

In this article, I will make a close reading of one such "story" to address the question of what happens to our understanding of the Holocaust when storytelling, in its eagerness to reach an audience, falsifies history. What happens when drama and mediation displace facts and historical knowledge? How does it affect the view of the victims, and the understanding of the Holocaust? What does it mean for the power of enunciation and the documentation of the Holocaust if what is mediated cannot be trusted?

THE TEACHING MATERIAL

The material includes "stories" of 44 people (some cover two persons), but all "stories" are told in first person. I have chosen to analyse the written version of William Melchior's "story", which is representative of the overall material.[40] It opens with Melchior introducing himself: "I am a Dane. I am a Danish national. I was born in Denmark, I grew up in Denmark, and yes, my religion is Jewish. Have I really deserved this fate?"[41]

With the emphasis on his Danishness and Danish nationality, it almost seems like he considers some people as more obvious victims of the Holocaust than others. Clearly, neither Jews in Denmark nor in other countries, nationals or stateless, deserved such a fate. Before the *Judenaktion* in 1943, there were many stateless Jews in Denmark. Among the about 6500 Jews, about a quarter had arrived as refugees in the 1930s, nearly all stateless. Furthermore, half of Danish Jewry came from so-called Russian families, people who had arrived in the years around WWI from the former Russian Empire, a part of them still stateless in 1943; even though the exact number is unclear. To give an example: among the 472 Jewish deportees close to a third were stateless.[42] To that should be added, that the deportees mirrored the composition of the Jews in Denmark, in the way that about a quarter came from old Danish Jewish families, about half were so-called Russian Jews and the last quarter were refugees.

[38] The teaching material is found under the point *Snublesten – Erindringskultur og kildekritik* at https://www.jewmus.dk/besoeg/gymnasieskolen. (All links were active on April 5, 2025).
[39] For example, at the *Stolpersteine* for Eva Salomonsen (Bredgade 51) and Abraham and Rose Schwartz (Sankt Pauls Gade 7).
[40] William Melchior's "story" is number 14 in the material about *Stolpersteine* in the centre of Copenhagen, pp. 53–55.
[41] William Melchior's "story" p. 54.
[42] Tarabini Fracapane 2021, pp. 368–369.

> Good day. I am William Melchior. I am a Jew and a real Copenhagener. I was born in Nørregade 15, on April 15, 1884. Here I grew up as the youngest in a flock of five siblings. So, there has been plenty to do for my parents – Moritz Jacob Melchior and Clara Rosalie.[43]

But according to the Register of the Jewish community, the Melchiors lived in Nørregade 13 not 15, a small mistake, but one of many.[44] And, whereas it is correct that William had four older siblings, one brother died when William was only one year old, so in that sense he did not grow up the youngest of five. From the registration of the death of 5-year old Ernst on May 31, 1885, it is also clear that the family at that time had moved away from Nørregade to the nearby Skindergade.[45] The "story", however, is told as if they lived in Nørregade for William's entire childhood, as it was "When we lived here on Nørregade we could always hear the Church of Our Lady bimble and bamble, so there was no excuse for forgetting time, if we were outside playing."[46]

From various censuses and police registries it appears that the Melchiors moved several times. During the following years, they lived in Ahlefeldtsgade 18, Nørrevoldgade 15, Nørrefarimagsgade 21, and then in 1904 they moved to Tordenskjoldsgade 25.[47] In Melchior's "story", however, they continued to live in Nørregade until "then we moved out on Tordenskjoldsgade 25. Near the harbour and Nyhavn. And later to Strandboulevarden 60 – again near water and Nordhavn."[48] The move to Tordenskjoldsgade took place when William was about 20 years old; the Melchiors are registered there in the Police Registry from November 1, 1904.

It is symptomatic for the "story" that an emphasis is given to the city landscape of Copenhagen by underlining the addresses' placements. This might be an attempt to attract the Copenhagen student towards something well-known, but at the same time, important events in Melchior's life are unmentioned, whereas they could have added nuances to the somewhat stiff "story".

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[43] William Melchior's "story" p. 54.
[44] Danish National Archives (DNA), Mosaisk Trossamfund København, Kontraministerialbog, fødte 1872–1890, scan 28, https://arkivalieronline.rigsarkivet.dk/da/billedviser?epid=17117291#153732,25620114
[45] DNA, Mosaisk Trossamfund København, Kontraministerialbog, viede og døde 1871–1890, scan 90, https://arkivalieronline.rigsarkivet.dk/da/billedviser?epid=17117291#153733,25620262
[46] William Melchior's "story" p. 54.
[47] Copenhagen City Archives (CCA), Politiets registerblade. Station 11. Film 0012. Registerblad 2178, https://kbharkiv.dk/brug-samlingerne/soeg-i-indtastede-kilder/post/17-1807438
[48] William Melchior's "story" p. 54.

For example, that 22-year-old William lost his father on March 9, 1907, which most likely was an important factor in his early adult life, and probably a reason why the family moved yet another time in November of that year.[49] At that time, William's oldest sister had already been married for a few years, and William's oldest brother had relocated to China for business, so the young man was living in Bredgade 47 with his mother and youngest sister, Emilie.[50] Two years later, on November 28, 1909, the Melchiors were struck by a tragedy when 27-year old Emilie died of appendicitis.[51]

In 1911 William and his mother moved to Stockholmsgade 37, where they employed a 35-year-old maid, Inger Mathilde Louise Henriksen, who moved in with them on March 4, 1912.[52] She stayed on also after William's mother died on December 22, 1912.[53]

None of the deaths of William's close family members are mentioned in his "story". Nor that he, following the death of his mother, changed addresses a few times, still with Ms Henriksen as a housekeeper. They first lived at Sortedam Dossering 95B, then Amager Fælledvej 7, and only in May 1916 at Strandboulevard 60.[54]

On November 13, 1919, William Melchior married Sigrid Salomon, who then moved into the apartment on Strandboulevard. This is completely mixed up in the "story", where it sounds like the entire family had moved directly here from Tordenskjoldsgade, as the deaths of the parents and sister are not mentioned at all.

In the early years of marriage, Ms Henriksen still lived with the couple. But in both the November 1925 and November 1930 census, the household only covers William and Sigrid Melchior, no children and no servants. On February 25, 1932, they divorced.[55] This is also not mentioned in the "story", only that: "In the end, I lived alone in Lille Strandstræde 26, at the corner of Sankt Annæ Plads. And it was from here that I in October 1943 was arrested and deported to Theresienstadt."[56] William Melchior did however not live alone in the usual sense, because according to the 1940 census, he shared a household with three others on the third floor of the house,

[49] CCA, Begravelsesprotokoller 1906–1907, p. 640, https://kbharkiv.dk/brug-samlingerne/soeg-i-indtastede-kilder/post/1-246071; CCA, Politiets registerblade. Station 7. Film 0028. Registerblad 245, https://kbharkiv.dk/brug-samlingerne/soeg-i-indtastede-kilder/post/17-1026895.
[50] Information from the Danish Jewish Genealogical Database (accessible for members of the Society for Danish Jewish History).
[51] CCA, Begravelsesprotokoller 1909–1910, p. 254 https://kbharkiv.dk/brug-samlingerne/soeg-i-indtastede-kilder/post/1-19845
[52] CCA, Politiets registerblade, Station 7, roll 0015, page 21, https://kbharkiv.dk/brug-samlingerne/soeg-i-indtastede-kilder/post/17-947837.
[53] CCA, Begravelsesprotokoller 1912–1913, p. 331, https://kbharkiv.dk/brug-samlingerne/soeg-i-indtastede-kilder/post/1-422217
[54] CCA, Politiets registerblade: William Melchior and Inger Mathilde Louise Henriksen (see links above).
[55] DNA, Ministry of Justice, 1. Ekspeditionskontor, Blanketregnskaber, 1932, Skilsmissebevillinger, p. 7, https://arkivalieronline.rigsarkivet.dk/da/billedviser?epid=215032#257619,48010625
[56] William Melchior's "story" p. 54.

probably in a small pension that seemingly was connected to Restaurant van Zandt located on the ground floor of the building and whose restaurateur was one of Melchior's cohabitants.[57]

Second part of the "story" deals with arrest and deportation. According to Melchior's "story" he was arrested in his home. There are no sources for this, and the "story" includes no references other than a general reference to the text about Melchior on the website www.snublesten.dk.[58]

However, there are sources from the early post-war period that suggest where Melchior was arrested: According to a police report from October 31, 1945, regarding the arrest of Jews in hiding at *Syrefabrikken* (a chemical plant) on October 4, 1943, where a woman was shot and killed, one of the Theresienstadt survivors mentioned that she thought Melchior had been arrested then. The police pursued this further and contacted Melchior's nephew, who himself had been a refugee in Sweden, but after returning home he had been informed by Theresienstadt survivors that Melchior had "been arrested by two Danish men at a cafe in Frederiksberggade" and the police, therefore, concluded that he had not been present at the factory.[59] The precise date of Melchior's arrest is unclear, but as his name figures on the transport list of the transport that left Denmark for Theresienstadt on October 13 (transport XXV/3) it seems unlikely that he should have been arrested in his home, since nearly all deportees on this transport were arrested in hiding or during attempted escape after the October 1 raid.[60]

The "story" becomes more fictional:

> Together with many other Jews, Roma, Communists and members of the Resistance, we were stuffed into some cattle cars and driven to Theresienstadt. The door was slammed, and it went completely dark. There was not much air in the car. There was no possibility for everyone to sit down at the same time. So some were sitting, and some were standing in shifts. A lock was put on from the outside. We were underway. But we did not know where we were going. There was a draught, and we huddled together – children huddled in with their parents.[61]

[57] DNA, Census 1940, København, Lille Strandstræde 26, 3, scan 420, https://arkivalieronline.rigsarkivet.dk/da/billedviser?bsid=239090#239090,45543599 In *Kraks Vejviser 1943*, Gade og hus register, p. 472 (Sankt Annæ Plads 6) it is clear that Dagmar Leisner – who is one of the four inhabitants at Lille Strandstræde 26 3, is listed as restaurateur of Café van Zandt

[58] https://snublesten.dk/snublesten/william-melchior/

[59] DNA, Københavns Byret, 23. Afd. Retsopgørssager, sag 23-418-1946, Politirapport af 31. oktober 1945, kontinueret 3. november 1945.

[60] Tarabini Fracapane 2021, pp. 56–57 and appendix 1.

[61] William Melchior's "story" p. 54.

If we look at the facts, then Melchior was not at all "stuffed" into a cattle car at this time. Jews arrested after the raid of October 1, were taken to Camp Horserød in Northern Zealand, where they remained until the evening of October 12, when 175 Jews were brought to Elsinore Station, from where a transport left at 4 in the morning of October 13. From a report written by a shocked employee of the Danish State Railway regarding the violent treatment of the Jews at the station, it is also clear that this transport left in ordinary person coaches.[62]

The train brought the prisoners to Gedser from where they crossed the Baltic Sea to Warnemünde by ferry. Only in the German harbour were they herded into cattle cars. Furthermore, this transport included only Jews; no Roma, Communists, or members of the Resistance, as mentioned in the "story". Onboard a transport which left Copenhagen on October 2, there were, besides the 198 Jews, also 150 Communists who were brought from the Langelinie Pier to Swinemünde (today Świnoujśie). However, the two groups were kept strictly apart onboard the ship. From Swinemünde, the Communists were brought to KZ Stutthof. The first transport with people arrested for engaging in resistance activities left in November 1943, and no transports of Roma left from Denmark.[63]

"When the wagon stopped, and the doors were opened, an icy coldness flowed in. Outside were German private soldiers – they pointed their fingers at us and laughed as they looked into the wagons for us."[64] At this point, it is unclear for the reader/listener where the prisoners are. Apparently, they have arrived at Theresienstadt, but in the ghetto, there were no "German private soldiers". There were SS soldiers and Czech gendarmes. However, compared with a testimony by child survivor Jytte Bornstein, which the text seems to lean on, it becomes clear that this refers to a short halt, where the prisoners were let out of the wagons to relieve themselves.[65] This is however not explained in the "story". "We arrived at Theresienstadt and were led into a large hall. Here one should hand over everything of worth. Money. Gold. What was this kind of place we had ended up in?"[66] From later survivor accounts it appears that the newly arrived on this transport were not brought to a "large hall" but to the open courtyard of the *Aussiger barracks*, from

[62] DNA, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gruppeordnede sager 1909–1945, 120D43/1a, Referat fra Trafikkontrolør C.A. Qvist's Tjenesterejse til Helsingør Natten mellem 12. og 13. Oktober 1943, dated 20. 10. 1943.
[63] For an overview of transports from Denmark, see Jørgen Barfod, *Helvede har mange navne*: (Frihedsmuseets Venners Forlags Fond 1995); at the website www.folkedrab.dk that the material refers to for further reading, there is no information regarding deportations of Roma from Denmark.
[64] William Melchior's "story" p. 55.
[65] Jytte Bornstein, *Min rejse tilbage*: (Frihedsmuseets Venners Forlag 2013), p. 54.
[66] William Melchior's "story" p. 55.

where they were taken to a small room, where they had to hand over their valuables.[67] From there, they were brought back to the yard where registration took place, and where they afterwards received a portion of barley.

"The food was stinky and awful. I thought, why would anyone eat this? But it was not long before I was the one hanging over the pots to get a portion."[68] The image of the elderly man who hangs over the large cooking barrel, is very strong. But it is a manipulated image. The quote stems from Jytte Bornstein, who was 7 years old in 1943. In her later testimony, she described one of her first impressions of other prisoners: "I also wondered why they were so eager to get the awful, sticky porridge that smelled badly. [...] But one day it was me and some other children who hang over the sharp metal edge that dug into the stomach, and with the head into the food container, tried to scrape the last remnants of 'Graupen' with my spoon."[69]

When Bornstein writes this, it is clearly an image of a hungry child too small to reach the bottom of the barrel, something she even illustrated in a drawing. But when the image is transferred to an elderly and much taller man hanging over the barrels, it changes. The material contains no references to Bornstein's work.

It is important to underline that William Melchior left no documentation from Theresienstadt, but still, the "story" recounts his deportation, arrival, and ghetto life. It mostly seems to be based on Jytte Bornstein's account, but when her words are told by William Melchior, a fake source is created. The "story" does not refer to any source that documents the four-and-a-half months Melchior lived in Theresienstadt. In contrast, it conveys information that is not correct: "It was so cold. I was put to work even though I was exhausted and tired. Then all adults had to work."[70]

This is also incorrect. Work duty in the ghetto was not for "all adults". When the deportees arrived from Denmark, there was work duty for prisoners aged 16 to 60, so the oldest adults did not work, but the oldest among the children did, an information which could have been useful since the target group is about the same age.

The story of William Melchior ends with the words: "When the calendar showed February 27, 1944, then I perished. I was only 60 years old."[71] These words also include the last factual mistake. William Melchior was 59 years old when he died in February 1944, being born in April 1884.

[67] Benzion Epelmann, *Ghetto dagbog*: (3 Holckenfeldt 2005), pp. 18–20; Bornstein 2013, p. 60.
[68] William Melchior's "story" p. 55.
[69] Bornstein 2013, p. 64.
[70] William Melchior's "story" p. 55.
[71] Ibid.

METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

The intent of the teaching material is to support "the students' understanding of memory culture and source criticism".[72] However, there is no real discussion points of the use and abuse of history and the Jewish destinies, or the absurdity of speaking beyond death. The introduction includes five questions about memory culture, which all concern *Stolpersteine*; the last question is formulated like this, "When is one a victim?" After that follows three questions supposedly about source criticism, with the subtitle "General questions for all stones". These questions are: "1. Consider the descriptive details /2. What kind of details can be imagined and are they likely scenarios? /3. Why should the Danish Jews be captured?"[73]

Furthermore, there are a few specific questions next to every "story"; Melchior's read: "1. William Melchior dies in Theresienstadt. From where do you think the descriptions of the experiences underway and in Theresienstadt come from? /2. Do you think these are accurate descriptions of his experiences? Or are they likely experiences? /3. What do you think is the most common cause of death in Theresienstadt?"[74]

There are no references for students or teachers where to find additional material and information that could support discussion or just help to find fact-based answers. The title "Literature and useful links", refers only to the website snublesten.dk and it encourages the student to look for more information at another two websites, but includes no references to literature.[75]

The other "stories" are equally problematic; to mention a few issues: An orthodox man talks about his pre-deportation life in a way that it sounds like he is working during Shabbat and proud of it (Leon Ruben). The only man from Denmark, who was deported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz-Birkenau, tells how he was taken to the gas chamber and did not survive (Schmul Sender Jonisch). There are some examples of people who talk about events that took place after their deaths, or even in Auschwitz (for example, Rose Wulff, Benno Politur, Arthur Ascher, and the elderly siblings Regitze and Alexander Cordosa). Furthermore, there are factual mistakes regarding arrests, like in the story of Willie William Levysohn, who tells how he was arrested in his home in October 1943, whereas the real Levysohn was one of the 150 men taken hostage in late August 1943 after the cooperation policy had

[72] See p. 2 in the teacher manuals, https://www.jewmus.dk/besoeg/folkeskolen
[73] Introduktion og arbejdsspørgsmål til Snublesten (Elev), p. 4.
[74] William Melchior's "story" p. 53.
[75] https://folkedrab.dk and https://besættelsestidensofre.dk

ended. This would have been an opportunity to include the so-called August Rebellion, an event which is in the school curricula.

Another problem is the reuse of text images, which means that another prisoner tells the same story as Melchior about being hungry and hanging over the food barrel (Annie Smaalann). And when important knowledge about personal background has not been located (even though it is available in censuses, protocols, and other registries) holes in the narrative are filled with sentences like "There is a lot I cannot remember about my life. Maybe that is okay, since I reached the age of 72" (Benno Politur), or "I find it hard to remember why" (Alfred Heymann); something which makes the "storyteller" appear senile and show no respect for the individual person and the individual fate. As in the "story" of Alfred Heymann, an elderly man who lived most of his life with his sister until she died in 1940. She is not mentioned in his "story" at all, and he remembers only little of his childhood and youth.[76]

CONCLUSION

The aim of the material is to "support students' understanding of memory culture and source criticism", yet there is no explanation of how this should happen.

Without any explanation of what the first-person narrator is supposed to add (other than a fake source), and with no proper documentation, the material appears unreliable, and its power of enunciation limited. The idea that the dead speak from beyond the grave is both distasteful and absurd.

A discussion of the material's use and misuse of history and the Jewish fates would have been appropriate. As would a discussion of the photo manipulation (in the app) and manipulation of written sources (without references).

At a time when Holocaust denial and distortion are rising, the lack of credibility of this teaching material is highly problematic. At best, students may find it irrelevant and reject it as a basis for learning about the Holocaust. At worst, the material may be seen as a systematic falsification of history by those who wish to relativise or deny the Holocaust. Falsifications – even made with good intentions – are still falsifications, and in a field like Holocaust education, this is very problematic.

At a time when museums and knowledge institutions should be protecting children and young people from the consequences of living in a world characterized by the so-called "post-factual", such a central aspect of Denmark's recent history

[76] All the "stories" are found in the student material under the theme *Snublesten - Erindringskultur og kildekritik* at https://www.jewmus.dk/besoeg/gymnasieskolen

should be treated with greater care and professionalism. This educational material shows no respect for the victims, and where one might think that it would focus on the individual victim, the individual seems in fact to be irrelevant.

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Victims Ignored? A Case Study on the Global Absence of Public Memory Culture on Nazi Forced Labour Camps for Jews in Silesia and Individual Initiatives to commemorate them.

Susanne Barth[77]

INTRODUCTION

The paper addresses the difficult process of building a memory culture on the victims of forced labour camps for Jews in Silesia, so-called "Schmelt camps," and the negative effects the absence of public commemoration had on survivors. It introduces two private initiatives from the "grassroots" that pioneer the commemoration of the victims of Schmelt camps.

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE SCHMELT CAMPS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE HOLOCAUST

Following the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany in September 1939, Eastern Upper Silesia, a formerly Polish territory, was annexed to the Reich. The region's ethnically mixed Polish German population was screened for their suitability to become "Germans." Initial plans to deport the 120,000 Jews living in Eastern Upper Silesia to the Soviet borderlands were cancelled due to logistical impediments. Instead, it was decided to temporarily exploit them as forced labourers in ghetto workshops and camps. From October 1940, young Jewish women and men were thus interned in a system of forced labour camps established by Himmler's Special Commissioner in Silesia, Albrecht Schmelt. The so-called Schmelt camps operated outside the usual concentration camp system and were under direct control of Heinrich Himmler. Unlike concentration camps, they were guarded by the German

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order police and ethnic German auxiliaries. Ordinary civilians were installed as camp leaders. There were up to 180 Schmelt camps in Silesia and parts of Sudeten. Out of an estimated 75,000 women and men held in these camps, about 50,000 perished. The prisoners were exposed to extreme violence, and they died of starvation, illnesses, and neglect. Sick and emaciated prisoners were systematically killed in the camps, by drowning or poisoning for example, or sent to the gas chambers of Auschwitz. When the Eastern Upper Silesian ghettos had all been liquidated and most of their Jewish inhabitants had been murdered in 1943–1944, Schmelt's camp system was disbanded. A few of the most important Schmelt camps with a remainder of 25,000 prisoners were taken over by the Auschwitz and Gross-Rosen concentration camps.[78]

THE STOPPING OF WESTERN DEPORTATION TRAINS IN COSEL (KOŹLE)

The start of large-scale deportations of Jews from western Europe in summer 1942 also brought Jewish men from France, Belgium, and the Netherlands into Schmelt camps. By order of Albert Speer, Hitler's man in charge of constructing highways and industrial plants in Silesia, 10,000 men were taken off deportation convoys from Westerbork, Drancy and Mechelen/Malines during unscheduled stops in the freight depot of Cosel, a town situated about eighty kilometres northwest of Auschwitz. Schmelt's people forced men and boys between sixteen and fifty-five years off the trains and brutally separated them from their families, who had to travel on to Auschwitz to be gassed. The male deportees were then distributed among Schmelt camps as forced labourers. The events in Cosel left many mentally shattered and they quickly succumbed to the harsh conditions in Schmelt camps. Their mortality rates reached ninety-five per cent. Among the western deportees were also Jews from other European countries, like Austria, Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Romania, who had fled to France, Belgium, or the Netherlands and were rounded up by the Nazis. It is also important to remember that, due to the Cosel stops, about thirty

[78] Sybille Steinbacher, Musterstadt Auschwitz: Germanisierungspolitik und Judenmord in Ostoberschlesien [Model Town Auschwitz: Germanization Policies and the Mass Murder of the Jews in Eastern Upper Silesia], Munich: K.G. Saur, 2000; Susanne Barth, From Schmelt Camp to 'Little Auschwitz': Blechhammer's Role in the Holocaust, Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2024

per cent of the men on the official deportation lists never arrived in Auschwitz, but ended up in Schmelt camps, where most of them died.[79]

The fact that the Schmelt camps were responsible for the death of almost half the Jewish population of Eastern Upper Silesia by way of "annihilation through labour" underscores their prominent role in the Holocaust. The Cosel stops equally exposed Jews deported from western Europe to this annihilatory camp system.

THE SCHMELT CAMPS IN THE MEMORIES OF SURVIVORS AND IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Hundreds of survivors related their experiences in Schmelt camps after the war. Among the earliest archives to collect such testimonies were the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH) in Warsaw, the Dutch Institute for War Documentation (RIOD, today Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies, NIOD) in Amsterdam, and the Polish Research Institute (PIŻ) in Lund, where Jewish and non-Jewish survivors, who had come to Sweden, were interviewed. Unlike the concentration camps, and especially Auschwitz, the Schmelt camps were not in the focus of larger trials. There were some pre-trial investigations carried out by German regional courts in the 1960s and 1970s. Suspects were interrogated and witnesses heard, but these investigations rarely led to convictions.[80] The creation of digital archives in the 1980s and 1990s, like the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies (FVA) at Yale University and the USC Shoah Visual History Archive (VHA), substantially increased the number and availability of sources on the Schmelt camps. Several survivors also published autobiographies.[81] Survivors repeatedly stressed that the Schmelt camps had been worse than concentration camps.[82] However, the relevance of these small camps in the Holocaust all too often eluded the interviewers' attention - mostly because they were unfamiliar with the subject.

Historical research on the Schmelt camps started immediately after the war. The Polish Jewish survivor Natan Eliasz Szternfinkiel published a book about the mass

[79] Die Deportationstransporte während der sogenannten Cosel-Periode, Staatsarchiv Würzburg 2012–009, no. 37; Jean-Luc Pinot, *Convois: La déportation des Juifs de France [Convoy: The Deportations of the Jews of France]*, Paris: Éditions de Détour, 2019, pp. 48, 268; Susanne Barth, "Revisiting the 'Cosel Period': A Fresh Perspective on the Stopping of Western Deportation Trains En Route to Auschwitz, 1942–1943," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 39.2. (summer 2021): pp. 35–63.

[80] Trial against Members of the Schmelt Office, Landesarchiv Münster Q_234, nos. 4861–4883.

[81] For instance, Israel Rosengarten, Overleven. Relaas van een zestienjaarige joodse Antwerpenaar [Survival: Account of a Sixteen-Year-Old from Antwerp], Rotterdam: De Vries-Brouwers, 1996; Bil Spira, Die Legende vom Zeichner [Legend of a Draftsman], Vienna: Döcker-Verlag, 1997; Felix Weinberg, Boy 30529: A Memoir, London: Verso, 2013.

[82] See for example, Jacques G., HVT-2845, FVA; Samuel Abrams, NIOD 250d/386; Karl Demerer, Bundesarchiv (BArch) B 162/18175.

murder of the Eastern Upper Silesian Jewry in 1946.[83] Shortly thereafter, the Dutch Red Cross issued a report on the fate of Dutch Jews who had been selected for Schmelt camps during the Cosel stops.[84] Serge Klarsfeld later also referred to the Cosel stops in his studies on the deportations of Jews from France and Belgium.[85] Polish historians continued to investigate the Schmelt camps throughout the 1960s and 1980s.[86] Their work eventually inspired scholarship in Germany, Israel, and the United States from 2000 onwards.[87]

THE ABSENCE OF PUBLIC COMMEMORATION AND ITS EFFECTS ON SURVIVORS AND HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

Despite the relative abundance of sources and scholarship on the Schmelt camps, the victims have never been publicly commemorated in any of the affected countries or at the Auschwitz Memorial, and neither has their story been included in exhibitions or in Holocaust education.

This lack of public awareness even led some survivors to omit the Schmelt camps from their biographies. They often tended to claim that they had been to concentration camps, as these were more widely known. Survivors speaking in front of school classes and other audiences apparently felt a need for adapting their life stories and genuine memories of the Schmelt camps to a more "conformist" narrative of the concentration camps. Such deliberate alterations to one's memories may, in turn, cause a loss of veridical memories, especially when the survivors in question were exposed to traumatic events in the camps.[88] Léon Zyguel, for example, was a teenager when he and his father were pulled out of a deportation train from Drancy in Cosel in autumn 1942, and he must have spent over one year in Schmelt camps before they were taken over by Auschwitz. Decades later in France, Léon

[83] Natan Eliasz Szternfinkiel, Zagłada Żydów Sosnowca [The Annihilation of the Jews of Sosnowiec], Katowice: Centralna Żydówska Komisja Historicznej, 1946.

[84] L. Landesberger, A. de Haas, and K. Selowsky, Auschwitz, The Hague: The Netherlands' Red Cross, 1947–1953.

[85] Serge Klarsfeld, Mémorial de la Déportation des Juifs de France [Memorial to the Deportation of the Jews of France], Paris: Klarsfeld, 1978; Serge Klarsfeld and Maxime Steinberg, Mémorial de la Déportation des Juifs de Belgique [Memorial to the Deportation of the Jews of Belgium], Brussels: Union des déporté juifs en Belgique et filles et fils de la déportation, Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1982; also, Insa Meinen, Die Shoah in Belgien [The Shoah in Belgium], Darmstadt: WBG, 2009.

[86] Artur Eisenbach, *Hitlerowska Polityka Zagłady Żydów [Hitler's Policy of Annihilation against the Jews]*, Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1961; Alfred Konieczny, "Die Zwangsarbeit der Juden in Schlesien im Rahmen der 'Organisation Schmelt'" [The Forced Labour of Jews in the Framework of 'Organisation Schmelt']. In *Sozialpolitik und Judenvernichtung: Gibt es eine Ökonomie der Endlösung? Beiträge zur nationalsozialistischen Gesundheitspolitik*, edited by Götz Aly, pp. 91–110. Berlin: Rotbuch, 1987.

[87] Steinbacher, Musterstadt; Wolf Gruner, Jewish Forced Labor under the Nazis: Economic Needs and Racial Aims, 1938–1944, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006; Bella Gutterman, A Narrow Bridge to Life: Jewish Forced Labor and Survival in the Gross-Rosen Camp System, 1940–1945, New York: Berghahn Books, 2008; Janine P. Holc, The Weavers of Trautenau: Jewish Female Forced Labor in the Holocaust, Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2023.

[88] Jacinta M. Oulton, and Melanie K.T. Takarangi, "(Mis-) Remembering Negative Emotional Experiences." In *False and Distorted Memories*, edited by Robert E. Nash and James Ost, pp. 9–22. London: Routledge, 2017, here pp. 15–17.

participated in a Holocaust education program for schoolchildren, and one of his talks was even featured in the film *Les Héretiers* (English title: Once in a Lifetime, France 2014, directed by Marie-Castille Mention Schaar) based on the true story of a French school class participating in an essay prize contest on the Holocaust. Léon recounted the stop in Cosel, but instead of speaking about his experiences in Schmelt camps, he immediately fused the selection in Cosel with the tattooing of his Auschwitz number, which occurred much later. Sadly, a unique opportunity for making the Schmelt camps and the suffering they caused known to a wider audience, and especially to younger generations, through the popular medium of film, was missed here. Léon had possibly even suppressed his genuine memories of these camps, and the filmmakers were not aware of their history.

Similarly, an organization of Jewish survivors formed in early postwar Vienna created a card index with the names of its members and the camps they had been to. Most of them belonged to a group of Austrian emigrants who had fled to the South of France, were deported from Drancy and taken to Schmelt camps from Cosel in the beginning of September 1942. All of them nevertheless stated they had been in "Auschwitz" from the moment of their deportation.[89] As authorities were not familiar with the Schmelt camp system, former prisoners were also unlikely to receive restitutions. Respective claims by former Schmelt prisoners who had worked on an IG Farben construction site in Heydebreck (Kędzierżyn-Koźle, Silesia) were dismissed. IG Farben's legal representatives cynically argued that only Auschwitz prisoners were eligible for payments, as Auschwitz alone allegedly was "symbolic" of atrocities against humanity.[90]

The absence of public commemoration on Schmelt camps (coupled with some survivors falling silent over their experiences) contributed to an almost exclusive focus on concentration camps in Holocaust education, museums and other media. Fresh impetus for regional memory cultures comes from the "grassroots." Two such initiatives will be discussed in the following.

[89] Karteikarten des KZ-Verbands (Organisationskomitee der wegen ihrer Abstammung Verfolgten), Dokumentationsarchiv Österreichischer Widerstand (DOEW) 20100.

[90] Notes on restitution claims against IG Farben, 6 June 1962, NIOD 250k/894; Mitteilungen der österreichischen Lagergemeinschaft, May 1962, Dokumentationsarchiv des Bundes jüdischer Verfolgter des Naziregimes/Simon Wiesenthal Archiv.

REMEMBERING BLECHHAMMER: THE POLISH INITIATIVE "BLECHHAMMER-1944 ASSOCIATION"

In March 1942, a Schmelt camp was established adjacent to a synthetic fuel plant in Blechhammer (Blachownia Śląska). Up to 4,000 Jewish prisoners were detained there when the camp was taken over by Auschwitz in April 1944, turning it into its second largest subcamp.[91] Therefore, Blechhammer represents both a Schmelt camp and a concentration camp satellite.

The camp's barracks were dismantled after the war, but remnants from the Auschwitz phase, like watchtowers and a crematorium, are still visible. In the 1960s, a memorial wall was set up by the Polish State; however, no information on the camp's two histories is provided to visitors. The site is managed by the local community, Kędzierżyn-Koźle. Since 2006, an annual ceremony on 14 June, the National Day of Remembrance for Victims of the Nazi Concentration Camps and Death Camps, is held there. Owing to its history as an Auschwitz subcamp, Blechhammer is included in the ceremony, whereas the victims of its Schmelt camp phase are not explicitly remembered on this occasion.

In 2003, the local resident Waldemar Ociepski started an informal initiative by creating a memorial chamber in Blachownia Śląska's community centre for different categories of prisoners and forced labourers held in the area during the Second World War. He also investigated US air force raids on Nazi industrial sites. In 2011, the "Blechhammer-1944" Association (Stowarzyszenie "Blechhammer-1944") emerged from this initiative. All members are volunteers and, in their own words, "local history enthusiasts." Ociepski's original exhibition was expanded over the years and a museum was eventually established in a former air-raid shelter in 2019. It was accredited by the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. The permanent exhibition features photographs, objects, and archival material about both the Schmelt camp and Auschwitz subcamp phase of Blechhammer and informs about the prisoners' suffering and fates. Since 2011, the association also reaches out to community centres, schools, libraries and other museums to show parts of their exhibition and give lectures on the camp. Between 2015 and 2020, several visiting Israeli youth groups were given guided tours of the Blechhammer camp by members of the association. The association closely cooperates with the city authorities of Kędzierżyn-Koźle. In 2018, they created an inventory of the remains of the camp and collected archival material to write a historical study. On this basis, the city

[91] Franciszek Piper, "Das Nebenlager Blechhammer" [The Blechhammer Subcamp], *Hefte von Auschwitz*, 10 (1967), pp. 19–39; Barth, Schmelt Camp.

authorities carried out renovations in the camp. Moreover, the association conducts research and archival queries, for instance to help establish the fate of prisoners or trace burial sites.[92]

A MEMORIAL SITE FOR THE VICTIMS OF THE COSEL STOPS: THE DUTCH POLISH FOUNDATION *STICHTING GEDENKTEKEN JODENTRANSPORTEN COSEL*

The local population was for a long time unaware of the tragic history surrounding the freight station of Cosel (Koźle), where men deported from western Europe had been separated from their families.

It was only in 2012 that the "Blechhammer-1944" Association learned of the Cosel stops through survivor testimony and contacts to scholar Hermann F. Weiss (Ann Arbor, USA). The association undertook more research to find the historical site and joined forces with a Dutch initiative to form the *Stichting Gedenkteken Jodentransporten Cosel* [Foundation Memorial for Jewish transports to Cosel].[93] On 2 September 2016, six memorial plaques were unveiled at the Cosel freight station. Since then, the "Blechhammer-1944" Association and the Dutch foundation hold an annual commemorative ceremony together with students of the Cosel High School, who also take care of the memorial.[94]

CONCLUSION: THE (IMPOSSIBLE?) ROAD FROM "GRASSROOTS" INITIATIVES TO PUBLIC MEMORY CULTURE

The above examples show that private initiatives at the "grassroot" level understood the relevance of Schmelt camps in the history of the Holocaust and also in the history of the region they live in. Coming from all walks of life with no professional background as historians, they manage to establish a local memory culture. More importantly, they provide much needed information to residents who grew up with the problematic "heritage" of Nazi camp sites without being familiar with their complex histories. Young people are encouraged to learn and to keep the memory of these horrible sites alive. The initiatives equally offer their assistance to the families of former prisoners who have no other institution to turn to for their queries, and who wish to have a place to commemorate their next of kin. They consult historians

[92] Information kindly provided by Edward Haduch of the "Blechhammer-1944" Association.
[93] The Stichting Gedenkteken Jodentransporten Cosel was founded by Annelies and Herman van Rens, see https://www.holocaustlimburg.nl/cosel (March 2025).
[94] Information kindly provided by Edward Haduch of the "Blechhammer-1944" Association.

and add their own research, so that both sides benefit from the mutual exchange. This notwithstanding, the question remains why the existing knowledge on Schmelt camps (and practices of local memory culture) still does not permeate the sphere of public memory, Holocaust education, public memorials and museums.

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Beyond "Planet Auschwitz": Shifting spatial perspectives on the Holocaust in Norway

Karianne Hansen[95]

INTRODUCTION

Norwegian Jews were among 1,1 million Jewish victims murdered by the Nazis in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Most of the Holocaust's victims from Western and Northern Europe were deported to Auschwitz between 1942–1945.[96] In particular, Norway's 2,000 Jews are uniquely situated in this context as the only Jewish community to be slated for murder.[97] Yet, few Norwegian historians have attempted to develop an interpretive framework for understanding the life and death of one of the most peripheral victim groups in Auschwitz.

AUSCHWITZ AND WESTERN AND NORTHERN EUROPE

Histories of the Holocaust in Western Europe typically stop at the boundary of the occupied nation-state. This phenomenon is surprising given that the murder of Western and Northern European Jewry took place at the Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp complex. The disconnection between national Holocaust histories and Jewish experiences in the Nazi camps results in a severe historiographical disconnect in the Scandinavian context.[98]

The limits of national borders in Holocaust research, particularly in Western Europe, is further complicated by Auschwitz's existence as *the* symbol of the Holocaust more broadly: as modern, bureaucratic, detached and mechanical.[99] By treating Auschwitz as fundamentally disconnected from histories of occupation and

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[96] https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/auschwitz; it is worth noting that Jewish prisoners existed in Auschwitz since the camp opened in May 1940.

[97] For the most authorative account on the Holocaust in Norway see Bjarte Bruland, *Holocaust i Norge. Registrering. Deportasjon. Tilintetgjørelse* [Holocaust in Norway. Registration. Deportation. Extermination] (Oslo: Dreyers Forlag, 2017).

[98] See for instance Laurien Vastemhout, Between Community and Collaboration. 'Jewish Councils' in Western Europe under Nazi Occupation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

[99] As Dan Stone reminds us "[...] Auschwitz was low-tech", *The Holocaust. An Unfinished History (*London: Pelican Books, 2023*)* p. 198..

deportation, historians cement the history of the camps as set apart from their broader historical contexts. The barbed wire becomes a physical boundary, but it can also represent the boundary of historical knowledge to what took place *inside* the barbed wire fence. As this research paper suggests, for Norwegian Jews, Auschwitz was not the endpoint, disconnected to what had taken place before, but a point of continuity with national Holocaust histories.

AUSCHWITZ AS A HISTORICAL AND LIVED SPACE

In order to explore the topic of victims experiences in Auschwitz, the camp complex needs to be understood as a physically built and constructed space, as a "historical space".[100] To that end, Nikolaus Wachsmann invites us to think about Auschwitz not as a sharp break with civilization by design nor a confined space completely out of bounds, but as a place that is influenced and shaped by a larger system, the SS Main Economic and Administrative Office and the policies, ambitions and priorities of the *Schutzstaffel*, SS, led by Heinrich Himmler.[101]

Moreover, emphasising space and sensory contexts means engaging with the perspective of rendering Auschwitz a concrete and real space with subjective experiences, it can help us explore the "reality of living and dying in Auschwitz".[102] Similarly, Omer Bartov argues that we need to understand the events of the Holocaust "not just from the center or the periphery, nor with detachment, but from within the event itself: it means to integrate the perspective of first-hand accounts, to bridge the distance between the historian and the events themselves, to relegate the victim a different function than witness, but as a historical subject".[103] To that end, this research paper adopts Bartov and Wachsmann's perspective to engage with the lives and deaths of Norwegian Jews in Auschwitz.

NORWEGIAN JEWISH EXPERIENCES IN AUSCHWITZ

Death was an integral part of Norwegian Jewish experiences in Auschwitz: of 772 deported, less than 300 Norwegian Jews were registered as prisoners, and between 34

[100] Nikolaus Wachsmann, "Lived experience and the Holocaust: spaces, senses and emotions in Auschwitz", *Journal of the British Academy*, 9 (2021), p. 29

[101] For the full argument on Auschwitz in the context of the history of the concentration camps see Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (London: Little Brown, 2016)., pp. 18–19 & chapter 6. For the spatial evolution of Auschwitz see Anne Kelly Knowles, Tim Cole and Alberto Giordano (eds.), *Geographies of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

[102] Wachsmann 2021, p. 29.

[103] For Omer Bartov's full argument where also these quotes and ideas come from see Omer Bartov, "Between Integrated and First-Person History: Writing the Holocaust from Within", *The Journal of Holocaust Research*, 1, no. 37 (2023), pp. 65–71.

and 37 survived the deportation.[104] Given this reality, we need to go beyond these numbers and ask how life and death of Norwegian Jews was experienced and understood first hand.

Firstly, Norwegian Jews did not stay in Birkenau beyond their first night. A little over 50% of those registered as prisoners were forcibly sent onwards to a newly opened and unfinished Auschwitz camp in the Polish village Monowice (Monowitz, in German). The Monowitz camp held at this point in December 1942 a little over 2000 prisoners, though the camp would grow significantly up until the evacuation and eventual closing down in mid-January 1945.[105] A smaller group was reported to be left behind in the Auschwitz main camp, and around 30 ended up in the smaller subcamp of Golleschau.[106]

Secondly, as registered prisoners, Norwegian Jews were seldom murdered in the same camp that they were imprisoned in but transferred to hospital in the main camp, where some were transferred again to Birkenau to be gassed. For instance, the available and incomplete source material shows that transfer away from the Monowitz camp was the norm – at least in the period December 1942 and April 1943 – and we can sometimes learn of Jewish life through their camp hospital records. Simultaneously, we need to remain critical of using perpetrator source materials and terminology.[107] Victim testimony and archival records ascertains that Norwegian Jews did suffer from the consequences of physical violence, malnutrition and frostbite.[108] Some of these transferred prisoners are found again in the records after their initial transfer to the main camp, demonstrating their temporary survival before being murdered or killed as a result of conditions and illnesses. The experience of death therefore was not always immediate and mechanised, but consisted of a wide range of experiences, drawn out in time. For those left behind, loved ones

[104] On these numbers see Vibeke Banik 'Holocaust i Norge', Store norske leksikon, 2024. https://snl.no/Holocaust_i_Norge; Bruland, *Holocaust,* pp. 594–598.

[105] Around 11 000 prisoners were registered in late 1944, see Piotr Setkiewicz, *Histories of Auschwitz IG Farben Work Camps 1941–1945* (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2000), p. 114.

[106] Oskar Mendelsohn, *Jødenes Historie i Norge gjennom 300 år. Bind 2: 1940–1945* [The History of the Jews in Norway Through 300 Years. Volume 2: 1940–1945] (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1987). pp. 173–174.

[107] Setkiewicz explores the high mortality rates and the intensity of 'selections' in the Monowitz infirmary in this period in more detail, *Histories,* pp. 146-164.

[108] For example: Samuel Sachnowitz, brother of Herman Sachnowitz, was severly abused and beaten and registered with a head injury: Transfer list from the Buna infirmary to the main camp, Samuel Sachnowitz, 1.1.2.1/530591/Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives; Several Norwegian Jewish prisoners are found on transfer lists with diagnoses such as frostbite and the euphemistic 'general weakness of the body' Transfer list from the Buna infirmary to the main camp, Harry Steinmann, 1.1.2.1 / 529821/ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives. It is worth noting that the youngest brother of Herman Sachnowitz, Frank Sachnowitz, was killed in Natzweiler in a horrific skeletal experiment. However, the younger Sachnowitz brother was selected among scores of other victims in blocks 21 and 28 in the main camp – after his initial selection from the Buna-Monowitz infirmary for malnutrition, Hans-Joachim Lang, *Die Namen der Nummern. Wie es gelang, die 86 Opfer eines NS-Verbrechens zu identifizieren* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, 2004), pp. 115–116, 119, 160–161. Lang identified in 2001 all 86 victims of this gruesome experiment.

'disappeared' and it was only much later that survivors realised what had happened to their loved ones.

A FAMILY HISTORY AND A HISTORY OF THE FAMILY

Jewish individuals deported from Norway experienced camp life in different ways. The role of family life is an important context for understanding the testimonial and experiential dimension of Norwegian Jewish life in Auschwitz.[109]

Kai Feinberg writes he slept alongside his father and uncles during their first night in Birkenau, recalling an intense feeling of closeness with his father. Herman Sachnowitz and his four brothers remained closely together during the night in Birkenau. Sachnowitz recalls that the brothers were in "a caress so intense his arms went numb". Relatives of other prisoners, including the brother of Julius Paltiel, Idar, (Julius Paltiel was not on his transport), shared the same space.[110]

These reflections evoke two important dimensions to early Norwegian experiences in the camp: Auschwitz was not interpreted as a fundamentally alien place – another planet – but as a carceral-like space. Kai Feinberg writes that it was initially after moving away from the ramp that "we understood that we were on our way to a camp-like facility".[111]

Survivors describe the barracks in Birkenau as hastily constructed, with protruding nails and a lack of bedding. The shock of deportation and interment was slowly but surely emerging for a Jewish community who had not experienced long-term wartime imprisonment. On a social level, people attempted to organise themselves along kinship and familiar lines.

This familial context continued to operate for Norwegian Jews in Auschwitz: they entered the camp as part of a family constellation, now reduced to uncles, brothers and fathers. The family unit was now the primary structure of social relations for Norwegian Jews in the Auschwitz complex.

LONELINESS

Because of their small number, Norwegian Jews had a hard time staying together. From that first night in Birkenau, to a two-week quarantine in Monowitz,

[109] Natalia Aleksiun, "A Familial Turn in Holocaust Scholarship?", in Denisa Nestakova, Katja Grosse-Sommer, Bobala Klacsmann, Jakub Drábik (eds), *If This Is A Woman: Studies on Women and Gender in the Holocaust* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2021), pp. 20-42.

[110] Kai Feinberg and Arnt Stefansen, *Fange nr. 79108 Vender Tilbake* [Prisoner nr. 79108 Returns] (Oslo: Cappelens Forlag AS, 1995), p. 34; Herman Sachnowitz and Arnold Jacoby, *Det Angår Også deg* [It concerns you also] (Oslo: Cappelen, 1976), p. 34; Samuel Steinmann, tape 1, interview by Berit Reisel, Bjarte Bruland, Irene Levin, Oslo, 2004. HL-senteret.

[111] Feinberg and Stefansen, 1995, p. 34.

Norwegian Jews were initially quartered together in the Monowitz camp. Within three months, over half had been murdered and the rest were scattered around in different work details. Several survivors express that their daily life did not include other Norwegians, which made it particularly difficult for them to be alone in the intense, chaotic and intimate space of the barracks: Julius Paltiel respond he slept next to "no one special".[112] Robert Savosnick explains: "for quite some time, I had been the only Norwegian in our barrack and in the work details. I did not have anyone with whom I could talk in my native language, which was depressing. All the thoughts whirring in my head were in Norwegian. All my replies to the Germans had to be in German".113 Survivors were all in camps with other Norwegians, but illness, work assignments and assigned barracks kept them apart. Savosnick's emphasis on native language has a clear emotional and inclusive meaning: only those who can speak with him in Norwegian can truly understand his most personal thoughts and he could not make himself properly understood. Thus, Norwegian Jews discussed the pain of not being heard properly.

PRISONER SOCIETY

Prisoner society in Auschwitz was a hierarchically arranged social space that operated according to political and "racial" designations and assigned national identification. Jewish prisoners, irrespective of nationality were typically at the bottom, while non-Jewish Germans existed at the top. These hierarchies were dynamic and shifted over time.

My research argues that the labelling of a Jewish prisoner with the insignia 'N' for Norway occupied a neutral to positive connotation in Auschwitz. Culturally, Norwegian Jews formed relations with German speaking prisoners because of their ability to speak German as well as by the linguistic similarities between Norwegian and German. In the Nazi concentration camps, a hierarchy of languages developed, which included German, Yiddish, Hungarian and Polish (depending on the camp). Research has shown that for prisoners who did not initially appear to master these

[112] Interview with Julius Paltiel, interview code 39292, tape 5, 20:30. Interview by Sarah Abraham-Regev. 1998. Visual History Archive.
[113] Robert Savosnick and Hans Mehlien, *Jeg ville ikke dø. Fortalt til Hans Melien* [I Did Not Want to Die. Told to Hans Melien] (Oslo: Cappelen, 1986), p. 125.

languages, in particular Greek and Italian Jews, suffered social exclusion and political and cultural stereotyping.[114]

Survivors report that many fellow prisoners knew nothing about Norway.[115] Perhaps, unsurprisingly, sensationalism and curiosity toward the label of Norwegian is reflected in the source material with survivors being addressed as "der Norweger". In this sense, "der Norweger" functioned as a generic label. Yet, "der" denotes the singular in German and illustrates the general fate of Norwegians in the camp: their singularity.[116] Moreover, there were religious differences among prisoners. For example, some Jewish Norwegians mention participating in religious activities with German Jews, in particular. Matters of faith, religion and the role of family in passing down a sense of Jewish identity is, while not extensively discussed by the survivors, a part of a later reckoning in their memory narratives. In this vein, we may conclude that Norwegian Jews could partake in religious communities in Auschwitz if they were inclined or had the possibility to do so.[117]

CONCLUSION: AUSCHWITZ AS A SPATIAL THRESHOLD FOR NORWEGIAN JEWS

Victim experiences tell us a different history than the perception of a machinery of destruction; and they enable us to see beyond perpetrator narratives and perpetrator documents that do not tell the whole story. We can also break with the perpetrator logic by reclaiming the names, identities and, life stories of the people and communities that were destroyed by the Nazi regime.

Research has long nuanced our understanding of victim responses and behaviour during the Holocaust by focusing on a wide range of reactions, perspectives, and perceptions of agency as well as powerlessness.[118] We achieve this goal by moving away from the question of *why* to *how* Holocaust victims lived and died and by including a more diverse body of sources and victim perspectives.

At the same time, there is much we cannot know. In the case of Norwegian Jews, the source material is patchy at best. We cannot really know when and how many

[114] Paris Papamichos Chronakis, '"We Lived as Greeks and We Died as Greeks": Thessalonican Jews in Auschwitz and the Meanings of Nationhood', in Giorgos Antoniou and Dirk Moses (eds.), *The Holocaust in Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 157-180; Bieke Van Camp, '"They called us Maccaroni, pasta eaters..." The Integration of Italian Jews in the Nazi Camps', Quest – Issues in Contemporary Jewish History, 12 (2017), pp. 59-88.

[115] Moritz Nachstern and Ragnar Arntzen, *Falskmyntner I blokk 19* [Counterfeiter in block 19] (Oslo: Ex Libris Forlag, 1995), p. 34.

[116] Karianne Hansen, *The Nation in the Barrack: Norwegian experiences and Identity in the Nazi camps, 1942–1945*, PhD Thesis, School of History, Politics and International Relations, University of Leicester. 2024, pp. 58–59.

[117] Hansen. 2024, p. 47. See pp. 45-71 for the full exploration of faith and Jewish identity among Norwegian Jews in Auschwitz.

[118] Anna Hájková, *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

of them died, and we do not have a fuller female perspective as not one single female deported from occupied Norway to Auschwitz between 1942 and 1943 survived. Finally, we have no witnesses to the murder, to the destruction of generations of Norwegian Jewish families in the gas chambers of Birkenau. Still, survivors tried to talk about the memory of their dead and we need to write them back into history in a nuanced and empathic way: The concrete historical experiences of Norwegian Jews in Auschwitz should be at the centre of our understanding of the Holocaust in Norway.

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The Difficult Past in the Lives of Child Holocaust Survivors

Joanna Beata Michlic[119]

INTRODUCTION

During the 80th anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau camp in Oświęcim on 27th January 2025, child Holocaust survivors – the last living witnesses to the horrors of Nazism – raised concerns about the current proliferation of Holocaust denial and Holocaust distortions on social media, university campuses and streets of major Western cities and beyond. They expressed their dismay about the post-October 7 global intensification of antisemitism that has rapidly produced offensive Holocaust inversion narratives in which Jews are equated with Nazis who have no historical and moral right to invoke the Holocaust after Gaza and to pray Kaddish for the 6 million Jewish victims of Nazism. Under such circumstances, not only do the child Holocaust survivors worry about the present and future lives of their children and grandchildren, but also about the future of the state of world democracy, civil society and education against hatred, racism, antisemitism and xenophobia. In addition, the current violent antisemitic wave spreading all over the world has triggered memories of the most painful wartime past in child survivors.

Today, of course we recognize that the Holocaust left an indelible scar, with consequences that continue to echo across the child Holocaust survivors' multigeneration families.[120] In this article, I would like to turn our attention to the wartime experiences of the difficult (traumatic) past in the lives of child Holocaust

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[120] Regarding the transfer of trauma in families of Holocaust survivors, see for example, Judy Tydor Baumel-Schwartz and Amit Shrira (eds.), *Routledge International Handbook of Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Descendants of Holocaust Survivors*, the Routledge International handbook Series, (London: Routledge, 2024).

survivors.[121] I will discuss two types of difficult past caused by the fundamental first rupture in their young lives – the separation from their parents and subsequent irreparable loss of their close family members in the Holocaust. The first type of difficult past pertains to the wrongs done to the Jewish children and youth by those who were supposed to shelter and protect them from the Nazis and local German collaborators during the war. The second type of difficult past pertains to the presence of secrets and taboos in the children's lives during and in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Both these difficult pasts are commonly intertwined with each other. The first type of difficult past has had a profound impact on post-1945 social identity of young Jewish survivors. It has triggered fear and anxiety of being recognized as Jewish and influenced the ways the young survivors have interacted with their families and friends, and their ongoing relationship with Jewishness and Judaism in post-1945 era. The second type of difficult past has played a significant role in the child survivors' relationship with surviving family members, Jewish and non-Jewish adult-strangers and their peer groups, as well as with their children – the members of the second generation.

To show the scope of the influence of the difficult past on the lives of child survivors, I will focus on the experiences of one child survivor from Nazi-occupied Poland, Lena Atlas. Lena Atlas was born on 20 October 1937 in Lublin, a city in south-eastern Poland wherein 35 percent of prewar population of 120,000 was Jewish.[122] Lena's father, Aron Atlas, owned and operated with help from his wife and Lena's mother, Rozalia Putterman-Atlas, a well-known and popular women's fashion boutique located at the heart of prewar Lublin's commercial district at Krakowskie Przedmieście 28.

[121] In this article, I do not use the complex and disputed term trauma, but instead I refer to the difficult/painful pasts in the lives of child survivors and define these difficult pasts specifically. On the subject of trauma, among Jewish child Holocaust survivors, see for example, Tracey Farber, Gillian Eagle and Cora Smith, *Catastrophic Grief, Trauma, and Resilience in Child Concentration Camp Survivors: A Retrospective View of Their Holocaust Experiences* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2023) and Constance Pâris de Bollardière and Sharon Kangisser Cohen, *After the Darkness? Holocaust Survivors' Emotional, Psychological, and Social Journeys in the Early Postwar Period* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2023).

[122] For the history of Jews in Lublin before and during the Holocaust, see Adam Kopciowski, *Księga pamięci żydowskiego Lublina*, (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2011) and David Silberklang, *David Gates of Tears: the Holocaust in the Lublin District*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2013).

Figure 1: Rozalia and Aron Atlas with their children Natan, Abraham and Lena in Lublin (1939?), Lena Atlas and family's private photo collection.

Today, Lena believes that before the war, her parents owned the entire building and that they lived above the boutique.[123] In the first postwar interview with Lena recorded and registered in a child's file of January 1945, Lena could only remember the first name of her mother, Rozalia, but she did not remember her father's name at all. Neither at that time did she remember the first names of her two murdered older brothers, Natan (Nathan) and Abraham. Thanks to encountering later in life another Jewish survivor from Lublin who knew well Lena's family before the war, Lena, as a mature adult, learnt that her brothers like her were gifted young mathematicians and scientists.

In 1945, Lena was an eight-year-old bright and intelligent girl who was eager to catch up on her missed years of school, but her physical and mental health was poor. Her weight of 24 kilograms and sunken chest cavity were a clear indication of severe long-term malnutrition and physical neglect. At first, she was also viewed by Jewish educators as a disturbed child, prone to outburst of anger before she underwent a social rehabilitation through helping younger children in a Jewish children's orphanage in Lublin.

I first time came across Lena's case in my research on Jewish Children's identity in the aftermath of the Holocaust. In 2007, I published an article on the subject, "Who Am I?' The Identity of Jewish Children in Poland, 1945-1949, in which I included an excerpt from Lena's 1948 interview.[124] A couple of years later Lena's son, Adam Atlas contacted me with queries about my article as he did not know about the existence of his mother's 1948 testimony or details about her wartime childhood. Subsequently, on my suggestion, Adam Atlas encouraged his mother to give a video testimony to a local Montreal Holocaust Museum in Canada that took place in the middle of 2010s. With Adam's assistance, I interviewed Lena again in July 2024 while working on my forthcoming book on Jewish Child survivors in Poland.[125]

[123] Recollections of Lena Atlas of 9 July 2024, Montreal, Canada. The recorded and written recollections were possible thanks to assistance of Lena's son Adam Atlas to whom I am very grateful. Hereafter, Recollections of Lena Atlas of 9 July 2024.

[124] Joanna Beata Michlic, "Who Am I?' The Identity of Jewish Children in Poland, 1945-1949', *Focusing on Memorialization of the Holocaust*, Polin, Vol. 20 (2007), pp. 98–121.

[125] Joanna Beata Michlic, "Who Am I?' The Identity of Jewish Children in Poland, 1945-1949', *Focusing on Memorialization of the Holocaust*, Polin, Vol. 20 (2007), pp. 98–121.

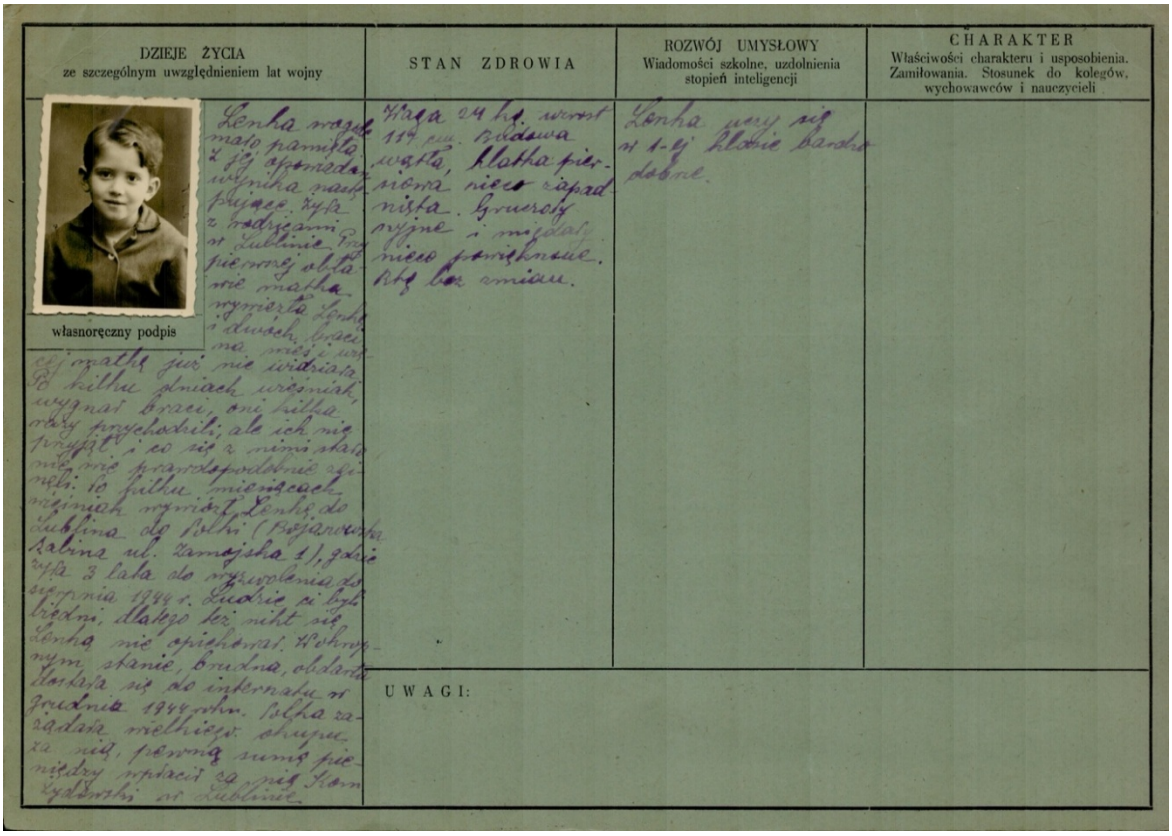

Figure 2: Lena Atlas, Karta Dziecka, Child's file of January 1945, ZIH 303_IX_86_18, the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute.

Lena Atlas's official child file, "Karta dziecka" (A child's file) of January 1945[126] and her testimony of 1948,[127] deposited at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, and video interviews of 2014 in Montreal Canada, and interviews with me in July 2024, combined with archival research enable me as a historian to fill out some gaps in Lena's pre-war, wartime and postwar biography. Lena's testimony of 1948 gives us raw, fresh insights into the range of painful experiences of hidden Jewish child fugitives living at the mercy of rescuers who did not care either about these children's physical and mental health or their general welfare.[128] In a straightforward

[126] Lena Atlas, Karta dziecka, Wydziału Oświaty CKŻP, no. 303/IX/649/172, Archives of ZIH.

[127] The testimony of Lena Atlas, born on 20 October 1937 at the Children's Home at No. 10 Ogrodowa Street in Petrolesie (today's Pieszyce). File no. No. 301/3364, Archives of ZIH. The testimony was written down in Polish by Janina Sobol-Masłowska, a survivor and member of the Jewish Historical Commission, who was also involved in the recovery of Jewish children from rescuers after the end of war. Lena signed the testimony.

[128] On rescuer-abusers, see Joanna Beata Michlic, "What Does a Child Remember? Recollections of the War and the Early Postwar Period among Child Survivors from Poland," in *Jewish Families in Europe, 1939–Present: History, Representation, and Memory*, ed. Joanna Beata Michlic (Boston: Brandeis University Press, 2017), 153–72.

and simple language, Lena was able to articulate the astonishing lack of compassion for her as a child on the part of her rescuers. As a pre-adolescent who just escaped genocidal conditions, Lena was capable to astutely observe that both her rescuers did not treat her on an equal par with their own children who had seemed to lead a relatively regular childhood despite the Nazi occupation, discrimination and persecution of Christian Polish population. In contrast to the children of her rescuers, Lena was denied any vestiges of childhood filled with love, carefree play, physical and emotional stability, and safety. In fact, she was treated as an un-paid child servant-slave who had to carry a heavy load of work not suitable for a child of her age, and who was denied the rights to eat the same basic food the first rescuer' family shared among themselves. Lena was also denied the rights to wear her own clothes that had been confiscated from her by her first rescuers, the farmer family, when she had arrived at their place. Shortly after, the farmer's daughter wore Lena's clothes in front of her eyes, a clear indication that Lena's feelings, dignity, and humanity did not matter to her purported rescuer-farmer. Lena was frequently beaten up and spoken to harshly for not accomplishing the tasks to the expectations of both her rescuers. However, she was capable to register that her second rescuer - a Catholic Polish woman in Lublin, treated her better than the farmer in the countryside. The farmer's family had neglected her physical health and hygiene to such an extent that, according to the girl, she became no use to them any longer, and therefore they decided to dispose of her. We do not know the details of Lena's transfer from the farmer's house to her second rescuer, Mrs. Sabina Bojanowska (Mrs. S. B.) in Lublin other than Lena's late postwar recollection of a long walk-through fields towards Lublin – a city known as the prewar Jerusalem of the North.[129] Mrs. S. Bojanowska indeed took care of Lena's basic hygiene and treated her with some gestures of human decency. As a result, Lena became completely emotionally attached to her. This instant strong attachment can be defined as a trauma bond syndrome as Lena (and other child survivors under similar conditions) was locked in a co-dependency with her rescuer. In her recollection of 9 July 2024, Lena names it a bizarre attachment, as gratefulness being different from a normal loving parent-child attachment.

Sometimes in the autumn of 1942 during the Nazi master-minded Action Reinhard aiming at the physical destruction of Polish Jews, Rozalia Atlas realized that she and her husband might not survive the war and decided to save her three

[129] Recollections of Lena Atlas of 9 July 2024.

young children by placing them with Polish farmers in the countryside, near Lublin. The mother prepared the children carefully for moving to the Aryan side - the public space forbidden to the Jews by the Nazi occupier. For Lena, the youngest, Rozalia chose a false Polish Catholic name, Lila Laskowska and had asked her daughter to repeat it many times prior to their separation. What we can also infer is that Lena's brothers were sheltered in the vicinity of Lena's rescue place and knew the location in which their youngest sister was in hiding. They, in fact, visited her on the farm. However, every time they came, the farmer chased them away. The boys were never traced after the war. In her recollection of 9 July 2024,[130] Lena believes that her brothers were not allowed to remain with her on the farm because they were circumcised. The farmer perceived their presence as an immediate threat to his family as only Jewish males underwent circumcision in prewar Poland. Lena also recalls that once one of her older brothers brought with him her favorite prewar or wartime toy and that in the immediate aftermath of that visit the brother might have been shot by one of the farmers. She vaguely remembers the shots and connects them to the fact that the brother never came back again to visit her.

During her stay with non-Jewish Polish rescuers, Lena, as many other young Jewish fugitives under similar circumstances, developed an overwhelming fear of being Jewish and being associated with Jews. This fear has influenced Lena's major postwar decisions about her future and her relationships with adoptive parents and her surviving biological grandparent. For the first time, Lena articulates clearly her anxiety and fear of being perceived as a Jewish girl in her early postwar testimony of 1948.

> I do not remember the day when the war started. I only remember events from the moment mummy took me to some Poles in a village near Lublin. She told me that my name was not Atlas, but Laskowska, and that I should not disclose to anyone that I was Jewish because they might kill me. I was obedient because I wanted to stay alive and was afraid of the Germans. I saw many times how the Germans were killing Jews in the village. Once they killed two women in the front of my eyes and they did not dig out a hole to bury them but left the corpses [unburied]. I did not know why they were killing Jews. The people, I was staying with, took all my dresses and coats and have given them to their daughter to wear. The girl did not play with me because they forbid her to do so, but I wanted to play with her so much. At night, I slept behind the stove, and during daytime I was tending the geese. Sometimes I took the cows to the

[130] Recollections of Lena Atlas of 9 July 2024.

> pastures. If the cows had walked to other [other farmers'] pastures, the farmer beat me up. Children sometimes called me "Jewess", but I did not respond out of fear and was terribly ashamed of my being Jewish. I envied the other children that they were not Jewish ("Jewesses"). I felt in my heart some kind of grudge towards someone, I was not sure who, for making me a Jew.[131]

Lena's transfer from her second rescuer Mrs. S.B to the Jewish children's home in Lublin, run by a Polish Jewish survivor Anna Natanblut (1890–1967) [132] was complicated and painful on many levels. Lena was afraid of returning to Jews and Jewish identity. As many other Jewish child fugitives, Lena perceived Jewish identity as a stigmatized one, being Jewish meant for Lena being haunted by the Germans and hated by many members of non-Jewish Polish society. Lena did not wish to be affiliated with a Jewish children's home in Lublin because she had lived for more than two years in a non-Jewish Polish environment absorbing anti-Jewish prejudices on everyday basis. But the man, from an unspecified Jewish organization who came to collect her, tricked her by saying: "Your mother is waiting for you." As she admits in an interview with me in July 2024, Lena did not know if this was true or not. Still, she was brave enough to decide to depart her rescuer, thinking that she could run away from the new place if she was not treated well there.[133] On the arrival at the Jewish children's home she received a warm welcome. To her astonishing surprise, Lena was offered her own bed with clean, white linen, and tasty food, and was cleaned off lice by a compassionate nurse.

By the summer of 1945, staff and children in the Jewish children's home in Lublin became acutely aware of increasing local attacks on surviving Jews including Jewish children. These attacks were organized by underground right wing Polish miliary units who were fighting a civil war against the communists. They held strong antisemitic views about the surviving Jews, blaming them for Judeo-communism - transferring Poland into the communist sphere. To protect the children and move as quickly as possible in anticipation of a potential attack by the rightwing military forces, the director of the Jewish Children's Home in Lublin decided on a swift relocation at 2:00am at night on 1 August 1945. The children were woken up, placed on a truck and taken to the train station for a ride to Pietrolesie in south-western

[131] Petrolesie (Pietrolesie /Pieszyce) (Lower Silesia), 13 March 1948, Lena Atlas. The testimony of Lena Atlas, File no. No. 301/3364, Archives of ZIH.
[132] Anna Natanblut is buried in Sweden, her chosen homeland to which she emigrated from post-1948 Poland.
[133] Recollections of Lena Atlas of 9 July 2024.

Poland. The new location for the children's home was relatively superior to the one in Lublin as the child survivors were housed in a former German hospital.

Figure 3: Jewish Children's Home in Lublin 1945, Lena Atlas third kid from left front row, Lena Atlas and family's private photo collection.

Unlike many child survivors in the children's home, Lena was taken in (if not technically adopted) by a childless Jewish couple working in the children's home in Pietrolesie. However, like so many other aspects of her wartime and early postwar biography, attempts at her adoption were filled with complications and twists. Lena recalls clearly that at that time, she didn't wish to be associated with Jews and feared to be near Jewish people. In the eyes of the eleven years old Lena, the husband of her potential adoptive first mother Pola looked too Jewish, so she became disobedient and refused to engage with them. After some time, Lena was taken in, by another loving childless Jewish couple, Rubin Feryszka and Luba Feryszka, secular communist Polish Jews who brought her up in Warsaw where she learnt to love a communist vision of the world.[134]

[134] Recollections of Lena Atlas of 9 July 2024.

But in 1947, when Lena was still living in Jewish children's home in Pietrolesie, her maternal grandfather Szyja Putterman traced her whereabouts through the Red Cross and international and local Jewish organizations. Szyja Putterman was an ordained Rabbi in prewar Lublin. But he was a bohemian type and preferred to play the violin to a solid rabbinical career. Because of his eclectic professional interests, he had a difficulty finding a steady job as a rabbi. At last, thanks to his practical daughter Rozalia, he found work as a mashgiach (kosher supervisor) and provider of entertainment on the Polish liner MS Batory and travelled between Gdynia, London and New York. At the outbreak of the WWII on 1 September he was still working on the liner and the Captain gave him permission to disembark in London in early September 1939 where he had settled for good during WWII. When Szyja Puterman finally located Lena, the only surviving close member of his family, he wished to adopt her. He instantly invited her to London. But in 1947, Lena declined his grandfather's invitation because as a ward of the Communist Polish state, she had been indoctrinated to believe negative thoughts about the capitalist world and England. Nevertheless, Lena was happy to be in touch with her grandfather and receive from him parcels

Figure 4: Lena's maternal grandfather Szyja Putterman on the liner M.S. Batory in New York, Lena Atlas and family's private photo collection.

with exotic foods such as chocolate and dates. She was one of the very few children in Pietrolesie's Jewish children's home with a surviving close relative.

In 1956, as a top student in her high school in Warsaw, Lena was sent to Moscow on a full scholarship to study at the Moscow Institute of Polygraphy. But soon after, a new wave of antisemitism broke out in Poland. Her adoptive father Rubin Feryszko lost his job at a military company in Warsaw and was denied the right to leave Poland for two years. He and his wife left Poland in 1958 for the USA to be reunited with their family. Before their departure for the new homeland, the couple realized that they did not have the financial means to pay for Lena's higher education in the United States. Therefore, they presented Lena with two options: to go back to Moscow to continue her studies there or to travel to London to be reunited with her biological grandfather Szyja Putterman. As Lena recalls, she decided to go to London. In late 1958, Lena was reunited with her grandfather whom she has not seen for more than 9 years. However, the reunion proved to be challenging from the start for reasons beyond Lena's control. One of the main obstacles laid in the long separation from her grandparent caused by the fundamental rupture – the Holocaust. Another reason was Lena's post-1945 upbringing by her adoptive parents Luba and Rubin Feryszko in communist Poland: Lena grew up happily in mostly secular culture with a strong leftwing ethos. Whereas in London her grandfather Szyja Putterman led a traditional Jewish life steeped in Orthodox traditions. On arrival to London, Lena wanted to boast to her grandfather and his second wife about how well Polish people eat and she took out the bread roll with ham and cheese that she brought from Poland as an exhibit of such an excellent diet. Her grandfather was shocked by her attempt of bringing ham to his home, as his house would have to be 'rekosherized' according to the strict Jewish rules of kashrut.[135] After this unfortunate episode, Szyja Putterman arranged for his beloved granddaughter to travel and stay with his nephew Namel Putterman in Paris. Lena returned to London from Paris when her grandfather suffered stroke. A few months later, in 1960, he passed away. In his will, he left Lena funds thanks to which she could immerse herself in the study of her beloved sciences. Lena studied and obtained a degree in Physics from City University in London. In February 1964, she married a (non-Jewish) Englishman with whom she has two children, the older son Bruno, who was born in London and the younger son, Adam who was born after the family emigrated to Canada. Lena has lived a fulfilling life as a mother and a

[135] Recollections of Lena Atlas of 9 July 2024.

professional woman in Canada. However, for a long time as an adult, Lena had a difficulty in accepting Jewish heritage, traditions and religion due to her wartime experiences. While raising her children, Lena met Mr. Gilbert Plaw, the principal of the Sunday school at Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom in Montreal. Thanks to warm conversations with Mr. Gilbert and his family, Lena was reintroduced to Judaism and Jewish traditions in a positive and meaningful way. As her son Adam Atlas states: "she wholeheartedly embraced Jewishness till the present attending the bar mitzvahs of her three grandsons, Eden Abraham Atlas, named after Lena's brother, Ben Aron Atlas, named after Lena's father and David Szyja Atlas, named after Lena's grandfather who brought her to London." Today, Lena is a retired physics teacher living in Montreal. She ran eight marathons and enjoys jogging, swimming and spending time with her sons and grandchildren.[136]

It took Lena more than thirty years after the Holocaust to accept her Jewish identity as not a stigmatized one and one that should not be afraid of but instead embrace with joy.

For many children like Lena, it was not only the German genocidal policy and practice towards Jews that made her afraid of regaining Jewish identity, but also antisemitic, violent attitudes and behaviour of members of the non-Jewish Polish population during the Holocaust and its immediate aftermath. Those children like Lena were subjected to a full range of harmful practices, ranging from verbal to physical and sexual abuse,[137] constant threats of denunciation and very meagre food portions despite a very heavy workload they were expected to perform on daily basis. Many of these children developed Stockholm syndrome of co-dependency with their rescuer-abusers and thus, were unable to leave them on their own accord after the end of the war.

Many child survivors like Lena when they have become adults did not necessarily wish to dwell on their traumatic wartime past for a variety of reasons including psychological, cultural, familial, and social. They were engaged in building professional and familial lives for themselves in unfamiliar and demanding social and cultural settings in the new homelands. Yet, after reaching a mature adult age, many

[136] Recollections of Lena Atlas of 9 July 2024.

[137] On sexual violence against children in WWII, see the forthcoming, Helga Amesberger Helga Embacher Johannes-Dieter. Steinert eds., *I haven't even told my mother. Children as victims of sexual and sexualised violence in the Second World War and its aftermath.* (Salzburg, Verlag -Edition Tandem, 2025). On physical violence against Jewish child survivors in early postwar Poland, see, for example, Karolina Panz, "The children are in a state of true panic", *Postwar Anti-Jewish Violence in Podhale and Its Youngest Victims*, Yad Vashem Studies, vol. 46 no. 1, 2018, 103 -140, and the same author, "Dlaczego oni, którzy tyle przecierpieli i przetrzymali, musieli zginąć. Żydowskie ofiary zbrojnej przemocy na Podhalu w latach 1945–1947, *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, vol. 11, 2015, 33–89, English version, ""Why Did They, Who Had Suffered So Much and Endured, Have to Die?": The Jewish victims of armed violence in Podhale (1945–1947), *Holocaust Studies and Materials*. Special issue in English, 2017, 148–211.

realized that the difficult past has lived within them and felt compelled to speak out about their prewar and wartime childhood. By paying attention to the difficult histories of child Holocaust survivors, we could learn a great deal about how societies perceive, engage with, and treat the most vulnerable – children and youth, and how the child survivors themselves deal with the incurred war traumas and the post genocidal reality. Cases such as Lena Atlas's provide valuable references, in discussions about social and cultural complexities and identity struggles experienced by child survivors (and their multigenerational families) of other genocides such as Armenian, Rwandan, Cambodian, or Bosnian, and bloody war zones conflicts.[138] Finally, they could prove the best educational lesson against the current wave of abuses of Holocaust memorialization.

[138] See for example, Yudit Kiss, *More Nights Than Days: A Survey of Writings of Child Genocide Survivors* (Budapest, Vienna, and New York, Central European University Press, 2023) and Introduction to the volume, *Childhood at War and Genocide. Agency, Survival and Representation*, Special Issue, EHS, vol. 5, 2024, 7-30, edited by Joanna B. Michlic, Yuliya von Saal and Anna Ulrich

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The Sea, The Ships, and Spaces: Exploring Maritime Holocaust Landscapes

Jon Reitan[139]

INTRODUCTION

The Holocaust was a genocide in constant motion, taking place in various landscapes, sites, and contexts over time.[140] Even from a narrow Norwegian perspective, the stages of genocide involved multiple events in new built environments, like transit camps to Auschwitz, but also natural landscapes that were transformed into genocidal milieus – such as the marshes of the Falstad forest in Mid-Norway, the border mountains to Sweden, and the sea, at which 773 Norwegian Jews were deported in four different ship transports in November 1942 and February 1943.[141] This paper discusses positions and functions of maritime landscapes in the collective memory of the Holocaust: To what extent, and in what ways, have maritime infrastructure played a role in visualizing, understanding, and remembering the Holocaust?

THE SEA: A MEMORIAL IN FLUX

The sea had different meanings to different people, at different times, during the Holocaust. This photo was taken on the shores of the fishing village Skede, north of Liepaja in Latvia, in June 2023. The view, the sound, and the salty smell of the Baltic Sea were the final sensory experiences of 2,700–2,800 Jewish men, women, and children from Liepaja before they were massacred and thrown into ditches in the sand dunes by German and Latvian units in December 1941.[142]

[139] Jon Reitan is an Associate Professor at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.
[140] Tim Cole, *Holocaust Landscapes* (Bloomsbury 2016).
[141] Bjarte Bruland, Holocaust i Norge. Registrering, deportasjon, tilintetgjørelse (Dreyers forlag 2017), 647.
[142] Yad Vashem, https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/this-month/december/1941-2.html

Figure 1: Skede Memorial, Liepaja, Latvia. June 2023. Photo: Jon Reitan.

The Baltic Sea was also the one thing standing between a dangerous and a safe space for Jews living in Denmark. In October 1943, the sea became a site of a massive rescue operation, when more than 7,000 Danish Jews were ferried across the narrow Öresund strait to Sweden.[143] Less than a year earlier, Norwegian Jews crossed the same waters, however not in fishing boats and cargo vessels guiding them to a safe zone. Instead, incarcerated in transport ships, the Baltic Sea became a cold and claustrophobic zone of suffering.

Some of the deported Jews from Norway were old enough to recall memories of their own emigration from Eastern Europe a few decades earlier, in which modernity and a new steamship industry turned the Baltic Sea into a site of hope and opportunity.[144] Now, the former migrants and their families were shipped back on the surface of a dystopian landscape. These contrasting experiences of dreams,

[143] See for instance Ulf Zander, "Dire Strait? When the Holocaust Came to Sweden – A Regional Perspective 1943–1945", in *Early Holocaust Memory in Sweden. Archives, Testimonies and Reflections*, Johannes Heuman and Pontus Rudberg (eds.): (Palgrave MacMillan 2021).

[144] Tobias Brinkmann (ed.), Points of Passage. Jewish Transmigrants from Eastern Europe in Scandinavia, Germany, and Britain 1880–1914 (Berghahn 2013).

despair, and destruction make the Baltic Sea an extraordinary space in Scandinavian-Jewish memory.

Now, all these different examples, connecting the Holocaust to the sea, have been exhibited in museums worldwide, from the perpetrator photos of Liepaja to authentic Danish rescue boats, and the iconic photograph of the *Donau* deportation from Oslo in 1942, which came on display for the first time in the Wannsee memorial in 1994. In the following, I aim to discuss another take on possible strategies and ways of engaging with maritime landscapes in museums. Empirically, the discussion will be limited to the cultural afterlife of the ship transports from Norway in 1942–1943, constituting a central part of the forced movements of Jews that also implied journeys by foot, in trucks, carts, and trains.[145]

THE POST-GENOCIDAL FATE OF THE DEPORTATION SHIPS

The most well-known of the deportation ships, the *Donau*, was built in Hamburg by the shipping company *Norddeutscher Lloyd* in 1929 and sailed mostly between Germany and the US West Coast in the coming years. After the outbreak of World War II, the ship was seized by the Nazis to transport troops and supplies to Norway, before it deported 529 Norwegian Jews in November 1942. The Donau sunk in the Oslo fjord in January 1945 after a spectacular sabotage mission carried out by the resistance movement. A few weeks after liberation, the newspaper *Aftenposten* published an article about shipwrecks and Nazi-confiscated ships, describing the visible presence of the *Donau* in the fjord: "Further south in the strait lies the 'Donau', its entire bow thrust into the pine forest and two masts jutting out at a senseless angle over the glittering sea. It stands as monument enough to the madness."[146] In 1952, the ship was raised, docked, and eventually sent to Germany for shipbreaking.

The *Monte Rosa* was originally a passenger ship, launched in 1930 and operated by the German shipping company *Hamburg Süd*. After the Nazis came to power, the ship was used to facilitate cruise holidays for the state-owned program *Kraft durch Freude*. During the War, the *Monte Rosa* was allocated for military use before it was requisitioned to deport Norwegian Jews on two occasions in November 1942. After liberation, the ship was confiscated as a war prize by Great Britain and renamed

[145] This paper is part of an ongoing research project on the roles of maritime infrastructure in Holocaust memory (April 2025). On aspects of forced deportations and relocations during the Holocaust, see for instance Simone Gigliotti, *The Train Journey. Transit, Captivity, and Witnessing in the Holocaust* (Berghahn Books 2010), and Gigliotti, "Conflict transport: Holocaust histories, routes, and witnesses", in *The Journal of Transport History*, 2024, Vol. 45 (2), 189–193.

[146] *Aftenposten*, 21 August 1945.

Empire Windrush.[147] The ship was severely damaged by fire on a journey from Japan to Southampton in 1954, and it sunk near Gibraltar.[148]

Finally, the *Gotenland* was originally ordered as a cargo vessel by a Norwegian shipping company in 1940, to be built in Copenhagen. However, after *Operation Weserübung* the ship was confiscated and later delivered to the German Navy. The *Gotenland* was put into service as a transport ship, mainly operating between Oslo, Copenhagen and the Baltic ports. One of the first tasks of the ship was to deport 158 Norwegian Jews to Stettin in February 1943. In October 1944, the ship was critically damaged in an Allied bomb raid and was retired from service shortly after. It was returned to its original owners in Oslo after the war, renamed *Hopeville*, and eventually sold to a Greek company. The *Gotenland* was sent to Shanghai for demolition in 1970.

Except for an unknown number of objects at the bottom of the Oslo fjord, the two ship´s bells from the *Donau* are the only remaining material evidence from these deportations. The bells are today on display at the Holocaust Centre and the Oslo fjord Museum respectively. The post-war absence of objects and remnants undoubtedly affected how the genocidal journeys were understood and commemorated in public life. Imagine, for instance, how society might have remembered them if the afterlife of the *Donau* had reached beyond 1952.

In comparison, a main reason why former concentration camps have occupied such a central, transnational place in Holocaust memory, is that visitors for decades have been confronted with a variety of spaces and built environments, facilitated to deepen our understanding of how people lived and died there. We simply cannot engage with space and carcerality in the same way with maritime infrastructure. The ships, vessels which Michel Foucault generally described as "places without a place", are gone and absolved.[149] Furthermore, the sea, a true landscape of infinity and cosmic rhythms, challenges the very nature of remembrance.[150] Hence, we need a set of strategies to make these deportation landscapes more recognizable.

THE SEA AND TRANSIT TESTIMONIES

Deportation testimonies have accumulated over time and in various contexts in the Norwegian collective memory, from accounts in post-war trials, private letters and

[147] In British history and memory, the ship is first and foremost known for carrying migrants from the Caribbean in 1948.
[148] Paul Arnott, Windrush. *A Ship Through Time* (The History Press 2021).
[149] The concept was first introduced in Michel Foucault, "Des espaces autres", *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuitès* (October 1984).
[150] See for instance John Mack, *The Sea. A Cultural History* (Reaktion Books 2011).

newspaper articles, published and unpublished memoirs. In November 1992, in the early Post-Cold War era, the 77-year-old Norwegian-Jewish survivor Robert Savosnick travelled back to Auschwitz with a journalist, 50 years after the *Donau* deportation. This journey was partly taped.[151] At one point, the journalist encourages Savosnick to recall his very first 24 hours as an Auschwitz inmate. In front of one of the prisoner barracks, visibly disturbed by revisiting the landscape again, Savosnick explains: "This is where we spent the first night in Auschwitz. We had been transported all the way from Norway under horrible conditions. We were totally exhausted, starving, and depleted."[152]

Evidently, I believe we need to think of the inner world of the forced deportations as something much more than a journey of relocation. From the outside, the ship transports could appear like any other passenger transport. However, transit narratives from inside the ships invite us to another zone of carcerality, bringing out their own sets of spatial, sensory, and emotional dimensions of the Holocaust.

In May 1947, Holocaust survivor Leo Eitinger wrote a letter to his friend Marcus Levin in Oslo. In a paragraph, Eitinger describes a scene unfolding on the *Gotenland* transport in February 1943, somewhere in the Baltic Sea:

> A young girl, who had been a teacher for the children at Bredtvedt prison [in Oslo, author´s remark], asked this officer if she could be allowed to sing with the children. "Yes, go ahead and sing, children, as long as you're alive," he replied. At the time, we all took these remarks as mere expressions, but later, after I had been in Auschwitz [...] I remembered those words, and it became clear to me that the officers knew exactly what was going to happen to us.[153]

In 1976, another Holocaust survivor, Herman Sachnowitz, published his memoirs *Det angår også deg*.[154] The book moved the Holocaust from the periphery towards the center of public attention in Norway.[155] In one of the chapters, he describes an episode on board the *Donau* transport, in which he was allowed to see his sister Marie:

> Before I returned to the prison cell, I asked a guard for permission to make a brief visit to the women´s section. I said, truthfully, that I had heard one of my sisters was

[151] The tape is today located in the archives of the Jewish Museum Trondheim.
[152] Robert Savosnick, November 1992 (taped interview), Jewish Museum Trondheim.
[153] Riksarkivet Oslo, PA 0874 Private Archive Oskar Mendelsohn, Box 6, letter 12 May 1947.
[154] Herman Sachnowitz, *Det angår også deg [It also concerns you]* (Cappelens forlag, 1976).
[155] Jon Reitan, Møter med Holocaust. Norske perspektiver på tilintetgjørelsens historiekultur [Encounters with the Holocaust. Norwegian perspectives on the historical culture of the Final Solution] (NTNU, PhD thesis, 2016).

> supposed to be in the same transport, and I wanted to know which one it was [...] Down in the cargo hold at the stern, women and children lay packed together on dirty straw mattresses thrown across the floor. They too were locked inside cages. Like wild animals in transport. Like us. After the fresh air on deck, the stench of sweat, vomit and infant urine was sickening – but I forgot it all when, in the midst of the misery, I found Marie.[156]

Robert Savosnick published his own memoirs a decade after Sachnowitz, six years before accepting the journalist´s invitation to revisit Auschwitz. This is how he remembers space and carcerality on board the *Donau* transport: "It's cold and dark in the cargo room where I end up. Suffocating, a musty smell [...] broad ledges in several floors along the side walls [...] The ship is obviously converted for human transport."[157]

The number of survivor accounts from the ship transports are indeed very few, localized in private and public containers of memory in post-war Norway. From both a historical and curatorial perspective, I will argue that these unique sources demonstrate a need to engage with the sea and maritime Holocaust infrastructure as a category of carceral landscape in its own right, as a true space of exception, generating its own traumas.

[156] Sachnowitz 1976, 19.
[157] Robert Savosnick, *Jeg ville ikke dø [I did not want to die]* (Cappelens forlag 1986).

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Collecting for the new Swedish Holocaust Museum

Yael Fried & Elin Thomasson[158]

INTRODUCTION

In 2021 the Swedish government decided to establish a Swedish Holocaust Museum, based on new collections. In this poster we want to show the process of collecting and exemplify material categories with new acquisitions. How is the collecting process developing? What material has surfaced? And what does this mean for the future of Holocaust memory in the Nordic countries and internationally? What questions do they raise and what insights can they give us regarding Holocaust memory in the Swedish context?

THE COLLECTION PROCESS

As in any museum, there is a set process of collecting. With regards to collecting Holocaust material there are some factors that are vital, and perhaps more problematic, than usual. Firstly, establishing contact with a donor requires sensitivity. At this point in history, donors are most often either survivors themselves or children of survivors. In either case, they are of advanced age and sometimes struggle with memory and trauma. Handing over material is emotional and can by some donors be experienced as a letting go of a heavy past. For others it feels like they are giving away a part of themselves or their family. Establishing a good relationship with a donor is therefore key to a successful acquisition, where in the end both donor and curator are on the same terms.

It is the curators' job to establish provenance and do the necessary inquiries regarding due diligence. In most cases it is not difficult – the material is personal with signatures and photographs. But sometimes ethical and legal questions arise. These do not always need to be resolved for an acquisition to take place, but it is

[158] Yael Fried and Elin Thomasson are curators at the Swedish Holocaust Museum. This is their poster presentation.

advisable to address them beforehand. Even if we acquire certain images, does it mean that we can display them? Are there copyrights?

Once the material has been handed over it needs to be registered and catalogued properly. This includes documenting as much as possible. How did the material arrive, from whom, are there detailed circumstances that might shed light on this specific story? Everything is then digitized to meet today's museum standard, and, if possible, made accessible online. If needed, the material undergoes preservation and is then carefully stored in the archives or depot for future generations.

We have identified four basic material categories that we deal with: photographs, archives, oral history and objects. They all show different aspects of how the Holocaust related to Sweden and how survivors and their descendants have dealt with trauma.

OBJECT: ICON

Figure 1: Icon, given to Hanna and Georg Dimitri as a wedding gift in 1947.

Hanna Dimitri survived the genocide of the Roma in Poland and came to Sweden with the White buses in 1945. She never told her children of her experience but instead shared her emotions with an icon. It is thus a post-war object, loaded with a personal narrative. Just as the object has been inherited, so has the trauma, and the icon carried the family history into the museum.

OBJECT: PHOTOGRAPH

Figure 2: Photograph of Sala Zoltowska given to Rosa Gustafsson (Née Ebel) in Visingsö refugee camp in 1945. Donated to the collection by Rosa's son.

As part of a larger collection of photographs from a Swedish reception center, a small photo of an unknown woman was found. Through identifying her, we came in contact with additional children of the local survivor community in rural Sweden. The collecting process and provenance research can thus accumulate new acquisitions and networks. It also leads to new insights and knowledge about "non-killing sites" which survivors came to in Sweden and where they started rebuilding their lives.

ARCHIVES: LETTER

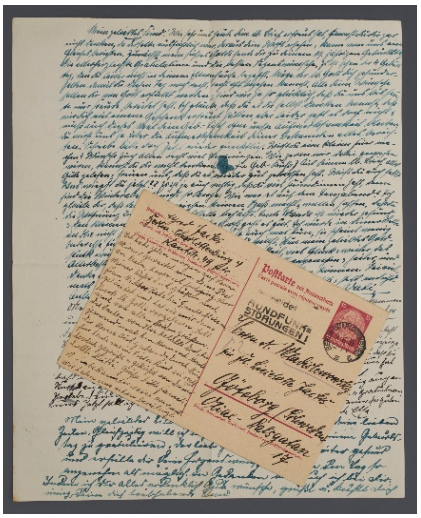

Figure 3: Letter sent to 15year old Liselotte Jacks in Sweden by her parents in Berlin.

Most of the new acquisitions are archival material. Often piles of letters and other documents, such as passports, travel applications and medical files show the desperation of relatives caught in Germany or Austria after their children were sent to safety in Sweden. In some cases, the existence of the letters and other documents has been unknown until now. They are found only after the parents have passed away, hidden deep in the closet or in the upholstery of a chair. Provenance research becomes a joint effort together with the donor. We, as curators, can help fill the gaps in their family history.

ORAL HISTORY: INTERVIEW

Figure 4: Interview with Susan Pollack, in cooperation with the Association of Jewish Refugees in London. She talks about postwar life in Sweden, something no one had ever been interested in collecting in Great Britain before.

As part of establishing the museum, we also conduct interviews. The methods we use vary, depending on the context and age of the interviewed. We ask questions that have not been asked so often before, such as what life in Sweden was like and about experiences of transmigration. Questions such as these have always been in the shadow of questions about Auschwitz or ghettos. We are now trying to fill this gap. One way has been through cooperation with a London-based organization –

the Association of Jewish Refugees. Two British women could tell us about life in Sweden, something no one had ever been interested in collecting in Great Britain before.

THE MUSEUM IN 50 YEARS

With the generations of survivors gone, the museum now upholds the memory of the Holocaust in Sweden. What the collection can tell us about this is open to research. This is where we invite researchers, writers, students and future generations of scholars to work with our collected material. What are the important research questions for tomorrow? What gaps can these collections fill?

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How do we include them – the other survivors?

Pia-Kristina Garde[159]

INTRODUCTION

Sweden received many survivors after the war, and in June 1945, people from The Cooperative Committee for Democratic Construction visited several rehabilitation centres for survivors. They wanted to find out what had happened to the survivors. They had created a questionnaire in different languages that was handed out to everyone who was willing to take part; Jews, Catholics, Protestants, and others.

In 1945 a book based on the answers was published, *De dödsdömda vittna* (*Those Who Were Sentenced to Death testifies*), by Gunhild and Einar Tegen. I have for many years tried to find the people in the book.

There are Holocaust museums in many places, but not all who were sent to the camps were destined to be exterminated.

I am thinking about able-bodied men and women who were used for work, members of the resistance, students that helped save Jewish children, clergy who were humiliated, women who were subjected to sexual assault, or experimental surgery.

There are or have been survivor groups in several countries, where the memories have been kept alive by the survivors themselves, Amicale de Ravensbrück for example, and for Auschwitz and other camps too, but now, when so many are gone... Who speaks for them? How do we remember them? This poster asks the question: How do we include all groups of survivors in Holocaust museums?

[159] Pia-Kristina Garde (b. 1951) has written a book about the survivors that came to Sweden in 1945. It has also been published in Poland.

SOME OF THEM

Figure 1: Gustawa Winkowska (1905-1997).

Gustawa Winkowska, was caught in Zakopane, where she happened to be when the war broke out. Her husband Henryk Winkowski and son Jan were in Ostrow with his paternal grandparents. Gustawa was taken to prison where she was severely assaulted. She later came to Ravensbrück, where she was put to work as secretary to the camp doctors.

She testified in several trials, first in Nuremberg in 1945, and then in the Ravensbrück trials that took place between 1946–1948, about what she had seen and heard during her three years in Ravensbrück; how the prisoners were mistreated by doctors and nurses, and that healthy women were brought in, sometimes fighting, to experimental surgery, and died.

She also talked about how women were sterilized. A gynecologist would come from Auschwitz for a week to sterilize women, even young Roma girls, because they could get pregnant from 14 years old, the doctor said.

Gustawa Winkowska was liberated in Ravensbrück and was taken to Sweden. Her husband, Henryk Winkowski (1897–1940) had been murdered during the Katyn Massacre of Polish military officers, in 1940. Gustawa Winkowska never returned

home. She did not want to "live under the Russian heal", she wrote, that had murdered her husband.

For many years she tried to get her son out of Poland, but he grew up and had his own family, and in the end he wanted to stay. So she visited now and then. Gustawa Winkowska outlived her son, but they are now buried together in Laski, a convent graveyard, outside Warsaw.

Figure 2: Josef Holy (1907–1985).

Josef Holy was caught because of political activities and resistance work. His questionnaire is one of the longest and most detailed. He spent five years in different jails and concentration camps.

There was a time when he was supposed to be released, and he was sent to Veveri, Brno on May 16, 1942. But then *SS-Obergruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich was attacked and he passed away June 4th, 1942, and Josef Holy was forced to stay and work for the Gestapo. And out of everything he went through, this was the worst.

He writes about countless groups of Czech patriots that were brought in, "good innocent Czech's were arrested day and night, without a break." "It is impossible to

describe the horrible scenes that played out at the assembly centres, during the interrogations, court-martials and at the place of execution."

He met many people that he knew, both men and women. "I talked to them before they were executed, and they often opened their hearts to me and asked me to deliver a final message to their loved ones." He writes that during this time it was impossible for him to sleep and that he could hardly eat. "It was a terrible work that tore at both body and soul."

After Brno, Josef Holy spent a short time in Dachau and then 3 years in Neuengamme.

He was liberated on May 11, 1945, and was taken to Sweden by boat. He writes about seeing friendly people waving to them as they approached the harbour. People with friendly faces, people they didn't have to fear, people that didn't murder. The time he came to spend in Sweden meant a lot to him.

He returned home to Bystrica, Mähren. I found his family, through another survivor in the Czech Republic. Mr Holy had gotten married, and the couple had two children. I communicated with his son. It had been difficult for Josef to return to ordinary life, the memory of what he had experienced haunted him. But he found peace at last when he started working in the military, and his son wrote that he became like another person. I have always hoped there would be a place for his testimony, maybe it is only saved here in Sweden.

Figure 3: Henriëtte "Hetty" Voûte (1918–1999).

Henriëtte "Hetty" Voûte was a young student living in Amsterdam. She was in a group that worked with saving Jewish children. She wrote that it was a full time job trying to find families that would take in the children, forged papers, ration cards. She was eventually caught.

She spent time in several camps. She was liberated in Ravensbrück, and was taken to Sweden, to the castle that is now Malmö Museum.

She told me that they had forgotten to ask the parents of the children, *one thing*: "If you die, what do you want us to do with the children? What kind of upbringing do you want for your children?"

In 1988 Hetty Voûte was recognized as Righteous Among the Nations, by Yad Vashem, in Israel.

There is so much to tell. I want them all to be remembered.

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From the Archives into the Classrooms. The educational programme of the State Archive of Saxony-Anhalt

Riccarda Henkel[160]

INTRODUCTION

With the loss of the last remaining eyewitnesses to the Holocaust, the focus is shifting to historical sites and original archival documents as the only authentic testimony of the Nazi period. In light of this the State Archive of Saxony-Anhalt is publishing a series under the title *QuellenNAH* to facilitate access to these unique sources and to promote their use in historical education.

LEARNING ABOUT NAZI HISTORY IN SAXONY-ANHALT

In Germany's federal structure, the school system, including the development of the curriculum and the teaching of history, is the responsibility of individual states. In Saxony-Anhalt, the Nazi period is taught as part of the history curriculum from grade 9 and in greater depth at grammar school (Gymnasium) in grades 11 and 12. The stated aim of history lessons is to "develop an individual historical awareness" and to promote "historical competence" in the students, which encompasses interpretive, narrative and historical-cultural competence. [161] In relation to interdisciplinary topics the history of National Socialism is also taught across subjects such as Social Studies, Ethics, Religion and German. Regular lessons are supplemented by school projects and excursions to memorial sites.[162]

[160] Riccarda Henkel is an archivist at the State Archive of Saxony-Anhalt (Landesarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt) in Magdeburg.

[161] Ministerium für Bildung des Landes Sachsen-Anhalt, *Fachlehrplan Gymnasium – Geschichte*. (2022), p. 6 <https://www.bildung-lsa.de/files/b45de329c361a40a2f0a721190203d5815/FLP_Geschichte_Gym_01082022_swd.pdf (Download 24.03.2025); Ministerium für Bildung des Landes Sachsen-Anhalt, *Fachlehrplan Sekundarschule – Geschichte*. (2019), p. 5. <https://www.bildung-lsa.de/files/164f3f97e3adf65ff6f44685dd9e1ced/lp_sks_gesch_01_08_2019.pdf> (Download 24.03.2025).

[162] Memorial sites in Saxony-Anhalt on the history of National Socialism include: Gedenkstätte KZ Lichtenburg Prettin, Gedenkstätte Feldscheine Isenschnibbe Gardelegen, Gedenkstätte für Opfer der NS-„Euthanasie" Bernburg, Gedenkstätte ROTER OCHSE Halle (Saale), Gedenkstätte für die Opfer des KZ Langenstein-Zwieberge, Gedenkstätte Moritzplatz Magdeburg. These memorials are run by the Saxony-Anhalt Memorials Foundation (Stiftung Gedenkstätten Sachsen-Anhalt). <https://stgs.sachsen-anhalt.de/stiftung-gedenkstaetten-sachsen-anhalt> (Download 24.03.2025).

Despite the history of the Nazi period being taught consistently in schools, different studies continue to report a lack of knowledge about the Holocaust and growing antisemitic[163] or antiziganistic[164] attitudes in German society and specifically among students.[165] To counteract this there is a need for historical education that offers students diverse points of contact with history in order to develop a critical awareness. Teachers in particular must be supported, as they have the key role of imparting knowledge of the past.

LEARNING WITH *QUELLENNAH*

In 2020, the State Archive of Saxony-Anhalt launched a project to develop educational materials. Since then nine brochures in the *QuellenNAH* series have been published. These brochures are designed to support teachers in the teaching of local and regional history, which is often neglected in textbooks. This regional approach is intended to make history proximate and tangible, engaging students with their immediate surroundings and to facilitate learning that has a lasting effect.

Original archival sources, reproduced and didactically annotated, are at the centre of *QuellenNAH*. This gives students direct access to the documents and encourages critical analysis of the sources. Moreover, different types of archival sources are included, which allow students to relate them to each other. Longer thematic overviews provide the broader historical context, while shorter introductory texts serve as a prelude to each document.

One challenge when working with original documents from the Nazi period is contending with the language of the time. Many of the sources are administrative in nature and therefore confront students with the language of National Socialism and a perpetrator narrative. To promote the students' sensitivity to language and avoid reproducing the Nazi terminology in the learning process, propaganda phrases, euphemistic expressions as well as ideological and stigmatising terms are clearly indicated in the texts.

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[163] RIAS Saxony-Anhalt provides up-to-date overviews of antisemitic incidents in Saxony-Anhalt. OFEK e.V. – Beratungsstelle bei antisemitischer Gewalt und Diskriminierung (ed.), *Antisemitische Vorfälle in Sachsen-Anhalt*. (2024). <https://report-antisemitism.de/rias-sachsen-anhalt/#publications> (Download 24.03.2025).

[164] Current overviews of antiziganist incidents in Germany are provided by MIA. MIA - Melde- und Informationsstelle Antiziganismus (ed.), *Antiziganistische Vorfälle in Deutschland: Jahresbericht der Melde- und Informationsstelle Antiziganismus*. (2024). <MIA veröffentlicht 2. Jahresbericht zu antiziganistischen Vorfällen in Deutschland. Die Vorfallzahl hat sich im Vergleich zum Vorjahr beinahe verdoppelt - Melde- und Informationsstelle Antiziganismus> (Download 24.03.2025).

[165] Julia Bernstein, Antisemitismus an Schulen in Deutschland. Befunde – Analysen – Handlungsoptionen (Bonn bpb, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2020); Marina Chernivsky, Friederike Lorenz-Sinai, Studienbericht Antisemitismus im Kontext Schule in Sachsen-Anhalt. Laufzeit der Studie: 2021 – 2023. Berlin 2024. < https://zwst-kompetenzzentrum.de/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Studienbericht_LSA_Web.pdf > (Download 25.08.2025).

TEACHING WITH *QUELLENNAH*

The *QuellenNAH* series has been designed to follow a modular structure, with each module focusing explicitly on a different aspect of the history of Saxony-Anhalt. The module on the Nazi era comprises three brochures which address the following aspects: Repression and scope for action' (*Repression und Handlungsspielräume*), Youth and Education (*Jugend und Erziehung*) and Economy and Labour (*Wirtschaft und Arbeit*).

The conceptual framework of the *QuellenNAH* series is summarised by the term 'society', the plurality of which is expressed through the selection of sources. The collection of sources illuminates different facets of how individuals positioned themselves in relation to the Nazi regime. In the selection of sources, an effort was made to elucidate the intricacies of quotidian history. The documents tell of victims, perpetrators and bystanders, thereby avoiding a simplistic portrayal of historical events and developments.

THE HISTORY OF PERSECUTED MINORITIES IN *QUELLENNAH*

In the *QuellenNAH* module on the history of National Socialism, the Shoah and crimes committed against the Sinti and Roma are addressed from different vantage points and by using various sources. However, teachers have expressed a desire to learn more about Jewish history in Saxony-Anhalt and the history of the Sinti and Roma. This request corresponds to the demand from representatives of these minority groups within Germany for an inclusive historical narrative that does not view minorities exclusively in the context of Nazi crimes, but recognizes their contribution to German history and society.

Against this backdrop the *QuellenNAH* booklet *At home in Saxony-Anhalt. Jews between persecution, self-assertion and recognition* (*Zu Hause in Sachsen-Anhalt. Jüdinnen und Juden zwischen Verfolgung, Selbstbehauptung und Anerkennung*) was published in 2022 and followed in 2024 by booklet, *Sinti and Roma in Saxony-Anhalt. Between Antiziganism and Self-Assertion* (*Sinti und Roma in Sachsen-Anhalt. Zwischen Antiziganismus und Selbstbehauptung*). These booklets span across different periods and place a special focus on deconstructing racist stereotypes, which appear in their historical forms in the documents, but have repeatedly appeared in the current thinking of some students.

In the development of educational materials pertaining to the history of minority groups, it is imperative to heed the demand articulated by representatives of these

communities: "Nothing about us without us!" As a state institution, the State Archive of Saxony-Anhalt can build on an existing network of academic, cultural and political institutions, while forging new connections. The *QuellenNAH* booklet on Jewish history was supported by the association 321-2021: 1700 Jahre jüdisches Leben in Deutschland e.V. The development process involved an exchange with academic institutions, museums, memorial sites and interest groups in the region, and was presented to the public as part of the Jewish Culture Days 2022.

In developing the *QuellenNAH* booklet on the history of the Sinti and Roma, the State Archive of Saxony-Anhalt cooperated with the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma (*Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma*). The Centre supported the project in two ways: firstly, it assisted with the conceptual framework for the publication, and secondly, it facilitated contacts between the project team and the descendants of individuals named in the selected historical documents. Furthermore, the State Archive initiated a collaboration with the association 'Menda Yek e.V.', which was established in 2022 under the auspices of AMCHA Deutschland e.V. and advocates for the rights of the descendants of Sinti who were targeted by the Nazi regime.

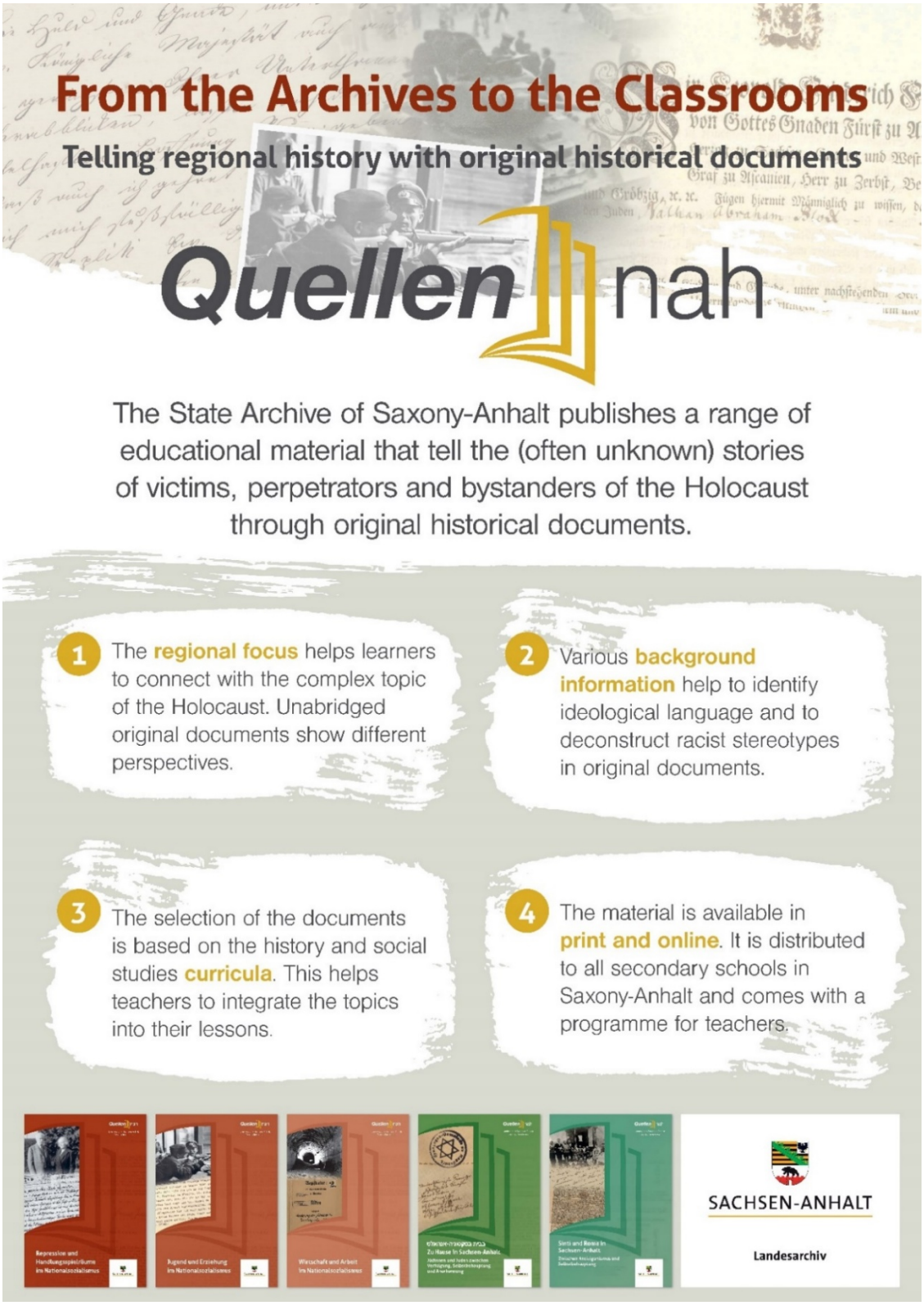
EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME AROUND *QUELLENNAH*

The *QuellenNAH* series is primarily directed at teachers who use the materials in the classroom. To serve this target group, the project has partnered with the Institute for School Quality and Teacher Training in Saxony-Anhalt (*Landesinstitut für Schulqualität und Lehrerbildung Sachsen-Anhalt*). It provides advice on how to link the materials to the subject curricula and runs workshops as part of the official teacher training programme. These workshops offer teachers the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the *QuellenNAH* series, its concept and to meet the authors of the booklets. Additionally, teachers are given the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the State Archive Saxony-Anhalt and the unique documents on site.

The *QuellenNAH* series has also been designed to be utilised outside the classroom as a component within the broader context of historical education. The intention has been to appeal to individuals with a general interest in the regional history of Saxony-Anhalt. For this reason, the project has received financial support from the State Centre for Political Education (*Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Sachsen-Anhalt*), and the series can be obtained from them.

All nine brochures of the *QuellenNAH* series are available in print and as a free digital download. In the context of teacher shortages and the cancellation of lessons, the State Archive of Saxony-Anhalt, in collaboration with its partners, seeks to leverage the opportunities presented by digitisation. The aim is to expand its services to include e-learning components.

Ultimately, the twofold objective remains. First, to ensure the accessibility of archival material to all interested parties as authentic testimony to the history of Saxony-Anhalt during the Nazi era; and second, to facilitate learning about and from history through an enlightened and sensitive approach to these sources.


From the Archives to the Classrooms
Telling regional history with original historical documents
Quellen nah
The State Archive of Saxony-Anhalt publishes a range of educational material that tell the (often unknown) stories of victims, perpetrators and bystanders of the Holocaust through original historical documents.
1 The regional focus helps learners to connect with the complex topic of the Holocaust. Unabridged original documents show different perspectives.
2 Various background information help to identify ideological language and to deconstruct racist stereotypes in original documents.
3 The selection of the documents is based on the history and social studies curricula. This helps teachers to integrate the topics into their lessons.
4 The material is available in print and online. It is distributed to all secondary schools in Saxony-Anhalt and comes with a programme for teachers.
SACHSEN-ANHALT
Landesarchiv

About IHRS

The Institute for Holocaust Research in Sweden (IHRS) was established in 2021 by Ulrika and Joel Citron, children of Holocaust survivors, born and raised in Sweden. The main aim of IHRS is to conduct comprehensive and nuanced research on all aspects concerning the Holocaust, focused on material and topics relevant to Sweden. An additional aim is to spread knowledge about new research to a broader audience. The IHRS is led by Director Karin Kvist Geverts who is an Associate Professor in History. More information about the IHRS can we found on the website www.ihrs.se