

What Can be Learned about Antisemitism from Holocaust Survivor Testimonies? A Narrative Inquiry Approach

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- Thematic narrative analysis of autobiographical materials can show up possible continuities between antisemitism of the past and the present.
- Narrative analysis connects biographical details to larger culture- and meaning-making institutions.
- The study of testimonies is suitable for identifying how identity models are constructed.
- Sources supplementary to the narratives are needed to find clues to the “why the Jews?” question.

Purpose: The purpose of this contribution is to analyse a set of Holocaust survivor testimony transcripts in order to find out their educational value regarding the connection between antisemitism of the past and the present. The narrative analyses are used to generate questions that might be relevant for addressing certain curricular aims within German Social Science Education.

Approach: Testimony transcripts of six Jewish Holocaust survivors were reconstructed using portraiture techniques with the aim of capturing the essence of the experience of being Jewish in a given socio-cultural context. Certain themes from the stories were picked out and probed further with other historical and scholarly literature so as to lend them depth and generalisability to theoretical concepts.

Findings: Within the context of antisemitism, the following themes are identified and discussed: a sense of safety, love, belonging, solidarity and resistance; set-apart times, Kristallnacht and the burning of the Book of Books; an example of an “identity model” under tension; Father-Son relationship and continued experiences of antisemitic stereotypes. Questions are generated about aspects of cultural and national self-image that could be relevant in Social Science Education.

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1 INTRODUCTION: PROBLEMATISATION OF THE FIELD IN THE CONTEXT OF GERMAN SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION

The incidences arising in school and other contexts from antisemitic hatred in Germany (and elsewhere) are well known and documented (see Zick, Hövermann, Jensen, Bernstein & Perl, 2017). This hatred has a long history and continues well into the present. Morally and politically speaking, therefore, education about antisemitism seems vital. However, there are several obstacles to this type of education in Germany, where the present study was conducted. One of the main problems is that in educational settings there is no relational continuity presented between antisemitism's historical manifestations and its current forms. More specifically, regarding the Holocaust, there is a general lack of understanding on the part of pupils of why it was Jews targeted for total destruction. This starts at primary school where young children, upon encountering the topic of National Socialism, "inevitably (*zwangsläufig*) ask their teachers why it was Jews who were persecuted" or "what are Jews in actual fact?" (Enzenbach, 2012, p. 55). The trend continues to high school where pupils with so-called migration background fail to see the relevance of studying the Holocaust at all, or compare it to their own experiences of being discriminated against, or ask questions like "why didn't Hitler take the Turks?" (Schäuble, 2012, p. 179), thus showing lack of understanding of the connection between Jewishness (or being Jewish) and the Holocaust. Another problem among German pupils is that aside from current forms of right-wing extremism, they cannot see any existing historical relationships, comparative cases and structural similarities between antisemitism of the past and the present (*ibid*). Some scholars go as far as saying that - globally - Holocaust studies (and by implication education) has become increasingly *judenrein*: "Rather than speak of Jews and Judaism, we speak of coping and trauma, dialogue and healing, representation and remembrance, textual analysis and ethics implications - everything except the singular assault on Jews and Judaism. Thus we have Holocaust studies without the Holocaust" (Patterson, 2006, p. 26). These observations show gaps and silences with regard to the relationship between being Jewish and experiencing antisemitism - historically and in the present.

Social Science Education in Germany could play a role in addressing some of these gaps. In several distinct parts of the Nordrhein Westfalen Social Science curriculum¹ there are guidelines for competency development calling for an ability to analyse complex manifestations, causes and effects of different forms of inequality (Ministry of Education for Nordrhein Westfalen, NRW, 2014, p. 30); learning how "identity models" are established and how they can be analysed; understanding the importance of the cultural origin for identity construction of young women and young men (p. 28); being able to identify typical, clichéd ideological thinking (e.g. prejudices and stereotypes) (p. 32); and analysing the manifestations, causes and structures of international conventions, crises and wars (p. 39).² Given this scope of opportunity and my interest in narrative methodologies, I wanted to ask a daring question: what can be learned about antisemitism from Holocaust survivor testimonies that is relevant for Social Science education? Can these testimonies be useful for learning about antisemitic stereotypes, or about the structures underlying the ongoing hatred and demonisation of Jews? In other words, how could such testimonies be used to shed light on the continuities between antisemitism of the past and the present? In Germany, such an inquiry has - to my knowledge - not been conducted with Holocaust testimonies (and hence this study is experimental to a large degree). Such testimonies have traditionally been used in education about the Holocaust for a different purpose, namely to act as a means to "restore" the victims' dignity and to fulfil the political mandate of "never again", meaning that they are meant to be used for the purpose of "civilising" pupils so that this history is never repeated (see Meseth, 2008).

In the German context, lessons about the Holocaust are generally treated separately from the study of antisemitism. For example, in a relatively recent international, four-day, interdisciplinary conference on Holocaust Education in Munich (Nähe und Distanz, 2018), antisemitism did not

feature once in the titles of the more than 65 presentations. According to a recent study, “there is often a lack of awareness of the problem, also because antisemitism is misjudged in its specificity as a perfervid view of the world and is subsumed under other forms of discrimination” (Salzborn & Kurth, 2019, p. 39). Education about antisemitism tends to follow a “*Feuerwehrpolitik*” (ibid, p.5), which refers to short-term emergency measures (like extinguishing a fire), aimed at dealing with antisemitic incidents symptomatically, mostly done by out-of school facilitators, with the aim of “immunising against anti-semitism” (Schäuble, 2012, p. 174). There are several doubts whether, for example in the educational work done at concentration and death camp memorial sites, there is any possibility or even desirability to address questions concerning current forms of antisemitism (Haug, 2017, p. 155). Some scholars argue that this separation is owed to an underlying “*Entlastungsstrategie*”, which refers to a strategy of avoiding, or distracting from, the burdensome confrontation with the mass murder of Jews during the 1930s and 1940s. The scholars in question formulate it as follows:

“It is important to see that antisemitism was unquestionably the core ideology of National Socialism, but existed before and after it and within all political spectra, so that one cannot ‘take care of’ an engagement with antisemitism by reducing it exclusively to the topic study of National Socialism. The paradoxical emotional relief arises when, in the school context, antisemitism (completely appropriately) is addressed as the core of National Socialism, but the antisemitic prehistory, its Christian and Islamic elements, the defence against guilt or the antisemitic hatred of Israel as post-histories of Nazi antisemitism are thus (completely inappropriately) ignored.” (Salzborn & Kurth, 2019, p. 7)

It is this ignored facet of education about antisemitism that this article wishes to address in an experimental way using narrative inquiry.

2 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS: NARRATIVE INQUIRY

The question this paper addresses is: what can be learned from Shoah testimonies for understanding the continuity between antisemitism experienced under Nazi ideology and its more current forms? For this purpose, narrative inquiry methods were deemed appropriate because such methods are, among other things, concerned with understanding continuities. Jerome Bruner (2004, p. 708) maintains that ways of story-telling become recipes for structuring experience itself, or “for laying down routes into memory”, not only guiding life narrative to the present, but directing it into the future, thus making narrative analysis a powerful mode of knowledge and reasoning. In particular, narrative portraiture methods are able to capture contrary forces (paradoxes) shaping our perspectives and our actions (see Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 9). Narrative knowledge is based on the fact that human actions are unique and not repeatable, as opposed to paradigmatic knowledge, which is expressed in concepts and definitions with the aim of prediction and control (Bolivar, 2002). By contrast, narrative thinking is expressed in anecdotal descriptions of particular incidences in the form of stories that allow us to understand how human beings make sense of what they do (ibid). More specifically, in this study I am using autobiographies, which are creative expressions, representations and performances of lived experiences (Denzin, 2004). Denzin argues that the expressions of lived experiences are the proper subject matter of sociology and that social scientists must learn how to connect biographical accounts to larger culture- and meaning-making institutions.









Narrative investigation of human life as an interpretation of experience is a complex matter because both interpretation and experience are highly relative terms, meaning that subjectivity is at the centre of the process of story telling (Atkinson, 2004). As such, the boundaries between

art and science become blurred (see Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann, 1997). The creative competence of pupils (an NRW curriculum aim, 2014, p. 11) would be realised when working with biographical materials as “writers and readers conspire to create the lives they write and read about” (Denzin, 2004). In this process, interpretation as a cognitive activity involves recognising, sorting and organising perceptions towards a cohesive construction of understanding (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann, 1997, p. 30). Thus, although narrative analysis is case-centred, meaning that human agency, imaginations and subjectivities of story tellers and their audiences are at the centre, such analysis can nevertheless generate general concepts or categories, as do other case-based methodologies (Kohler Riessman, 2008, p. 13).

These categories contained within narrated experiences should be situated in discourse within a set of socio-historically explainable regularities and guidelines, assuming that the life story corresponds to a socially constructed reality (Bolivar, 2002). At the same time, we must also not fail to appreciate that such stories are completely unique and extraordinary (ibid.). Another element in the construction of narrative understanding is the realisation that “small facts are the grist for the social theory mill” (Geertz quoted in Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 13) and that both scientists and artists claim that “in the particular resides the general” (ibid). To put it in another way: Life stories can provide the researcher (or the learner) with information about a social reality that exists *outside* the story, described *by* the story (Atkinson, 2004, emphasis added). Generalisations occur not from a sample to a population, but rather to theoretical propositions, which are to some degree transferable (Kohler Riessman, 2008, p. 13). Making conceptual inferences about a social process like identity construction is a “valid” kind of inquiry with a long history in anthropology and sociology (ibid).

The materials chosen for this study are six video-interviews with victims of the Shoah that are part of the Steven Spielberg Visual History Archive (VHA) housed by the University of Southern California’s Shoah Foundation. The interviews comprise a set of transcribed video-testimonies and are part of a larger educational package designed for pupils in German high schools studying Social Science, Languages (German and foreign languages), History, Religion, Civics, Ethics, Politics, Philosophy or Psychology (see Zeugen der Shoah, 2012). The video-interviews as part of an educational software are about 30 minutes long each and recount stories of fleeing, persecution, surviving death camps, being involved with resistance movements and the struggle to continue living with the trauma. The original interviews (about two hours long) follow the witnesses’ life stories from their youth to the time of the interview and are focused on one of four themes (fleeing, surviving, resisting and continue living). The principles guiding the reduction in lengths were that the overall biographical span of the witness’s story should be kept intact and be focused on one of the named themes. Accordingly, the witnesses’ stories used in this study are categorised as follows: Margot’s and Lissi’s narratives focus on escaping Nazi Germany; Hellmut’s, Eugene’s and Aaron’s focus on resisting Nazi ideology and persecution, while Jack’s story is about the trauma resulting from having survived Auschwitz and other dehumanisations. Next, a table with a photographic portrait of each virtual “participant” is introduced so as to actuate the process of establishing the creative co-constructive relationship between witness and reader.

Table 1: photographic portraits of the six Jewish witnesses

Margot Segall-Blank (fleeing)	Lissi Pressl (fleeing)	Hellmut Stern (fleeing)	Agnes Weiss-Balázs (surviving)
			
Eugen Hermann-Friede (resisting)	Aaron Bell (resisting)	Jack Bass (carrying on living)	Dina Dzialowski (carrying on living)
			

3 METHODOLOGY: THEMATIC NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

For the present study thematic narrative analysis was chosen as a methodology. Such an analysis is interested in the *what* (content) of the story rather than its mode of (*how*), reason for (*why*) telling it, nor in the constructive role played by the interviewer or the reader (*for whom*) (Kohler Riessman, 2008). Language is considered to be a resource and is not treated as a topic for inquiry, meaning that the utterances in question are assumed to have a shared meaning among readers thought to bring with them a competent mastery of the language (p. 59). Speech quoted from interviews is “cleaned up” to erase disfluencies and break-offs (p. 57). In this way thematic narrative analysis is similar to grounded theory approaches. However, it is different from grounded theory in that narrative scholars keep the story “intact” by theorising from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases (p. 53). Rather than fracturing a biographical account into thematic categories as grounded theory coding would do, the narrative is interpreted as a whole (p. 57). The investigator works with a single story at a time, isolating and ordering relevant (as defined by his or her theoretical orientation and interest) episodes into a chronological biographical account (*ibid.*).

Typically, a researcher would begin, firstly, to theorise about a social issue and then, secondly, look for how the theoretical concepts are manifested in the data or the unit of analysis (p. 60), based on the assumption that personal stories can embody theoretical abstractions: “sociological concepts are enacted as individuals talk and write” (p. 63). Thirdly and finally, when working with archival materials, as I do in the present study, the investigator interrogates the emergent themes historically, confronting paradoxes by turning to other scholarship on the emergent themes in order to critically examine them and to gain specificity for the thematic analysis (p. 64).

Applied to the present study, I conceptualised antisemitism theoretically in a particular way, then analysed the transcripts of the interviews based on these identified concepts, which constitutes a “nominal level of analysis” (p. 64) using portraiture techniques (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). Finally, I related these concepts to historical materials and other scholarship on the particular theme, comprising the deeper level of analysis by “confronting the puzzles and paradoxes in the documents” (*ibid.*) as well as aspects that are just hinted at but not elaborated on (i.e. the silences). At this level the investigator is sensitive to seemingly unimportant issues in the

material, e.g. topics that the interviewees might take for granted (p. 67) but that can bring submerged aspects of a puzzling narrative feature to light.³ This is reflected in the discussion section of this paper. I elaborate on each of these processes in the following.

Several scholars note that antisemitism is not just another form of stereotyping but is distinguished by the fact that it bears no relationship to reality whatsoever; it is purely fictional. Theologian Christian Staffa (2017, p. 174) who is an expert in researching the effects of Nazism, also in German educational contexts, as well as in Jewish-Christian relations generally, argues that “antisemitism [is] not about any real quality or historical description of Jews, but about the safeguarding and development of a Christian, and then, as a consequence, a parallel national and cultural self-image”. In other words, antisemitism is not about any real attributes or stereotypes about Jews per se but about a self-image of an antisemitic subject and his or her own idealisation as a religion, as a nation, or as a human being that needs a negative, hostile counterpart for its self-definition (p. 184). This hostile counterpart is what Jewishness represents. This way, a close relationship is established between the purely fictional and invented Jewish stereotypes and the purpose they serve: the creation of a self image thought to be positive as a result of being opposite and different.

Secondly, as stated in the beginning, education in Germany about antisemitism and the Holocaust is fragmented and German school learners do not understand the link between them. This begs the question of “why the Jews?”, which Jewish Studies Scholar David Patterson answers as follows:

“If we view the Holocaust in terms of the murder of the Jews, then in order to understand the Holocaust, we must address the question of what the Jews signify *by their very presence in the world*, so we may have some inkling of what was targeted for destruction. And whatever the Jews may signify, it has been shaped by the Torah and the Talmud of Judaism. There can be no understanding of the Holocaust, even if one wants to speak of ‘trauma’, without an understanding of the Judaism that defines the identity of the Jew, before and after; that the Nazis marked for extinction upon the extermination of the Jews; and that Western ontological thought, from German Idealism to postmodernism, has sought to eliminate. Making these connections is nothing less than a matter of life and death.” (Patterson, 2006, p. 33, italics in the original)

Based on this theoretical premise, which by no means is meant to imply that there are no others, I chose to analyse the testimonies by focusing on what “Jewishness” means to the witnesses. For this reason, the selection from the twelve available testimonies was based on the criterion that the witnesses had to be Jewish, which eight fulfilled.⁴ From a Judaic perspective outlined above, “Jewishness” would mean the quality of being defined Jewish as connected to the Torah and the God of Israel. It is this Jewishness, as some thinkers note, that antisemitism opposes. Nirenberg (2013) argues that this Jewishness is not the actual relationship between Jews and the Torah, but rather the perception and interpretation thereof throughout the ages by Christians, Muslims, western philosophers and other systems of thought. This includes some “non-Jewish” Jewish and anti-Zionist thought (see Prager & Telushkin, 2016). In the context of Nazism, according to the latter authors, the Nazi’s ultimate aim was to destroy the threat posed by monotheism’s God-based morality to their race/nation-based morality. “Hitler declared that his mission in life was to destroy the ‘tyrannical God of the Jews’ and his ‘life-denying Ten Commandments’” (ibid, p. 16). Based on this argumentation, it was thought appropriate to examine first of all the testimonies for clues about what Jewishness looks like to Jewish witnesses and then, secondly, to contrast it with antisemitic ways of thinking that oppose it.

As a first step, I copied out the transcripts of all the interviews that accompany the video-data. Then I did a word search on this data, looking for the words “Jew”, “Jewish”, “Judaism”, “antisemitism”, “Israel” and any possible cultural-religious connotations like “Hebrew”, “zionist”, “kosher”, “bar mitzvah”, “synagogue”, “religion”, “tefillin” etc. These words acted as “codes” for the nominal level of the narrative analysis. The second step comprised the construction of the portraitive narratives of the 30 minute testimonies based on these “codes”. I copied out all the sentences or sentence groups that contained the listed words so as to establish the contexts in which they were used, thereby creating the narrative frame for the analyses. Based on these frames, the shortened narratives were developed according to portraiture techniques, which entail searching for the story line emerging from the material, actively selecting the themes that will be used to tell the story, thus being “strategic in deciding on points of focus and emphasis, and creative in defining the sequence and rhythm of the narrative” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 10). At this stage the following three criteria as described by Kohler Riessman (2008, p. 74) were observed: a) use of a priory concepts (“codes” identifying Jewishness); b) keeping the individual stories intact; and c) attending to time and place by historicising the narrative account. The process was very similar to the one described by Kohler Riessman (p. 64) who recounts how another researcher worked with archival documents on female identity construction, drawing on Foucault’s ideas of space: she “circles and highlights words and phrases that strike her [...], she then reads the documents again with spatial categories in mind, looking in the text for additional statements that relate in a general way to the larger concept”. It is this relationship between the construction of Jewishness and its manifestation in particular socio-historical incidences of the remembered experiences of the witnesses - or the *essence* of the experience of being Jewish in a given socio-cultural context - that I sought to capture in the portraitive narrative analysis. One must bear in mind that the researcher’s own autobiography impacts on the analysis of the examined narratives (Golsteijn & Wright, 2017) and that such portraiture is both a creative and a scientific process (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann, 1997), thus making the construction of two identical narrative portraits impossible.⁵

Finally, themes are identified based on the cases that are significant in the light of the theoretical concepts. Kohler Riessman (2008, p. 64) refers to the researcher’s interrogation of the themes historically, using “discursive constructs of historical contingencies”, or theorising in a case-centred manner. For the present study, this meant that in the discussion some of the themes identified in the individual stories are supplemented with other historical scholarship so as to gain deeper insight about them. Again, this selection is inevitably biased towards my research interests (see Dixson, Chapman & Hill, 2005) and other researchers may well have picked out different themes of interest to them, based on other theoretical framings. The discussion also generates possible questions to reflect on as relevant for the study of Social Sciences described by a particular German curriculum.

4 RESULTS: PORTRAITIVE ANALYSIS OF THE WITNESSES’ AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES

4.1 Margot Segall-Blank, born in 1926 in Berlin, Germany (interview in English)

She describes her parents as “typical, loving Jewish” and she recalls that there was something special about being a Jewish girl. She was educated in liberal Judaism, learned Hebrew, observed the holidays, and prayed in Hebrew. It gave her joy and comfort to be able to go to her grandparents’ house for Passah or Chanukka. Her father’s family was “extremely emancipated”, but she was encouraged to study the bible (small b in the transcript) by her mother. When the Nazi assaults started in the 1930s, her positive attitude towards her Jewish identity gave her the confidence to stand up to the bullying she experienced at school. She mentions the anti-Jewish propaganda (newspaper with stereotyped cartoons) and that Jews were excluded from public

life, including schools. The Jewish teachers made their own provision for continued schooling of the children. Margot refers to a film made in the 1930s in which the message was that emancipated Jewish families found their roots to Judaism again (the film shows her as a little girl attending a Jewish school and writing on the board in Hebrew). Margot talks about Zionism: that Israel wanted to be recognised and she wanted to be part of that. She wanted to show German Nazis that the Jewish nation “was much stronger and much better.” She was proud of her Judaism and wept when the synagogue was set on fire on *Kristallnacht* in 1938, on a day when she went to her “Hebrew religious school in Fasanenstraße”. She describes the effects of the Holocaust as those that gave her years of anxiety. She managed to emigrate with her family to Australia where she did not encounter any antisemitism at all. In her later years she was proud that her own children upheld Jewish traditions by marrying Jewish partners and pursuing Jewish activities.

4.2 Lissi Pressl, born in 1917 in Berlin, Germany (interview in German)

She emphasises that her family consisted of German citizens with Jewish faith and that “being German” was very important to them in terms of assimilation. She talks lovingly about her extended family and describes how close the family members were to each other. Every Friday evening the whole family would meet and the grandmother would light candles, saying the Kiddush prayer, and blessing the candles to usher in the Shabbat. To Lissi, these Friday nights were “very, very beautiful. I mean we were all not overly religious. But still there was somehow a sense of belonging.” At school she was the only Jewish child in her class, and did not experience any discrimination until Hitler’s time. The others had always accepted the fact that she would not take part in religious instruction and that she attended her own in the afternoons. But when Hitler came to power, she was isolated and no one wanted to have anything to do with her because she was Jewish. She then became part of a Jewish community with a Rabbi called Dr Arthur Rosenthal. The community met regularly, sang songs and talked about emigration. Initially she fled to Italy, alone, without her family. In the Italian community where she arrived there was no sense of antisemitism until Hitler. In the next part of her journey as a refugee in Manchester, she was taken to a Jewish community after the police rescued her from an abusive employer. Her mother and brother were shot by the Nazis.

4.3 Hellmut Stern, born in 1928 in Berlin, Germany (interview in German)

The Sterns were liberal Jews: Hellmut and his family went to the synagogue on the holidays, dressed for the occasion. His father was expelled from the *Reichsmusikkammer* in 1933 on grounds of being Jewish. When the discriminations intensified, the Jewish community held together and helped each other where they could, also internationally, which is how Hellmut and his family managed to emigrate to China. His father was Zionist and convinced that they should emigrate to Palestine. He helped others with emigration and wanted to found a kibbutz in Israel. Hellmut’s recollection of *Kristallnacht* is “alive” every day, as is his memory of his adjacent Jewish school being burnt down.

When they arrived in China, the Jewish community looked after them in terms of clothing, food and accommodation. Later, when he moved to Israel, Golda Meir herself helped him to get a visa to live in the United States. In China, there were also Russians, among whom Hellmut experienced antisemitism. He could not understand why he was referred to as a “German” at school when in Germany he was called a “Jew” and fled from there. He started to question his identity: “what/who am I actually? Why am I being accused of things and beaten up for things that I cannot change? I don’t understand why. And that’s when I started asking questions for the first time.” The interviewer asked him what role Judaism plays in his life, if any. Hellmut struggles to answer the question “because I cannot answer it for myself in a satisfactory way. It’s a conflict

inside of me that has become personal. Are we a religious group or a nation? A people or folk like any other or are we defined by our religion? I am not religious. In any case, after Auschwitz I can't understand how anyone can be religious. But of course that's a private matter". He talks extensively about this struggle of being both Jewish and German:

"Ok, I am a national Jew, if you insist. But even that sounds wrong. I am also German, since I cannot take the German out of me, just like I cannot take the Jew out of me. Because we are also, well, the Jews are also a 'fate-community' (*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*), based on what happened. Of course the Holocaust is not the only thing that defines Jewishness. The origin, the history of Judaism, and I count myself as part of this, and I belong to it. And especially to German Jewry. But the Holocaust has now also made a fate-community out of it, as I mentioned. And I belong to this fate-community and cannot exclude myself from it even if I wanted to. And sometimes I get angry about what happens in this community and become rather critical." (*Zeugen der Shoah* DVD 1: Fleeing)

He then talks about his critical-political engagement regarding Israel but also Germany where he is active as a party member because "politics has been concerned with me, therefore I must also concern myself a little with politics".

4.4 Eugen Hermann-Friede, born in 1926 in Berlin, Germany (Interview in German)

His mother married a non-Jewish man after she divorced her Jewish husband, Eugen's biological father. But the adoptive father acted in the role of a real father for Eugen. They celebrated Christmas and Easter and he was not brought up Jewish, but knew that his mother was Jewish. He was treated "accordingly" by the kids and the teachers in the non-Jewish school that he attended. The interviewer asks him whether they kept the Jewish holidays and Eugen explains that yes, they did, because his step-father had great interest in the Jewish faith and his mother explained the meaning of the holidays to him. In 1938 Eugen was forced to leave the normal school and went to a Jewish school. One knew that even the Jewish schools would not last much longer because of the increasing discrimination against Jews as the laws put in place were meant to "demolish Jewish life".

Because of denunciations Eugene had to move from one hiding place to the next. In one of the families the parents told their 12 year-old daughter that they were hiding a Jew illegally. When the girl asked why they needed to hide a Jew, the conversation went like this:

Because the Nazis murder the Jews.

Why? Ruth asked.

Because they [the Nazis] are criminals. And if you tell anybody that we're hiding such a Jew, then they will kill us, your papa and your mama.

In the 1980s Eugen visited a wellness facility in Germany to recover from an accident and was shocked about the antisemitism he encountered there. Furthermore, he does not believe, as is popularly held, that the Germans did not know about the Holocaust, because "millions of people do not just disappear with their belongings brought back".

4.5 Aaron Bell (born Bielski), born in 1930 in Stankiewicz, Poland (interview in English)

Aaron Bell was one of the brothers who organised a survival/resistance movement in a Russian forest and whose story is captured in both book (Tec, 1993) and film (Zwick, 2008) formats. Aaron grew up on a farm in a small town and recalls that they were the only Jewish family, with

the closest other Jewish family 10-12 km away. He had three brothers who were tall in stature and for this reason he never experienced any antisemitism as a child. His parents were religious, meaning that they would not travel on a Sabbath, which they observed with special meals: "it was somewhat different than the regular day". They ate kosher and were all traditional Jews. Growing up as Jews in a Russian small village was not easy because the neighbours and the police would come and terrorise the Jewish people, except them because of the brothers who "were very tough young men, unique, and they took care of the whole family." When the war started, those people who were afraid of them wanted to take revenge on them and, together with the German police officers, would terrorise whoever was in the house.

Some gentile neighbours helped to hide Aaron when he was a child, but his parents and some of his brothers were murdered by the Nazis and their Russian collaborators in a mass-execution action by machine-guns, having had to dig their own graves first. "They butchered 5,000 Jews in one weekend." In the forest, where they had established their resistance group, a small town developed and they fought for their survival. "If there is a Jewish child, if there is a Jewish woman, or an old Jew. If he wants to come to us, whatever we will eat, he will have." And this way the movement got very popular among the weaker Jewish people. They survived by robbing surrounding grocery stores, pretending to have rifles at night and "so word got around that the Bielski brothers have a whole army behind them." The Russian partisans came to this forest refuge every now and then and there were problems because "some of them were anti-Semites, Jew-haters." They and the partisans had in common that they both fought the Nazis.

4.6 Jack Bass (born Bassfreund), born in 1923 in Bernkastel, Germany (interview in English)

He grew up in a small town in Germany with very few other Jewish people. His father came from an orthodox family whose father was a Rabbi. Jack's father used to put on a tefillin when he went to work as a doctor to the hospital and prayed in the chauffeur-driven car. Jack experienced anti-semitism growing up. Other children called him a "dirty Jew" whenever he did something that they did not like. Later, the family moved to Berlin and experienced the discriminatory laws. During the war they were only allowed to shop during very restricted hours and "I remember there was a lady standing, she was old and she had arthritis, she had a cane. And she was always watching that no Jew would enter a store before four o'clock or after five o'clock."

One day he was arrested in Berlin, together with many other Jews because the Nazis wanted to "give Hitler as a birthday present a Jew-free Berlin." He was deported to Auschwitz and upon arrival had to undergo a full body-shave. "The Kapo said: 'Now you're like little babies again. You have no name, you're nothing.' He says: 'I'm your daddy, and I'm gonna take good care of you.' And decided to beat people up."

Reflecting on his experiences that he had to endure in his former home country (he emigrated to the USA), he cannot understand that today Jewish people settle in Germany.

"I just can't see it. Germany - I've read so many books after, since I came out of the concentration camp about the history of the Jews in Germany. And if you live in a country that in every century persecuted you and accused you of poisoning wells and creating typhoid fever and typhus. And being responsible for the plague and being maimed and killed and having to live in ghettos. How could you live in a country like this? [...] I was back in 1972. I find them just as bad and as anti-Semitic as they were [then]. Of course, now they have to be a little more cautious about expressing themselves. Because there is no more Hitler. But, I don't think that their character has changed any."

5 DISCUSSION OF THE PORTRAITIVE ANALYSES OF THE WITNESSES' AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES

The approach to answering the question, “what can be learned about antisemitism from Holocaust witnesses using narrative inquiry?” led to the focus on the meaning of Jewishness and the way it could be understood as a continuing projection area necessary for antisemitism. The discussion will be guided by the underlying question of “why the Jews?”, seeing that Jewishness is the common denominator between past and present forms of antisemitism. At first glance, from the testimonies, students would not immediately find answers to “why the Jews?”. For example, Nägel & Wein (2015, p. 176) describe Margot’s testimony as especially suitable for young people to learn about the different facets of what it means to be Jewish. While this assertion is correct, this by itself would not contribute to an understanding of antisemitism or to the reasons why Jewish people were targeted for total destruction (and why, for example, this was not the case for homosexuals). For this reason, in the ensuing discussion certain themes will be picked out from the individual narratives and supplemented with other (historical) scholarship in order to provide more insight on those themes and to generate ideas about possible topics for discussion in social science classes.

5.1 Sense of safety, love, belonging, solidarity and resistance

Being Jewish in Margot’s, Lissi’s and Eugene’s testimonies would mean being raised in a loving family with a strong bond between parents and children. In Lissi’s testimony, in particular, the viewer or reader gets an idea about the importance of solidarity within the family, especially during the set-apart times. A Jewish communal spirit is described in several of the testimonies as creating co-dependent and supportive relationships in families, among teachers and pupils, and among Jewish communities across the globe. This could be contrasted with Nazi values and family upbringing norms. A good example is the very influential book on parenting by Dr Johanna Haarer, published in 1934, called “The German Mother and Her First Child”. In this book Haarer wrote about how to raise children for the *Führer* and taught mothers to systematically ignore the needs of their babies. For example, she advised new mothers to avoid all body contact and to even isolate their babies for the first 24 hours straight after birth. The aim was to teach children to become “low in emotion” and “independent”, i.e. to be detached from their mothers or anyone else. Gesa Schütte (2015, p. 388), in a biographical essay, recalls how, after the birth of her daughter in 1991, her mother had given her a copy of this book that, according to Gesa, comprised “a manual for cold-heartedness and relational deprivation (*Beziehungsarmut*)”. Kratzer (2018), writing about “why Hitler is still having an influence on child-rearing today” analyses the effects of this book and wonders how a whole generation, who has been systematically taught to not build relationships with others, is able to teach their children or grandchildren to do so?⁶ She comes to the conclusion that even though parents can consciously choose to deal with their own lack of bonding experience and try to raise their children differently, in stressful moments, they often revert to the the learned, unconscious and traumatic patterns. Thus a question could be to reflect on any projections of one’s own possible upbringing experience, conscious or not, to anti-Jewish stereotypes. Some scholars found evidence that antisemitism is based on a type of envy of Jewish social relations (see Aly, 2012) and this could be made into a topic of discussion. More indirectly, one could ask how the testimonies may be used to discuss various and conflicting senses of family, tradition and belonging and, in turn, how these affect an understanding of the cultural origin of our identity constructions.

The sense of safety, love and belonging characterising Jewish families was destroyed by the Nazis when Jews were systematically discriminated against, excluded, and isolated from public life. This isolation and demolishing of life and family was countered by the international Jewish community who provided material and social support for newcomers. Jewish communities - and also some Germans as Eugen’s testimony shows - resisted the destruction also in resistance

movements, fighting for a bigger cause than individual survival. This may be seen as an alternative to a philosophy that considers the independent will of the individual as the highest moral order (see Freeman, 2001, p. 35). Aaron Bell's story takes this issue one step further as he describes his brothers' resistance group that protected especially the weak and helpless. Again, this aspect can be contrasted with the Nazi ideology of breeding the "genetically fittest".

Aaron's testimony can also offer some insights about stereotypes. For example, he refers to the partisan's antisemitism *and* to their hatred of the Germans. This would be a good opportunity to explore different types of hatred and what is behind each, so as to avoid collapsing all of them into a generalised and universal form of prejudice or stereotype. One of the early Christian stereotypes, for example, that Jewishness is about the material, fleshly world as opposed to the spirit (Nirenberg, 2018) is countered in the testimonies that emphasise a sense of belonging through the depth of family bonds and a sense of solidarity among Jews worldwide; social relations that are not particularly material or opposed to the spirit. Questions could be: what are the functions of such stereotypes? How do they relate to one's own positioning and self-identification? Where do such dualisms (e.g. body vs. mind, material vs. spiritual) come from and how helpful are they for understanding identity models?

5.2 Set-apart times, *Kristallnacht* and the burning of the Book of Books

In the analysed stories a feeling of belonging and loving bonds with the family were remembered especially during the set-apart (holy) times of the feast days, including the Shabbat, even though most of the interviewees stressed that they were not religious or that they were "liberated" and "emancipated" from their religious ties. They nonetheless valued and observed these times. Significantly, by observing these special times they were following Torah instructions and affirmed their Jewishness. An important detail, but one that is not mentioned in these testimonies (but can easily be found in others) is that many of the Nazi mass shootings (mentioned by Aaron) and other atrocities were carefully planned to take place on High Holy Days like Yom Kippur and Shavuot. Some scholars maintain that the Shoah was an attack "on the eternal in an attempt to close the portals through which the eternal might make an appearance in time" (Patterson, 2006, p. 56, referring to Holocaust survivor Mary Berg's diaries that she had kept in the Warsaw ghetto). "Scheduling their actions to coincide with the remembrance and observance of holy time, the Nazis would murder the Holy One in the process of murdering the Jews" (ibid). Such insights could inspire analyses of testimonies in terms of the timing of the atrocities and in turn provide some answers to the "why the Jews" question.

Despite their lack of self-professed religiosity, the burning of the synagogues by the Nazis was a traumatic memory for Margot and Hellmut. It shows that despite having chosen to "liberate" themselves from their religious identities (as Hellmut noted and Margot implied), there must still be a tie to such an identity, possibly through an association of the synagogue with a place of learning more generally. Questions around this theme could be: why do non-religious Jewish people experience the burning of a religious site like the synagogue as traumatic? The testimonies analysed here will not be able to answer this but they could be used to spark further study. In this regard the work of Alon Confino (2014) could be useful for exploring the theme and symbolic meaning of fire and burning in the context of antisemitic Nazi ideology. As an historian he uncovered evidence showing that not only were the synagogues burnt or the books by Jewish and other "subversive" or anti-Nazi authors in the well-known Berlin "feast" in May 1933, organised by students, but also the "Book of Books" (the Hebrew Bible):

"The Nazis did burn the Hebrew Bible, on November 9 and 10, 1938—not one copy, but thousands; not in one place, but in hundreds of communities across the Reich; and not only in metropolises such as Berlin, Stettin, Vienna, Dresden, Stuttgart, and Cologne, but also in small communities such as Sulzburg, a Protestant village in

Baden with 1,070 inhabitants, 120 among them Jewish, where the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments were thrown from the roof and the Nazis marched mockingly up and down the main street with the Torah scrolls before destroying them. By fire and other means, the destruction of the Book of Books was at the center of Kristallnacht, when 1,400 synagogues were set on fire” (Confino, 2014, p. 115).

In fact, Margot mentions a street by name: Fasanenstraße which is the same street where “Germans carried the [Torah] scrolls from the Fasanen Street synagogue to Wittenberg Square and burned them there” (ibid). This violent and triumphant burning is a powerful physical act of a symbolic expulsion of God’s moral order that was to be replaced with another. Here we find a clue to “why the Jews?” that would need further expansion. Confino (2012) argues that historians have ignored the Torah-burning because the sources evidencing it do not fit the hegemony of racial ideology as the ultimate source of motivations, beliefs and values in the Third Reich (p. 372). In other words, historians have not asked why, if the Nazis were set on creating a *racial* civilisation, did they burn the Jewish Bible and synagogues which are *holy, religious* symbols? (ibid, emphasis in the original. Confino does not in any way repudiate the importance of racial ideology). The point, however, is that religious identity cannot be ignored when analysing the complex forms, causes and effects of inequality or the structures of crises and wars. It cannot simply be equated with racial identity.

Moreover, Confino (ibid, p. 389) notes that the emotions governing these Bible burnings were visible as raw hatred, cruelty, violence, mockery and humiliation, while the less visible were those of envy and fear, believing that Jews possessed awesome powers and that therefore “the Nazis set out to erase from Germany any trace of Jews and of Judaism because the Nazis believed that any remnant of Judaism, however small and trivial, would soil the nation”. Again, this points towards an answer to the “why the Jews” question. It could inspire questions around emotions involved with antisemitic attitudes: what raw, visible and less visible emotions accompany current forms of antisemitism? A case study could be the public burning of flags (see Weinthal, 2017). For pupil groups who tend to compare Nazism to their own experiences of discrimination, an interesting angle could be to ask whether it would be imaginable for them if mosques and copies of the Qur’an were systematically burnt in public ceremonies in today’s Germany, and if so, what would the symbolic significance and sense of transgression be?

Aaron’s story, as well as Margot’s love for Israel, and Hellmut’s political engagement with modern Israel touch on the origins of the Jewish state. This could be useful for discussing modern forms of antisemitism that delegitimize this state. What is the (structural) role of such delegitimation in the Middle East Conflict? What is its significance for the ideological frameworks of so-called terror organisations? Another point of discussion could be why, despite terror attacks directed against Israel, Jewish culture still considers “every life as sacred” (Sacks, 2013) and continues to provide help for those in need globally, including to those who hate them. This could be understood as one of the central moral codes upheld by Judaism and is thus a defining feature of Jewishness, as originating from it, even though other religions and faith groups have also adopted it or versions of it. Referring to Fackelheim, Patterson (2015, p. 161) explains

“that a Jew must be at one with [a universal] humanity.’ This being at one with humanity is rooted in the testimony to all humanity for which the Jews are chosen: it is a proclamation that every human being is chosen for a unique responsibility to and for his neighbour, that each is accountable for a specific task that no other can perform, and that every soul is indispensable to all of creation – a teaching that is blatantly contrary to the foundations of National Socialism.”

Questions could centre around other modern teachings and forms of socialisation that perpetuate the antisemitic and narcissist idea that people are as valuable as their (replaceable) economic function and usefulness. How do such conceptualisations feature in the identity-construction of young men and women?

5.3 An example of an “identity model” under tension

The identity struggle of being Jewish *and* German is portrayed best by Hellmut Stern. Hellmut does not see himself as religious, yet he counts himself as belonging to the Judaic confession that he cannot “take out of him”. In the same way, he cannot change his nationality or the fact that he belongs to a fate-community as a victim of the Holocaust. It is particularly noteworthy that “national Jew” sounds wrong to Hellmut. Possibly that is because, unlike national identity, “Jewish” is not a designation of an ethnic (or “race”) group. On the contrary, “it signifies that there is no true humanity without being related to divinity [...] It is not blood and soil [*Blut und Boden*] which properly define us, but rather the possibility of emancipating ourselves from this very blood and soil” (Crétella cited in Patterson, 2006, p. 13). Political activism that Hellmut took up in place of religion is unlikely to be emancipated from “blood and soil” precisely because politics is by and large defined by national interest.

This testimony could be used for asking how it is possible for a Jewish person to be critical of Israel and to be so unsure about his own Jewish identity. When the connection between the God of Israel and the Jewish people is broken by self-identification (i.e. rejection of the Jewish identity by the self), then only the particularities of blood and soil remain. However, as Hellmut says, although he does not view himself as “religious”, the historical origin of Judaism still defines Jewishness for him and he counts himself as part of this confession. Such a definition of Jewish identity is precisely what Patterson (2006, p. 33) referred to as having been shaped by the Torah of Judaism. It means that the definition is based on God’s view of the matter and not on self-identification - in the Torah it is clear that Israel is His chosen one (or tool) for His purposes. This explains why Jewish self-identification was irrelevant for the Nazis too: they wanted to usurp a *divinely* instituted order and not a human-based one - again we find here a hint of an answer to the “why the Jews” question.

This testimony could be used to further investigate the construction of identity models. What are the competing forces that impact on our freedom to choose certain norms and form our ability to deal with conflicting factors? How do individuals’ identity models position them politically and socially in terms of “*Blut und Boden*” vs. a universal idea of sacred humanity?

5.4 Father-Son relationship, and continued experience of antisemitism

Jack Bass’s story offers excellent opportunities to explore how the Nazis desecrated the Father-Son relationship, pivotal to the Torah. Shaving the body and beating up the “newborn” in the name of a father is an example of extreme perversion and not just some accidental or collaterally damaging part of the Auschwitz dehumanising ritual. It is key to understanding the Nazi assault on “the Name” (HaShem), as discussed by Patterson (2006). It was a ritual prior to the “tattooing” of a number into the prisoners’ skins. “Inscribing the number on the body - no, forcing it into the body, under the skin, and indelibly into the core of the body - is the first step toward draining the body of its soul, which is the divine image of the Name [...] Robbed of his name and marked with a number, the human being is robbed of his life and his humanity” (p. xii). Questions for deeper engagement could be: what is the role of a name in the origin and formation of an identity? (And its loss?) How can the role of a father be understood in structural terms when thinking about wars and crises globally?

Jack’s experience of antisemitism in post-war Germany, as well as Eugen’s, point to the continuity between the history of the Shoah and modern forms of antisemitism. More specifically, Jack

talks about the age-old stereotypes of Jews allegedly poisoning wells and being thought to be responsible for all manners of evil, thereby pointing out not only clichéd ideological terms, but also implying that they are completely fictional. Such references, as well as others painting Jews as “world dominators”, “hostile strangers”, “homeless wanderers”, “money-grabbing usurers” (Schwarz-Friesel & Friesel, 2012) or Christ/God killers (all of which, according to the authors, have scapegoating functions for one’s own shortcomings), could serve as identifying markers of typical anti-Jewish stereotypical thinking, alerting pupils in other media to an underlying ideological function they perform. The terms ascribed to Jews could be explored more in-depth with research on the “dangers of false analogies” (ibid). In as far as these labels have no base in empirical reality whatsoever, antisemitism a different form of stereotyping. Unlike other stereotypes, antisemitism does not work with inductive conclusions from empirical bases or with generalisations, but consists of an “unreal, hyperbolic, and demonizing world fantasy of the negative role of Jews” (p. 38-42). Questions to explore could be, to what extent are antisemitic attitudes and feelings related to actual negative encounters with Jews? How do stereotypes work in general and what are the differences between different types thereof? In what way could analogies between different types of stereotypes be misleading, or even “dangerous”?

6 CONCLUSION

This article set out to answer to the question: what can be learned about antisemitism from Holocaust survivor testimonies using a narrative approach? The theoretical foundation asserted that in order to understand the connection between antisemitism and the Holocaust, one needs to ask what Jews represent in the world, and this has a relationship to the Torah and the Talmud that defines Jewishness. This foundation informed the narrative analysis of six video-interview transcripts, based on Jewish-related words that served as codes for constructing narrative portraits, framed by the inquiry of how conceptions of Jewishness were embodied in the life experiences of the witnesses. The narratives were then interpreted thematically, drawing on additional insights from historical and other scholarly sources.

At first glance the testimonies may not be able to provide answers to the question of why Jews were persecuted during the Holocaust and why there is continued antisemitism today. However, there are lessons to be learned nonetheless. What students may learn overall from the testimonies is that Jews were not deserving of the fate encountered during the Holocaust. Thus the major insight could be that antisemitism is not about any real attributes or stereotypes about Jews per se. The argument was put forward that antisemitism is more about a self-image of an antisemitic subject and his or her own idealisation as a religion, as a nation, or as a human being that needs a negative, hostile counterpart for its self-definition (Staffa, 2017, p. 184). In this way antisemitism becomes a phenomenon that has structural and global dimensions. The discussion of the narrative analyses showed how, by picking out certain themes from the individual stories and supplementing them with other scholarly insights, such themes could serve to critically examine certain aspects of that cultural and national self-image.

Another educational benefit with regard to the topic is that these testimonies would by and large avoid a moralising approach (often used in schools) that hopes to lead (in vain) to ethically correct behaviour based on having “learned from” the history of the Holocaust (Schäuble, 2012, p. 174-175). If not these particular ones, then other testimonies could be sourced for the purpose of learning about the connection between the Holocaust and antisemitism. The wide availability of tens of thousands of testimonies in many different languages, located in archives worldwide, is a boost for scholars who are motivated to do so. A further educational benefit of studying testimonies could be the application of narrative inquiry research methodologies, producing social scientifically relevant knowledge, irrespective of the subject matter covered. Following Kohler Riessman’s (2008) elaboration of thematic narrative analysis and exemplified in the presented study, such a methodology consists of theorising about a particular social issue,

identifying and reconstructing the ways in which these theoretical concepts are manifested in real life experiences, and interrogating the contradictions and paradoxes in the emergent themes historically with the help of other sources. The study of testimonies shows promising suitability for identifying the construction of particular identity models and for learning how they are established.

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ENDNOTES

¹ In Germany each federal state is responsible for its own education and curriculum as there is not one national policy governing them. I chose the state of NRW because this is where the study was conducted.

² All translations from German to English are those of the author.

³ An example of this in the present study is the significance of the tattooing process at Auschwitz described by Jack Bass and elaborated on in the discussion.

⁴ Eight testimonies were analysed initially, from which two were discarded in the end because the connection between being Jewish and the Holocaust was minimal. This left six analysed testimonies to be discussed in this paper.

⁵ In my case, this autobiography, comprising a particular set of perspectives, prejudices, experiences and ideologies, is shaped by inherited experiences of trauma resulting from the Holocaust, as well as years of intensive study of and interest in Jewishness and the history of Israel as a people, a land, and as a modern state.

⁶ Haarer's book did not disappear after the War. It was "cleansed" of blatant Nazi language and between 1949 and 1987 over a million copies were sold (Schütte, 2015, p. 388).