# Antisemitism then and now

## Reflections from survivors of Bergen-Belsen

## Key Question: What can be learned about antisemitism from survivors of Bergen-Belsen?

## Teaching Aims and Learning Objectives

- To explore experiences of antisemitism during the 1930s and 1940s
- To deepen knowledge and understanding of antisemitism as a historical phenomenon
- To consider how the experiences of survivors from Bergen-Belsen can enrich understanding of the contemporary world

## Rationale

The resurgence of antisemitism in recent years is palpable to young people in the social and cultural settings they inhabit. Whilst it is possible to identify the causes that have helped bring this about, the upsurge in antisemitism has nevertheless occurred at a time when teaching, learning, and remembering about the Holocaust are at levels hitherto unforeseen. This problematises the notion that the way to combat contemporary antisemitism is through more Holocaust education and remembrance. Fundamentally, it begs questions about the contribution teaching and learning about the Holocaust can make to developing knowledge and understanding of antisemitism.

This lesson uses the occasion of Bergen-Belsen's liberation to deepen knowledge and understanding of antisemitism as a historical phenomenon. It does so by exploring the experiences of three people who found themselves in Bergen-Belsen at the time of liberation.[1] Each of these survivors – who were growing up during the Nazi period – had numerous first-hand experiences of antisemitism. In learning more about them and their experiences, students expand awareness of the shapes of antisemitism in the 1930s and 1940s, allowing them to bring a historical perspective to bear on the world around them.

## Key Information

This one-hour lesson is written for Key Stage 3 students and above. For a class of 30 students, working in six groups of five students, the following material is required:

- Two sets of 'Tomi Reichental: Experience Cards'; Two sets of 'Anita Lasker-Wallfisch: Experience Cards'; Two sets of 'Freddie Knoller: Experience Cards'
- Six 'Enquiry Grids' – one for each group – ideally photocopied or printed on A3 paper
- Two class sets of 'Quotation Cards'

Secure knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of the Holocaust is both presumed and a prerequisite. This lesson cannot serve as a substitute for a Scheme of Work or Programme of Study on the Holocaust.

[1] It is important to stress to students that we have chosen three case studies of survival in this lesson. There were thousands of survivors of Bergen-Belsen and of the Holocaust more generally. These cases as chosen here for in-depth exploration.

# Lesson Plan

## What does 'antisemitism' mean? (5 minutes)

Indicate that this lesson will focus on exploring something which has existed throughout history and continues to exist today. This 'something' is called antisemitism. Note that some students may have heard of this word before, but others may not. Hearten students that it is okay if the word is unfamiliar – they will learn more about it during the lesson.

Explain to students that as a starting point it is useful to establish who knows what about the term 'antisemitism'. Display Slide 2 of the accompanying PowerPoint. Ask students to read the question carefully on their own, and then decide upon one answer. They are to then record their answer in their exercise books by completing the sentence 'I think the term 'antisemitism' means…' Additionally, they could provide their answer through polling software.

## What does antisemitism look like? (5 minutes)

Reveal the correct answer to the question as being option b). If students' answers have been collected, reflect on the response of the class overall. In a case where the majority of the class do not know the correct answer, be sure to offer the reassurance that research has shown many of their peers are equally unsure about this. Also determine whether the class are familiar with what 'prejudice' means, providing an explanation if necessary.

Move to Slide 3 of the PowerPoint presentation – posing the question 'What does antisemitism look like?' Ask students to write the sentence 'antisemitism looks like…' in their books, before spending a couple of minutes sharing ideas in pairs and noting these down. Proceed to collecting a sample of responses. Record these ideas at the front of the class on an interactive whiteboard or sugar paper. Encourage students to add ideas to their own lists in a different colour.

Transition to the following activity by suggesting that we can learn more about what antisemitism is, what it involves, and how it effects people by looking at examples from history.

## Learning more about antisemitism (25 minutes)

Divide the class into six groups of five people. Provide each group with a pack of Experience Cards and copies of the Enquiry Grid.

Explain to students their task: they are to learn more about some of the forms that antisemitism took during the 1930s and 1940s and consider what effect these had upon individuals. To achieve this, each group will investigate the experiences of one individual. Working with the Experience Cards, they will need to identify concrete examples where these individuals (or their relations) endured prejudice, discrimination, or persecution. They will also need to consider the effects and impact these occurrences had. In some cases, the individuals themselves explain how they felt or responded to their experiences. In other instances, the group will need to decide for themselves what the possible consequences of a particular occurrence may have been.

As the groups complete this task, have students record their findings on an Enquiry Grid. It is recommended this is done collectively on one communal grid with one member of the group acting as a scribe, but individual grids could equally be completed. Emphasise that in completing the grid students will need to extract key information from the Experience Cards and then employ their skills of concise note-taking. Clarify that bullet-points and other ways of listing information is perfectly acceptable.

## Antisemitism 'then'… (15 minutes)

Having mined the Experience Cards for information, indicate to students how they need now to think about what this information reveals or suggests. This can be done by considering the question on Slide 4 ('What have you learnt about antisemitism from your survivors' experiences?). With this slide on display, ask the groups to spend 5 minutes discussing this question and noting their conclusions in their exercise books.

Leading from the front of the class, go around the groups and collect responses from students. Be conscious that more than one group will have looked at the same individual. As students share their thinking, collect comments via your interactive whiteboard or sugar paper affixed to a wall. Take the time to highlight emerging commonalities and differences and note any questions or uncertainties students have.

Transition to the final activity by explaining that apart from experiencing antisemitism, all of the individuals that have been examined in the lesson had something else in common: they were all liberated from the same place – a camp called Bergen-Belsen.

## What now? (10 minutes)

With students remaining in their groups, provide each group with the relevant Quotation Card. Ask them to take some time to look at what their individual survivor has recently said about the world today, and to discuss in their group the two questions on Slide 5.

Close the lesson by collecting responses from the class to these questions:

- Does it matter what these survivors think?
- How can they help us understand antisemitism today?

In discussing these questions, make cross-references where appropriate and salient to the earlier responses given to the question 'What does antisemitism look like?' For an extension activity, students could be asked to consider how their initial ideas compare with what they have learnt about antisemitism during the 1930s and 1940s, and what changes and continuities can be observed.

# Additional Information

## Pedagogical guidance

The following guidance provides insight into the pedagogy of the lesson, highlights and offers commentary of some of the issues it surfaces or touches upon, and forwards practical suggestions for the classroom.

### Engaging all learners

#### Literacy

The primary resources for this lesson – the Experience Cards – are text-heavy materials. As such, they inevitably and unavoidably raise issues related to literacy.

With regard to the amount of writing students are required to read, various strategies could be employed to help students. Within groups, students could work in pairs so that the labour of reading any given card is shared. To help with such a division, all of the cards employ a colour-coding system: text appearing in a blue box contains general information either about the card, or about the context it is referring to; text within the yellow box contains the words of the survivors themselves. The amount of text any given student is required to read can also be mediated through reducing the number of survivors a class is investigating and/or increasing the number of students within each group.

Although the text of the Experience Cards has been designed for use with mixed-ability Year 9 students, they will nevertheless be challenging for some. Accordingly, in addition to the above, teachers should consider employing strategies such as encouraging students to read aloud to each other, asking students to summarise the contents of a card for others, allowing students to annotate or highlight text as it is read, and flagging technical or complex vocabulary from the front of the classroom.

#### Maintaining engagement

The centrality of the Experience Cards to this lesson, and their nature as text-heavy material, raises the prospect that some students may struggle to maintain focus and attention. Partly in response to this, most of these cards include some sort of visual image – usually a photograph – which relates to something being described or talked about it the card itself. Whilst these images help to break up the text, they can also be used explicitly to focus students who are likely to find prolonged reading difficult. In this way, teachers could ask such students to read only some of their given card and instead deconstruct and analyse the visual that is contained on it. Simple lines of questioning around what can be seen, what can be presumed or inferred, can offer students with learning opportunities which are low threat, but potentially highly challenging analytically.

### Challenge and stretch

Teachers looking to challenge and stretch high ability students could capitalise on geographical coverage of the lesson materials as the basis for further investigation. Cumulatively, the experiences of Tomi, Freddie and Anita traverse a number of countries – from Austria, Germany, and Slovakia, to Occupied France, Occupied Poland and Vichy France. Due to the constraints of the lesson the history of antisemitism and the Holocaust are not explored in any depth, but certainly could be taken up by students looking for additional learning opportunities.

## Defining antisemitism

Defining antisemitism in a way which is universally acceptable, is a challenging task. However, defining this and other terms in the classroom is critical if there is to be shared understanding about what is being investigated. The starter activity – where students 'define' antisemitism from a list of possible answers provides the class with a definition to work with. This question and its accompanying answers originate from the questionnaire devised by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education as part of its exploration of students' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. The question – as with all of the others in that questionnaire – was formulated out of piloting and consultation with educationalists and historians. As it stands, it does not profess to be a comprehensive definition of the term antisemitism, but one which – in its sentiment and language – provides teenagers with an intelligible and authentic "answer" to what the question is asking.

Teachers should be aware that the term 'antisemitism' is one with a particular etymology. Of particular note is that the term was originally coined in the context of Imperial Germany during the late 19th Century, as a means of distinguishing Jewish people on the basis not of religious belief or cultural practice but supposed racial characteristics. To complicate matters further, whilst this particular type of antisemitism was institutionalised within Nazi Germany and various other countries, older forms of anti-Jewish prejudice which were deeply embedded in European societies, continued to exist throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

That different types of Jew-hatred, based on different precepts, existed at the same time during this period is very significant: it complicates reductive, sweeping ideas that millions of Jews were killed "just for who they were", or because they were not "blonde haired or blue-eyed". Moreover, this underscores how understanding "antisemitism" during these decades requires an appreciation of these multifarious forms of antipathy and hate – some of which dealt in the currency of killing, and others which were limited to non-lethal forms of discrimination.

To acquire a working knowledge of some of these issues teachers can consult guidance from institutions like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) (https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/antisemitism) and Yad Vashem (https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/nazi-germany-1933-39/antisemitism.html) – the latter of which offer a highly recommended online course 'Antisemitism: From its Origins to the Present' (https://www.yadvashem.org/education/online-courses/antisemitism.html).

Finally, teachers should be prepared for the possibility that some students may have encountered recent developments in the media regarding antisemitism and the Labour Party. Capturing these issues briefly and succinctly is arguably not possible here, though teachers may wish to consult this overview produced by the BBC (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-45030552). Teachers ought to be aware that a key matter within the ongoing controversy was the working definition of antisemitism constructed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). This definition can be read in full here: https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/stories/working-definition-antisemitism. Whilst this definition has been formally adopted and/or endorsed by a number of governments around the world – including the United Kingdom – teachers should be aware that it has not been beyond critique. For a flavour of these, teachers may wish to look at this article published in *The Guardian* in 2018 (https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jul/27/antisemitism-ihra-definition-jewish-writers). For those teachers wishing to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the state of antisemitism in the UK, a useful starting point is the Home Affairs Select Committee's report *Antisemitism in the UK* published in 2016, available here: https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/inquiry2/.

## Teaching about antisemitism in the classroom

It is quite common for teachers to feel trepidation at the prospect of teaching antisemitism in the classroom setting. Often, this anxiety comes from fears related to potential student responses; from the prospect of causing distress or offence, for example, to the possibility of students making remarks which are either inappropriate or outright unacceptable.

Such concerns are understandable, and highlight how broaching issues which are challenging, sensitive or controversial in the classroom are often intrinsically related to concerns about classroom behaviour and discipline. It is therefore critical teachers feel suitably familiar with their school's sanctions and disciplinary policies. Equally, they should approach the task of teaching about antisemitism in a collaborative manner – sharing ideas and experiences with colleagues, drawing support from middle and senior management, and planning how students are going to encounter the topic in a manner cognisant of their broader curriculum and pastoral frameworks.

Equally essential is teachers' confidence – both in terms of subject knowledge and classroom practice. A confident teacher in this vein is one who feels suitably able and prepared to deal with the contingencies of a classroom broaching a topic that is morally, ethically, and emotionally charged. Whilst it is neither reasonable nor likely to be practically possible to expect a teacher to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of the history of antisemitism, for example, a teacher who has a decent degree of familiarity with how antisemitism has evolved over time will feel more comfortable in handling potential issues, remarks, and questions that could arise.

For further guidance, teachers may wish to consult the publication *Addressing antisemitism through Education: Guidance for Policymakers*, published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization – available online at https://www.osce.org/odihr/383089?download=true.

## Teaching about the Holocaust, learning about antisemitism

A central objective of this lesson is to demonstrate how learning about the persecution and murder of Europe's Jews during the 1930s and 1940s, can deepen students' knowledge and understanding of antisemitism. In the process, students learn about aspects of the Holocaust – but this lesson does not seek nor claim to provide comprehensive historical knowledge of it. Neither does this lesson seek or claim to provide students with a complete understanding of antisemitism: such an endeavour is neither possible nor achievable in the confines of an hour long lesson, nor in the context of its focus on a specific time period.

Being clear about what this lesson can and cannot do is all the more integral given commonplace presumptions that by learning about the Holocaust, the existence of antisemitism can ultimately be defeated. Though this notion is alluring and comforting, it fails to acknowledge the complexity of antisemitism, its continually evolving nature, and its position as a central – but not exclusive – causal factor in the genocide of European Jewry. Through engaging with the experiences of Tomi Reichental, Freddie Knoller and Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, students develop historical knowledge and understanding of the shapes that antisemitism assumed during the 1930s and 1940s, and the very real, human impact that antisemitic attitudes and actions had. Some of the experiences that these survivors describe echo one another: as children of the period, these individuals all for example recount antisemitic experiences relating in some way to school. Yet though there are commonalities of experience there are also differences and specificities. This does not prevent generalisations being made, of course, but it demonstrates that antisemitism during the 1930s and 1940s was not a singular, uniform entity, that led to the same outcome everywhere. Rather, it acquired particular shape and form in various settings, influenced by contexts that were historical and contemporary, political and cultural.

This heterogeneity is salutary and instructive for understanding antisemitism as a historical phenomenon and a contemporary one. It underlines how learning about Holocaust inevitably affords insights into antisemitism, but also that learning about antisemitism cannot be reduced to just learning about the Holocaust.

## Research-informed practice

Research into students' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust published by UCL in 2016 revealed that two thirds of students aged 11-18 years old could not define antisemitism correctly. This highly disturbing finding serves as a point of departure for this lesson. As much as legitimising a lesson focused on exploring antisemitism during the period of the Holocaust, it also underlines the need to establish what the students in front of a teacher know and understand about this term from the outset. It is for this reason that the lesson begins with the multiple-choice question – which is the same question that was used in the UCL study.

However, in anticipation that some may contend students "know" what antisemitism *is* even if they are unfamiliar with the term, the lesson duly moves to asking 'what does antisemitism look like?' The activity serves a dual purpose: as well as usefully surfacing students' thinking, it also enables the teacher to collect "real-world" ideas that can be juxtaposed against events in history over the course of the lesson. It is very likely some of the suggestions made by students here will be evidenced in Experience Cards they go on to work with; at the same time, these cards will equally likely provide examples of "what antisemitism looks like" which they had not previously considered. In this fashion,

teachers can bring the past into dialogue with the present – not to draw "lessons", but rather to deepen thinking and pose new questions.

## Historical context

This lesson is concerned with exploring manifestations of antisemitism and not the historical development of the Holocaust. However, broaching the broader events and processes that made up the Holocaust is of course unavoidable. Indeed, awareness of the historical contexts of the respective countries that the three survivors hail from is integral for students' comprehension of their various experiences of antisemitism. Neither students nor teachers need extensive knowledge of the histories of the Holocaust in Slovakia, France or Germany, for a working understanding will be constructed through learning about the experiences of the survivors. That said, the more developed students' (and teachers') general knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust is, the greater their confidence and competence in making links, comparisons and contrasts will be.

To help familiarise teachers with some of the issues that emerge out of the histories of the three survivors, some brief commentary follows. Teachers may wish in the course of their lesson to introduce some of these issues to their classrooms.

For further historical information on Bergen-Belsen, please see the teacher's guide 'Bergen-Belsen: A Short History for Teachers' (Chapter 2 in these School Resources).

### Tomi Reichental

The stories of Tomi and his family, are illustrative of two particular dimensions within the history of the Holocaust which are often overlooked in educational settings.

The first concerns the significance of contingency in terms of time and space – or, put differently, the reality that where someone was at a particular moment in time, could have a critical influence in determining their experiences and potential fate. Born in what was then Czechoslovakia in 1935, Tomi's life and that of his immediate family is one which was for a time blissfully isolated from the tumult of other central European countries. This is not just simply because of the rural location of Merašice, but also the result of the political structure of inter-war Czechoslovakia. A child of the reconfiguration of Europe that followed the end of the First World War, Czechoslovakia was distinguished during the 1920s and 1930s by the relative strength of its parliamentary democracy. This is not to say that ethnic tension was absent; like many states that were born out of the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the creation of new nations in the years after 1918 brought forth new (and old) nationalisms – and this often animated existing animosities between different ethnic groups; especially where these were demographically imbalanced. Similarly, antisemitism was certainly present within Czechoslovakia, though with the exception of the Czech heartlands of Bohemia and Moravia, this tended to be bound up with anti-Communism rather than notions of race.

By all accounts, therefore, Tomi's family – like most Czechoslovakian Jews – had a degree of security and stability. This was, of course, thrown into turmoil by the events of 1938 which saw, in effect, the country dissected by the Nazi annexation of Bohemia and Moravia and ceding of eastern territory to Hungary. The Reichentals were, through no fault or action of their own, suddenly thrown into the tempest which followed these geo-political developments.

It was at this juncture that a second dimension proved to be of crucial importance: that is, events and occurrences at what we might call the 'local' level. From its creation, Slovakia was in a number of respects a vassal of Nazi Germany, but this did not mean that what ensued during and after 1939 was merely the result of German bidding. Like other states allied to Nazi Germany and many occupied territories, the first moves against the indigenous Jewish population centred on social ostracisation, cultural marginalisation and the normalisation of persecution. The introduction of the Jewish Codex in September 1941 was seminal in formalising discrimination that had taken place over the previous two years, accelerating it and extending this further. It was soon followed by new developments in the protracted, and somewhat complicated, negotiations between the Slovak and German governments over the provision of labour. As noted in the Experience Cards, this was the discussion in autumn 1941 over the potential deportation of Slovakian Jews.

There is some disagreement around whether the Slovakian government initiated this development or were responding to a German offer. Even so, as a result of the agreement the Slovakian state became the only country which willingly paid for the deportation of their Jewish population, while various Slovakian agents and agencies put the plan into practice. In so doing, these individuals and the Slovakian government were acting not under duress, but of their own volition.

The decision by the Slovakian state to end mass deportation in October 1942 naturally brings forth numerous questions, and did forestall the annihilation of those Jews who remained in the country. Still, the proactive approach adopted by the state, leading politicians, and "ordinary" people on the ground during the period of March to October illustrates not just the importance of non-Germans in the perpetration of the Holocaust, but also the need to understand the local contexts in which these people participated in the processes of persecution, discrimination and violence.

As ever, there is no monocausal explanation, but for a significant proportion of people involved, it is certain antisemitism played a sizeable role. However, it is too simple to say this was necessarily an annihilatory form of antisemitism of the type seen in Nazi Germany. Such a type existed in parts of Slovakian government and society to be sure, but more diffuse was a brand of antisemitism which was bound up with intense Slovakian nationalism and Catholicism. Naturally, this did not mean that all Catholics were antisemitic – indeed, in his autobiography Tomi recalls the kindness and generosity of the Catholic Priest in his village who not merely maintains his friendship with the Reichentals after 1938-39, but ultimately provides them with sustenance and protection following the Jewish Codex and beginning of mass deportation.

### Freddie Knoller

Freddie Knoller's story is – amongst other things – one of journey and movement. Accordingly, students see through Freddie's eyes how both antisemitism and the Holocaust traversed national borders.

As the oldest of the three survivors explored in this lesson, Freddie's experiences – and his recollections of them – are often more crystallised and detailed. By the time the Nazis came to power in Germany Freddie was already nearly 12 years old, and once Anschluss took place (with all its turmoil and terror) he was nearly 17. Significantly, Freddie's first memory of antisemitism pre-dates the Nazi period: it occurs in 1927, and within the context of the First Austrian Republic which was bound by The Treaty of St. Germain (1919) to guarantee minority rights for Jews. That this incident took place is noteworthy on numerous counts. As much as illustrating that parliamentary democracies

are not inoculated against antisemitism, it equally underlines how antisemitism was neither exclusively "Nazi" or exclusive to the Nazi period. What makes the event only more poignant is how the central protagonist in this tale – Karl Swoboda – is a boy aged just six years old. It is unclear whether at this time his is an antisemitism of race, religion, or other, and in all likelihood it was probably unclear to him. This raises questions about the basis of Karl's antisemitic views, their origins, and his awareness of his own behaviour.

This is, of course, not the first time we encounter Karl in Freddie's story. Indeed, this meeting is thrown into sharp relief by Freddie's recollection of seeing Karl on the street in 1938 – now replete in his Hitler Youth uniform, and 'determined to disown me'. Drawing a straight line between these two incidents is not possible, since after Karl and Freddie's fight as six year olds, they then establish a friendship based on their shared love of stamp collecting. It is impossible to offer an explanation for how and why Karl becomes the person he does, but his actions across these eleven years brings to the fore how individual antisemitic views and beliefs could be impacted by personal relationships, and the broader experiences that individuals had outside these connections.

Karl's character arc – of which his antisemitism has a key part – has to be understood in the context of the history of Austria during the inter-war period. This a time-span which begins with Austrian National Socialism existing almost beyond the margins of Austrian politics, then being suppressed and banned under the Federal State (1934-1938), before experiencing a dramatic revival in the lead-up to and in the aftermath of the *Anschluss*. Karl's antisemitic views are evidently not reliant on Nazism, and – indeed – they do not prevent him from establishing a friendship with Freddie. This sense that antisemitism could somehow be lived-with, accepted, and/or coexist with the toleration or even the embracing of Jewish people speaks in some respects to the dynamics at play in Austria in the years before 1938. That the *Anschluss* proceeds to rapidly unleash the violence and brutishness it does, raises the need to consider how antisemitic attitudes and beliefs themselves change and develop.

The increasingly desperate attempt by Freddie's parents to find refuge for their sons brings into view other dimensions to antisemitism during these years. First, it speaks to how Nazi policy towards the Jews – if a coherent, uniform position could even be said to exist at this time – had shifted away from socio-cultural marginalisation and political disenfranchisement, towards seeking the emigration of Jews out of Greater Germany. Achievement of this objective was understood to reside in making life completely intolerable for Jews, thus forcing their hand and making them want to leave. The key to this was seen to be in removing the capacity of Jews to support themselves economically; accordingly, 1938-1939 saw a ratcheting up of economic persecution through expropriation, expulsion, and forced seizure of properties and possessions – all conducted under the sobriquet of "Aryanization". These were not new "forms" of antisemitism, but they did constitute new antisemitic measures which had a catastrophic effect upon many people.

The shift towards heightened economic persecution and its relationship with emigration went hand in glove with the second dimension: that being the actions and behaviour of the free world in response to the ongoing refugee crisis become all the more acute. As is indicated in the Experience Cards, the international community was not forthcoming in welcoming Jewish refugees from Germany – partly because of their increasingly destitute state. Yet while concern at absorbing economically impoverished people was a real one in a number of countries, it was accompanied and sometimes compounded by fears that an influx of Jews would stimulate domestic antisemitism. This attitude – which was often informed by long-standing notions that the existence of antisemitism was attributable

to Jewish "difference" – was a key influence in many countries during the critical 18 months between March 1938 and the outbreak of war in September 1939.

Freddie's own escape from Nazism was, of course, to prove only temporary. Yet while his time in France includes some of the most remarkable aspects of his biography, they also provide invaluable vignettes that throw light on the involvement of non-Germans in the persecution of Jews. This is powerfully shown as Freddie bears witness to the infamous round-up of Jews in Paris in May 1941, and his own later incarceration at Drancy in 1943. In the years after 1945, French society struggled to confront the legacies of collaboration in both the occupied and non-occupied areas of France – and French involvement in the deportation of Jewish people was a central component in this. Indeed, it was not until 1995 that then President Jacques Chirac officially acknowledged that the French state had actively participated in a process which ultimately saw some 76,000 Jews deported to their deaths in camps located in German occupied Poland.

Understanding the course of the Holocaust in France and the degree of French collaboration in its perpetration naturally requires an appreciation of the history of antisemitism in that country. Such an enterprise has deep historical roots, of course, extending back to the contradictions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There one finds Jewish emancipation dramatically enacted in 1791, and then over a century later the self-same country thrown into social division and cultural crisis by the antisemitism which underpinned the Dreyfus affair. Yet the particular complexities and paradoxes of antisemitism in France also acquired a new edge during the 1930s when they became enmeshed with growing concerns around immigration. The refugee crises that confronted Europe following the Nazi ascent to power and Spanish Civil War saw a significant increase in the number of Jews in France – so much so that when war between France and Germany ended in the summer of 1940, more than half of the 350,000 Jews living in the country were not French citizens. In examining antisemitism in France during the 1930s and 1940s then, one quickly bumps into issues of national identity, ethnic cohesion, and the role of immigration.

### Anita Lasker-Wallfisch

In contrast to Tomi and Freddie, Anita Lasker-Wallfisch spent her entire childhood living under the ever-encroaching Nazi regime. Accordingly, through her story students encounter experiences of antisemitism within the most radically antisemitic nation-state in interwar Europe. This does not make her experiences more extreme than others; it does mean the context in which they occurred was – for a time – substantially different to that of Tomi and Freddie and offers perspectives on a distinct form of antisemitism.

Like Freddie, Anita's first personal experience of antisemitism occurs in a school setting. As the Experience Cards make clear, Anita's exposure to antisemitism was filtered through a number of different 'layers' – her young age, first and foremost, but also the high level of her family's assimilation. Where the former served for a time to both limit her comprehension of what was taking place and what she could later remember, the latter – by Anita's own admission – meant her Jewishness was not accented and thus not understood as a defining characteristic of her identity. These factors did not protect Anita from antisemitism of course, but – as her recollections indicate – they did serve as a buffer and helped create the impression that life was proceeding 'fairly normally', even if there was 'a growing awareness all was not well'. They also help to explain her bewilderment at her first antisemitic experience with the blackboard sponge at school and being spat at in the street.

Anita's experience of antisemitism from her peers clearly has parallels with those described by both Tomi and Freddie. However, in contrast to them, Anita's peers proceed through their school years in a system which is constructed to instil ideological doctrine. Embedding antisemitic ideas and beliefs into young people was a core part of this policy, with the intent that schoolchildren would incorporate a racialised understanding of Jews and Jewishness into their worldview and value systems. This was antisemitism of a different hue to that in circulation elsewhere in Europe at this time, though of course with the expansion of the Nazi sphere of influence so these perspectives and perceptions became adopted more widely.

Amidst the shock and awe of the first few years of Nazi Germany there is an underlying potential for students to not recognise how anti-Jewish policy did not follow a straightforward trajectory. To be sure the first eighteen months of Nazi dictatorship saw both a raft of legislative measures enacted against Jewry and a considerable upturn in state-sanctioned violence, yet events did not continue at the same rate for the following six years. Rather, anti-Jewish activity proceeded through peaks and troughs, sometimes meandering down what would prove to be policy cul-de-sacs and on other occasions assuming an ad hoc appearance. As much as this was a reflection of the political structure of the regime and its lack of clarity over policy, it was also testament to the interplay between those in power and broader German society.

How this looked on the ground – and, crucially, how it was experienced – is well-illustrated in Anita's reflections on the Experience Card entitled 'Persecution'. The picture she depicts here is one of a gradual but sustained and unrelenting erosion of civil liberties; one which takes the form of both governmental actions but also socio-cultural prejudice and discrimination. Of course, this cannot be explained by any sweeping claim of German people being inherently antisemitic, but nor can the persecution of German Jews during the 1930s be explained without reference to antisemitism. In the event, even this may be too much of a generalisation for how it does not capture the different graduations and foundations for people's antisemitic views.

Just as Anita's experiences in the 1930s prompt thought about the nature of antisemitism in Germany at this time and its development, so the same applies to events in her life during the first years of the Second World War. The pedantry of many of the laws which were passed between 1939 and 1941 serve as a foil onto which is juxtaposed the radical steps that were taken against Jewish people at this time: namely, the introduction of forced labour, the humiliation of wearing the Star of David (with its echoes of measures taken to identify Jews during the middle ages), and the obstacles erected against accessing basic necessities like food. The consequences of these assaults on people's humanity and well-being is given a human face through Anita's memories, and acquire an added tragedy when her parents and grandmother are deported – leaving her to assume the duties of an adult at the tender age of sixteen.

In this way, as much as Anita's experiences provide students with a chronicle of the Holocaust they also exist as an indispensable window onto the effects that radicalised antisemitic persecution had. This continues through Anita's experiences of prison, and especially with her arrival at Auschwitz. As she illustrates, if the systematic (and immediate) removal of people's identities through tattooing, shaving, and number allocation helped some of the perpetrators to participate in atrocities, it was a rigmarole that inflicted profound trauma on its victims.

This and much else that occurred in death camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau, was – quite literally – antisemitism *in extremis*. In learning about these particular experiences students acquire knowledge and understanding of the extremities of antisemitism in the twentieth century, though it is important this is itself properly contextualised: first, into the broader history of the Holocaust, where the nadirs of the extermination camps were no more or less horrific that those that took place in the ghettos or at the sites of mass shootings across Eastern Europe; and second into the longer (and so-called longest) hatred of Jews which scars European history. Needless to say this is not to fall into the trap of relativization, but rather to emphasise that in order to properly understand the antisemitism of the 1930s and 1940s, and in turn extract the insights it can provide, it is necessary to view and approach it within its own historical context.

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