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Religious education, antisemitism and the curriculum in Norway

by

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Abstract

Using a content analysis, this study critically explores the religious education (RE) curriculum for primary and secondary school in Norway with a view towards highlighting references to antisemitism and the Norwegian holocaust, especially in relation to the teaching of Judaism. The study focuses on inclusive education from the perspective of the religious education curriculum. The findings reveal that while aspects of the history of Christianity are taught employing a local lens, this does not extend to Judaism. We argue that this statutory omission is problematic given the historical contours of antisemitism which found its apotheosis in the Norwegian holocaust and the contemporaneous recrudescence of antisemitism. Given the historical conflation of religion and ethnicity in regard to Jews, it is argued that the RE curriculum should include pedagogical measures that aim at combatting antisemitism. Commensurate with a contrapuntal pedagogy that aims at counteracting antisemitism, we posit some examples for the consideration of RE teachers.

Keywords: Religious education, antisemitism, Norway, inclusive education, curriculum

Introduction

How does the religious education curriculum contribute to the struggle against antisemitism? More precisely, are there formulations in the curriculum that acknowledge the Norwegian holocaust and demonstrate a desire to educate students about the perils of antisemitism? These questions are central to this study. One-third of the Norwegian-Jewish population, roughly seven hundred and seventy Jews, were herded into the *SS Donau* and perished upon arrival in concentration camps in Germany; only thirty survived (Hoffman, Kopperud & Moe, 2012). The few returnees' trauma continued in the aftermath of the war. According to a recent government white paper crafted to tackle antisemitism, *Action plan against antisemitism 2016–2020*, “The state refused to pay out inheritances unless a death certificate was presented, which was impossible for the Jews who had lost family members in the concentration camps to obtain” (Ministry of Local Government and Modernization, 2016). In light of the traumatic history of Jews in Norway, this study argues that the teaching of Judaism in the statutory subject of religious education (RE) in primary and secondary school would benefit from an engagement with the Norwegian Holocaust. Currently, topics central to an inclusive education, such as knowledge about the Norwegian Holocaust and antisemitism, are conspicuous by their absence in the entire RE curriculum. It is this silence that has exercised some authors to grope for answers.

“We have no photographs. There does not exist one picture of a Norwegian police officer arresting Norwegian Jews and escorting them for deportation. The only thing we have is dark, grainy photographs of spectators who stand at Oslo harbor and watch the ship *Donau* after Jews have boarded. Perhaps it is this absence of a visual prop which is one of the reasons it is very difficult for Norwe-

gians to accept that the Holocaust was not something that happened elsewhere, but here, in our midst” (Michelet, 2014, p. 10; translation ours).

According to Michelet (2014), it is only in the last decade that serious research about the Norwegian Holocaust began in earnest. It is important to underscore that while there are some RE textbooks in primary and secondary school in which antisemitism and the Norwegian holocaust feature, schools and teachers are under no compulsion to purchase these books and, even if they do, can disregard teaching about the Norwegian Holocaust as this is not explicitly mentioned in the curriculum. For example, the textbook, *Vivo*, by the publisher Gyldendal does mention the 1814 Jewish clause, the Norwegian Holocaust, the role of the Norwegian police in deporting Jews and even modern antisemitism in Russia and Iran. While this is laudable, teachers have shared that they avoid teaching about this “painful” chapter because the children are emotionally vulnerable, and, germane to this study, nothing in the RE curriculum obliges them to teach it. In other textbooks, the content on antisemitism and the Norwegian holocaust occupies a liminal space. A case in point is the textbook, *Horisonter* (Holth & Deschington, 2006) for grades 8-10. Curiously, of the 20 pages on Judaism, only two small paragraphs, on the last page, mention cursorily what happened to Jews in Norway. And, regrettably, nowhere is the culpability of Norwegian society mentioned. The sentence in question reads, “There were 1800 Jews in Norway, and over 750 of them were killed by the Nazis during the Second World War. Many managed fortunately to flee to Sweden” (Holth & Deschington, 2006, p. 66). Critical discourse analysis reminds us that passive constructions, which negate the schema that “left-hand noun phrases refer to an agent” (Fowler, 1991, p. 78), have the effect of reorienting the story. A perfunctory look at the local teaching plans for religious education, often uploaded on school websites, corroborates claims that many schools refrain from teaching about the Norwegian Holocaust (e.g. Vardåsen school; 5th grade RE teaching plan; link in bibliography). The lead author can confirm that many RE teachers in high school were perplexed that only a tiny minority of students knew about the Norwegian Holocaust (Thomas, 2016). We argue that the truncated teaching in primary and secondary school must accept some of the blame for the poor levels of knowledge about such an important topic. This, we argue, ought to have consequences for curriculum content.

Integration is an oft-repeated aim and ideal of Norwegian education (Pihl, 2010; Hovland, 2001; Hauge, 2014). However, few immigrants in Norwegian history have embraced this aim with as much commitment as have Jews. It is worth quoting at length from one document, entitled *Jødene* (Jews), available on The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training’s website, which bears ample testimony to the oomph with which Jews integrated into Norwegian society.

“Most of the immigrant European Jews considered Norway their first Fatherland. This laid the foundation for a strong will to integrate into Norwegian culture and lifestyle – while simultaneously maintaining their Jewish culture and religion. It was important that their children attend school and secure an education, learn Norwegian and befriend Norwegians. Outdoors life in Norwegian nature was something Jewish families adopted quickly. Children were given Norwegian first names in addition to their Jewish ones, and some norwegianized their surnames so they would be better understood in mainstream society” (Levin, 2015, p. 3; our translation).

It is argued, based on the subsequent experience of Jews in Norway, that this will to integrate through, among others, the educational system proved deficient once the forces of Nazism that ruled Norway during WWII rekindled the simmering undercur-

rent of antisemitism. This undercurrent of antisemitism saw its apotheosis in the Constitution of 1814 which banned Jews from entering Norway. Are there indications that the contemporary curriculum for religious education, a vital platform for combating antisemitism, takes cognizance of the need to go beyond platitudes about integration? It is further argued that educational aims and objectives, as formulated in curricular documents, cannot shy away from naming the problem (antisemitism in this case) and devising ways of dealing with it through the schooling apparatus, particularly given the current recrudescence of antisemitism in Norway.

1 Literature review

This study argues that the teaching of Judaism in the academic subject of religious education in schools in Norway is an appropriate forum for sensitizing pupils to the history and machinations of antisemitism. It is regrettable that this is currently not the case. According to Pihl (2010, pp. 56–57), who is concerned about what she refers to as “an ethnocentric education policy”, “A study shows that the Holocaust annihilation of Norwegian Jews during the Second World War and the Norwegian contribution in deporting Jews is not taught in the Teacher degree program”. She goes on to state:

“Teacher-students lack knowledge about this phenomenon, which is one of the darkest chapters in Norwegian history. This means that 76% of students enrolled in the largest Teacher degree program respond that they are not qualified enough to teach about the Norwegian Holocaust” (Pihl, 2010, p. 57; translation ours).

The above is odd given that the national curriculum for schools and the new general plan for teacher education in Norway underscore the fact that Jews are among the five national minorities recognized in Norway commensurate with the country’s international duties. These statutory educational documents go on to state: “These groups have contributed in shaping the Norwegian cultural heritage, and teaching/instruction must impart knowledge about these populations” (NDET, 2017b, p. 6). In addition, a study conducted by the Norwegian Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities (2012) states:

“The respondents were asked their opinion on the school curriculum and whether they thought today’s young people should learn about the fate of the Norwegian Jews during the Second World War. There was a high degree of consensus – almost everyone answered that they thought this topic should be included in the curriculum” (Hoffman, Kopperud & Moe, 2012, p. 27).

It is argued that the silence in the religious education curriculum in regard to, for instance, the proscription on Jews entering Norway in the 1814 Constitution can actually be a salient opportunity for teachers to promote inclusive education. Inclusive education can be understood as “Education that fits the abilities, interests, values and experiences of learners – and their needs to relate to their peers in all their diversity” (Mitchell, 2017, p. 11). In addition, “It is a multifaceted concept that requires educators at all levels of a system to attend to vision, placement, curriculum, assessment, teaching, acceptance, access, support, resources and leadership” (Ibid, p. 11). This study focuses on inclusive education from the perspective of the religious education curriculum. We argue that for religious education to bolster values amenable to a democratic society, it cannot shy away from engaging with injustices that, regrettably, were spawned by interpretations of religion, such as accusations of deicide against Jews in medieval Europe and alleged biblical commitments to resurrect a state.

Education systems should ensure that the school curriculum includes consideration of the diverse groups within their societies and in a range of other countries. This should involve an historical perspective on oppression and inequality and learning to be critical thinkers able to analyze historical and contemporary issues centering on ethnic diversity (Mitchell, 2017, p. 170).

Three reasons underlie the imperative to make the teaching of antisemitism an integral part of religious education: the unbridled antisemitism that culminated in the Norwegian Holocaust; the fact that unlike Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and adherents of other world religions, anti-Semites have traditionally collapsed religion with ethnicity in the case of Jews and, thirdly, the contemporary upsurge in levels of antisemitism. Specialists in RE have long explored ways of making the subject more inclusive (Hull, 1998; Igrave, 2001 & Stern, 2006). Significantly, the UK's Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) considers the following germane to the practice of inclusion:

“An educationally inclusive school is one in which the teaching and learning, achievements, attitudes and well-being of every young person matter [...] This shows, not only in their performance, but also in their ethos and their willingness to offer new opportunities to pupils who may have experienced previous difficulties [...] it involves taking account of pupils' varied life experiences and needs” (Ofsted, 2000).

Ethnic and religious minorities are included in the definition above. There is, sadly, a plethora of reasons for students from Jewish backgrounds to feel excluded in education in Norway. A case in point is a study commissioned by Oslo Municipality entitled “Monitoring Knowledge and Attitudes about Racism and Antisemitism” (Vaagen & Gran, 2011, p. 53). Among others:

- 46.3% of students surveyed believed that “Norway has had a law which forbade Jews from entry”.
- 35.6% believed the statement “600 000 Jews were killed under WW2” to be true.
- 47.5% believed “Jews have been persecuted for over 2000 years”.

The above speaks ill of current levels of knowledge about antisemitism in Norway and the broad contours of antisemitism historically. As Rubin (2013, p. 217) contends, persecuted minorities, such as Jews, would take little comfort in studies that discuss Jewish holidays “when compared to issues of discrimination and persecution”. The lead author's experience as a teacher of RE in high school in Norway (Thomas, 2016) bears testimony to Rubin's (2011) contention. Only when Judaism was broached did the topic veer off-course to classical anti-Semitic tropes of collaboration with the Devil and financial chicanery. While the inclusion of Judaism in Norwegian RE as part of world religions is important, omitting the subject of antisemitism leaves the teacher bereft of an indispensable tool in grappling with a persistent hate ideology that looms large anytime the topic gravitates towards Jews. That the traumatic experience of the Holocaust trumps all other dimensions of Jewish identity for American Jews, reinforces the importance of teaching it in the RE curriculum when Judaism is the focus.

“Among the noteworthy findings of the Pew Research Center's 2013 study, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, was that nearly three-quarters (73%) of American Jews consider “Remembering the Holocaust” the most essential part of what it means to be Jewish: more essential, in fact, than any other aspect of Jewish iden-

tification, including observing Jewish law (19%) and being part of a Jewish community” (28%) (Jacobs, 2018, p. 111).

Why would it make pedagogical sense to couple the teaching of Judaism with antisemitism? In his thought-provoking book, *A World Without Jews: The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide* (2014), Confino ponders the Nazi assault against the Jews as epitomized in the burning of the Torah scrolls (SS soldiers played soccer with them) and the destruction of synagogues in Germany to forward this analysis:

“Burning the Bible, and by extension Kristallnacht, was part of the Nazi tale about Jews as inheritors of a tradition, of historical origins, that threatened the Third Reich ... In burning it, the Nazis expanded on the idea of eternal origins by adding the desire for a clean slate of religious origins ... The act of destruction was also an act of appropriation of the authority of the Hebrew Bible and a sort of overcoming an original sin of origins – namely, that the roots of Christianity were Jewish” (Confino, 2014, pp. 120–122).

Despite Nazi hubris, the roots of Christianity are solidly grounded in Judaism. As the Apostle Paul admonished the Roman Christians: “Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee” (Romans 11:18). To the above, one can add Lévy’s (2017, pp. 32–34) arguments for approaching the Holocaust as exceptional: it was to be *final*, without appeal and sought to erase the memory of the living and the dead. He writes: “So great was the will to annihilate that even the traces of the exterminated – their culture, language, places of worship, books – were to be wiped off the surface of the earth as if they had never existed, as if no Jewish being had ever been conceived or created” (Lévy, 2017, p. 32). While scholars of the Holocaust speak of “memorycide” to capture the attempt to erase all traces of Jews from the world, Confino (2014, p. 240) is of the opinion that the Nazis aspired, not to erase the memory, but appropriate it to concoct a novel myth about the Aryan “master race”.

It is, we argue, insensitive to teach Judaism in the Norwegian RE syllabus without taking cognizance of the contours of antisemitism sketched above. Inclusive education in this sense would imply an acknowledgement of the immutable fact that the monotheistic/Abrahamic religions find their origin in Judaism and that many Norwegians were complicit in abetting and perpetrating the Norwegian Holocaust because they shared to various degrees in imagining a world without Jews. In the government’s recent *Action Plan against Antisemitism 2016–2020*, the extent of the collusion is clear:

“The police action against the Jews on 26 November 1942 was the largest in the history of Norway. All Jewish assets and property were confiscated, on the initiative of the Norwegian Nazi party ‘Nasjonal Samling’. Members of the civil service, taxi drivers and civilians were also involved in the actions” (Ibid, p. 16).

It behooves the authorities, then, in light of this historical responsibility to explore ways of combating antisemitism through religious education.

2 Methodology

This study employs a content analysis approach applied to the statutory religious education curriculum for primary and secondary school in Norway. The document, *Curriculum for Knowledge of Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics* (2015), is available in the public domain (see link in bibliography). The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (NDET) is the official state organ behind the cur-

riculum. “The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training is responsible for the development of kindergarten and primary and secondary education. The Directorate is the executive agency for the Ministry of Education and Research” (NDET, 2017a). As emphasized earlier, religious education textbooks have not been included in the population sample because teachers can choose between several textbooks some of which elect to forego any mention of antisemitism and the Norwegian holocaust entirely. We argue that this ad hoc approach is emblematic of the need to include these topics in the statutory religious education curriculum.

Content analysis has been defined, among others, as “a strict and systematic set of procedures for the rigorous analysis, examination and verification of the contents of written data” (Flick, 1998; Mayring, 2004). In particular, the method has been favored by researchers who seek to ascertain the importance of topics as evidenced by their relative frequency (Weber, 1990). Initially, a simple word search was conducted to determine the frequency of the occurrence of the words “antisemitism” and “Norwegian holocaust” in the RE curriculum. Once it was ascertained that these units of analysis did not occur at all, we carefully interrogated the RE document for any statements regarding the history of each religious and non-religious tradition. We argue that the fact that antisemitism and the Norwegian holocaust are absent is a vital find. We are reminded in regard to content analysis that, “Frequency does not equal importance, and not saying something (withholding comment) may be as important as saying something” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 481).

The assumption was to approximate what dimensions of religious and non-religious history were deemed essential knowledge for the architects of the RE curriculum. After considering the “manifest characteristics” (Krippendorp, 2004, p. 46) of the text first, we proceeded with an open coding of emergent themes to “infer the antecedents of communications” (Cohen, Manion, L. & Morrison, 2007, p. 476). All coding was done responsively – i.e. they emerged from the data rather than being created pre-ordinately (Cohen, Manion, L. & Morrison, 2007, p. 478). Once the unit of analysis was shifted to references to “history”, the syntactical meaning of these sentences were studied. Further to this, a careful reading of the text threw up another significant unit of analysis – bullying and antiracist work – which we considered pertinent to our study of antisemitism and the Norwegian holocaust. The units were collated as categories that are complementary and not mutually exclusive.

In exploring the RE curriculum document, we were guided by Hammersley and Atkinson’s (2007, p. 130) exhortation to treat official data as social products: “they must be examined, not relied on uncritically as a research resource”. Due to the anonymity of the architects of the curriculum, buoyed by the gravitas accorded the Directorate of Education, there is the peril of perceiving such official documents as objective statements about “reality” rather than documents crafted by individuals with biases. It is this epistemological fallibility that informs our *modus operandi*. Some of the questions that a content analysis of documents would seek to explore, include the following:

“How are documents written? How are they read? Who write writes them? Who reads them? For what purposes? On what occasions? With what outcomes? What is recorded, and how? What is omitted? What does the writer seem to take for granted about the reader (s)? What do readers need to know in order to make sense of them?” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 132).

Where texts from diverse sources have been translated into Norwegian, this has been indicated in parenthesis. The images featured in the discussion section have been captured with our own camera. Permission is not necessary since the brass plaques

and Gustav Vigeland's statue of Ruth Maier are in the public domain and can be reproduced without permission.

3 Findings

The findings in this section are based on the statutory curriculum for religious education for primary and secondary schools in Norway entitled *The Curriculum for Knowledge of Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics 2015* (KCRPLE from hence). The curriculum is translated into English and available in the public domain¹. Religious education is compulsory from grade one to grade ten. In what follows, statements pertinent to the research question are reproduced for closer study.

4 Omission of the history of Judaism in Norway

“Knowledge of Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of life and Ethics is an ordinary school subject intended to bring all pupils together. The Norwegian Education Act demands that the teaching of this subject be objective, critical and pluralistic. This implies that the subject be taught impartially and based on facts, and that the different world religions and philosophies of life shall be presented with respect” (KCRPLE, p. 2)

Under the subheading “Purpose” on page 2, the RE curriculum is to be taught in a manner that is “objective, critical and pluralistic”. Furthermore, the subject is to “be taught impartially and based on facts”. These academic formulations are the denouement of litigations brought against the state by a group of parents supported by the Norwegian Humanist Association and the Norwegian Islamic Council to the United Nations in 2004. They argued that the teaching of Christianity was proselytizing and participatory. The UN ruled that the teaching of RE in Norway was found to be in violation of the Human Rights Codes of article 18, paragraph 4, of the Covenant by the UN Human Rights Committee (*Leirvåg v. Norway*). While the above was non-binding, a second ruling against the subject of RE in Norway by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg, which upheld the earlier UN ruling, led to amendments that redressed some of the concerns raised (Thomas, 2015). Hence the current formulations such as “objective, critical and pluralistic” and the need to teach the subject “impartially and based on facts”. The above has been labored to consider the degree to which this applies to the teaching of Judaism and its history in Norway.

- “The main subject area Christianity covers Christianity from a historic perspective and how it is understood and practiced in Norway and around the world today” (p. 3).
- “The main subject area Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Philosophies of life covers these religions and selected philosophies of life from a historic perspective, their written traditions as sources of cultural understanding and beliefs, and how these religions and philosophies of life are understood and practiced around the world and in Norway today” (p. 3).

¹ The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2015). URL: <file:///C:/Users/pt/Desktop/Rothgangel/CURRICULUM%20FOR%20KNOWLEDGE%20OF%20CHRISTIANITY,%20RELIGION,%20PHILOSOPHIES%20OF%20LIFE%20AND%20ETHICS.pdf> [last access: 29.08.2018].

With respect to Norway, only Christianity and Judaism can be said to have long historical traditions. The history of Jews in Norway does not begin in 1851 when, after a prolonged struggle, the efforts of the celebrated writer and poet, Henrik Wergeland, led to the expunging of the “Jew clause” (*Jødeparagrafen*) which read: “The Evangelical-Lutheran religion is the state’s public religion. The inhabitants who practice it are obliged to raise their children in the same. Jesuits and monastic orders may not be tolerated. Jews are excluded from access to the Kingdom”. In 1436, Archbishop Aslak Bolt made it an offense to observe the Sabbath (Mendelsohn, 1969, p. 10). We argue that the RE curriculum does a disservice to the history of Jews and Judaism in Norway in omitting the over 600 years of Jewish presence. Contrary to its own stipulation, this does not support teachers with tools amenable to a pedagogy that is “objective, critical, pluralistic, impartial and based on facts”.

Below is a list of formulations from the competence aims after years 4, 7 and 10. The formulations are compared on the basis of what they stipulate in regard to the history of Christianity and Judaism in Norway. As is evident, whereas Christianity’s history is mentioned, one fails to find any similar reference to Judaism’s history in Norway.

- Christianity
- Describe local churches, find traces of historical Christianity in their local community and district, and present these finds in different ways (after year 4, p.5).
- Tell about central events and persons from the history of Christianity, from the earliest congregations to the Reformation (after year 7, p. 6).
- Tell about central events and persons in the history of Christianity in Norway up to the Reformation (after year 10, p. 8).

The ahistorical study of Judaism is manifest in the three points below under “competence aims after year level 7”.

Judaism

- Explain what Tanak, Torah and Talmud are, and talk about important stories from the Jewish faith
- Talk about Judaism, the Jewish way of viewing life and ethics with an emphasis on their idea of god, their view of humanity, creed, current ethical challenges and selected Jewish texts
- Explain the Jewish calendar and manner of calculating historic time, and describe Jewish holidays, festivals and central rituals

We argue that a similar formulation with respect to Judaism would be salient with a view towards combatting antisemitism. By similar formulation, we mean a reference to “find traces of historical Judaism”. There is no shortage of “historical traces of Judaism” in Norway, and Oslo in particular. Curiously, the one place where the RE curriculum stipulates a historical consideration of Judaism and concern for issues pertinent to Jews in Norway, is in the final year of high school where teaching about Judaism is not compulsory, while the other world religions are mandatory. Writing about this in 2015, one high school RE teacher stated:

“I was shocked when I discovered that Judaism, one of five world religions, was virtually absent from the textbook we use for teaching, said Marte Breivik, teacher of Religion and Ethics at Kongsskogen high school in Oslo. With the increasing

fear of antisemitism in Europe, Breivik thinks it strange that the textbook authors do not see the need to give greater attention to Judaism” (Skatvedt, 2015).

The Norwegian publisher, *Aschehoug*, has elected to expunge a chapter on Judaism from its book *Tro og tanke* (Faith and thought). Professor Gunnar Heine, who was co-editor at the time, is quoted as regretting this decision. Heine states: “At the time there was much talk that one should think globally and give the students more knowledge about other religions besides the monotheistic ones, such as Hinduism” (Brække, 2017). The above concerns led Ervin Krohn, the leader of the Jewish community in Oslo (Det Mosaiske Trossamfunn), to state, “Teachers are obliged to follow the curriculum, and if one does not have access to other teaching materials, then I am afraid that Judaism will disappear completely” (Brække, 2017). In the discussion section we highlight three such examples which teachers of RE could use as pedagogical helps in sensitizing students to the dangers of antisemitism.

Bullying and antiracist work

In a similar vein to the omission of a historical context in the first part of the findings, it is our contention that the RE curriculum misses a vital opportunity to capitalize upon the study of Judaism as a platform for teaching about antisemitism. As the formulations from the RE curriculum evince, bullying and antiracist work are mentioned but decontextualized from antisemitism. The teaching of Judaism is broached as if Judaism and Jews are two distinct entities. This would be to ignore the lessons of history. This thread is further elaborated in the discussion section. Below are some statements from the RE curriculum.

- Talk about respect and tolerance, and counteract bullying in real life (after year 4, p. 6).
- Talk about ethnic, religious and ethical minorities in Norway, and reflect on the challenges of multicultural society (after year 7, p. 8)
- Discuss racism and how anti-racist work can prevent racism (after year 7, p. 8)

In the current anti-Semitic climate, where Norwegian-Jews are stigmatized and even fear attending school, the RE curriculum should explicitly acknowledge antisemitism as a particular form of hatred directed at Jews by articulating the need to cultivate “respect, tolerance and bullying” in relation to Jews and Judaism. As it stands, these formulations which are subsumed under “Philosophy” alone become platitudinous and decontextualized. The following statements reported by the Norwegian national broadcasting station (Nrk, 2014), distil the gravity of the situation: “Together with homo and whore, Jew is the most common pejorative in Norwegian school grounds” and “A fresh, global survey conducted by the Anti-Defamation League shows that 15% of the Norwegian population has anti-Semitic views. This constitutes over half a million people, and is more than Denmark and Sweden” (translation ours).

Curricula for every subject, from grades one to high school, can be found on NDET’s website. *The Curriculum for Knowledge of Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics 2015* states, for instance, that pupils are to “discuss racism and how anti-racist work can prevent racism” (KCRPLE, 2015, p. 8). While the latter is laudable, it is significant that the word antisemitism is never mentioned nor nomenclature that can be recognized as referring to the specific kind of racism which led to the Norwegian Holocaust.

5 Discussion

How can the teaching of Judaism in the Norwegian religious education curriculum for primary and secondary education include references to the Norwegian Holocaust with a view towards combating antisemitism and promoting inclusive education? We have argued that the current omission of the Norwegian Holocaust from the religious education curriculum denies the students an opportunity to understand and grapple with prejudice in a pluralistic world where a premium is put on cultivating tolerance. A Pew Research study about Jewish identity indicates, (Jacobs, 2018, p. 111), Jews in the USA are of the opinion that “Remembering the Holocaust” is the most essential part of their identity, more so than observing the Jewish law (19%). History has demonstrated that learning about the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – does not automatically translate into diminished anti-Semitism; the Holocaust was perpetrated in countries where the biblical patriarchs were venerated. Due to space restraints, we will highlight some examples we have employed in our teaching practices capitalizing on examples from historical anti-Semitism in Norway and suggesting ways to combat them in religious education. Marrus (2016, p. 171), a major figure in Holocaust historiography, reminds us that “Studying the Holocaust deepens appreciation of human reality, and that, in a general sense, makes us more mature, wiser, more ‘experienced’ observers of the human scene”.

We posit that RE teachers ought to lock horns with anti-Semitic legislation and acts from the Norwegian past and present in a pedagogy that can be described as contrapuntal – a counterpoint to antisemitism that holds transformative value (Said, 1994; Singh & Greenlaw, 1998; Thomas, 2017). An example from Norwegian history that would find resonance in religious education is the fear underlying the 1814 ban on Jews from entering Norway. Ulvund (2017, p. 59) refers to the Magistrate Lauritz Weidemann (1775–1856) who channeled the opinion of the residents of Oppland county in Norway. Weidemann contended that “Jews were duplicitous, and that their religion along with the hope of becoming a nation again had led them to ‘intrigues and to create a state within a state’” (Ulvund, 2017, p. 59; translation ours). Teachers could point (as the lead author has done in high school lessons) that the above illustrates how Jews have often been accused of being more loyal to the state of Israel (when it did not exist) than the host countries where they have resided in the past and do reside contemporaneously. There is a consensus that such accusations are anti-Semitic commensurate with the guidelines by The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, for example. The current debate in the UK Labour Party about the extent to which such international definitions ought to be accepted (Cowburn, 2018) indicates that antisemitism exists in the highest echelons of power, and serves as a reminder of the timeliness of this study. That the founding fathers of Norway’s Constitution doubted whether Jews would be loyal to Norway is still an anti-Semitic trope alive and well among some contemporary Europeans. Consider this statement from The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia in 2002.

“There is some evidence that many Europeans doubt the national loyalty of members of Jewish communities due to their support for Israel: An ADL survey (June 2002 / October 2002) in nine EU states (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, UK, Spain, Italy, Austria, The Netherlands) ascertained that 51% of respondents (the numbers lay between 34% in the UK and 72% in Spain) believed “that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to their own country” (Bergmann & Wetzel, 2003).

In response, an RE lesson where history and religion can fruitfully intersect is one where teachers counteract with appropriate texts from the Tanakh. Teachers of Judaism can highlight the fidelity of the patriarch Joseph (Book of Genesis) who married Pharaoh’s daughter and presciently saved Egypt from a disastrous famine. Other ex-

amples could include the prophet Daniel who is still highly regarded by Iranians, as some of our students have confirmed. Daniel served faithfully in the courts of several Babylonian and Persian kings. Furthermore, King Zedekiah persecuted Jeremiah (chapter 27) precisely because the prophet called for his fellow-countrymen to accept the yoke of the King of Babylon and seek the welfare of Babylon in exile. The anti-Semitic nature of Weidemann's allegation is all the more accentuated when one considers that Jews across the world had, and still harbor, diverging views on the issue of *aliya* (returning to the land of Israel). In addition, the irony of accusing Jews of harboring Zionist aspirations at a time when the father of modern Zionism, Theodore Herzl (b. 1860), was not yet born, should not be lost on the students. Obviously, examples and methods of working will be contingent upon teachers' skills, but the aim is that "a more relevant and responsive approach would be to center the curriculum on present-day concerns from which students can trace historical roots" (Jacobs, 2018, p. 115). Weidemann's antisemitism was clearly baseless as few other minorities demonstrated a stronger desire to integrate into Norwegian society than did Jews once the ban was lifted. As Levin (2015) noted earlier, Norwegian Jews adopted Norwegian first names and the Norwegian love for the outdoors, among others.

In the findings section we drew attention to the omission of the phrase "historical traces of Judaism". With respect to inclusive education, Mitchell (2017, p. 170) reminds us that the school curriculum "should involve an historical perspective on oppression and inequality and learning to be critical thinkers able to analyze historical and contemporary issues centering on ethnic diversity" (Ibid.). As mentioned earlier, we will provide three examples of such "historical traces" that would support teachers in countering antisemitism. Møllergata school in Oslo has a brass plaque commemorating four Jewish pupils who were deported during the war. The plaque features the names of the pupils and that they were dispatched to Germany and killed (image 1).



Image 1: "Pupils who fell as victims in the war: deported to Germany 26/11 1942 and annihilated"

The inscriptions reads "Pupils who fell as victims in the war: deported to Germany 26/11 1942 and annihilated" (translation ours). What is disconcerting is that the plaque does not mention that these students were "deported" and "annihilated" because their only crime was to be Jewish. Needing to clarify this further, this was raised

with the receptionist who stated, “I am new here, and hence unsure. However, the school lays a wreath under the plaque every year, so I am guessing that they are the Jewish children. Please talk to the Head Teacher about this.” As will be seen in the other two examples, broaching this subject led to much awkwardness and anxiety. We were reminded of Michelet’s (2017, p. 10) introspection, “Perhaps it is this absence of a visual prop which is one of the reasons it is very difficult for Norwegians to accept that the Holocaust was not something that happened elsewhere, but here, in our midst”. As previously mentioned, a formulation about finding “traces of historical Judaism” in the RE curriculum would encourage teachers to employ the past in ameliorating the formidable challenge presented by antisemitism.

Another example could be the project called *Stolpersteine* (German for cobblestones) started by the German artist, Gunther Demnig in 1993. The aim of the project is to lay bronze cobblestones all over Europe to commemorate the victims of National Socialism. “Since 2010, Oslo Jewish Museum and artist Gunter Demnig have been placing memorial cobble stones in memory of Jewish victims of the Holocaust in Norway” (Oslo Jewish Museum, 2018) (see image 2).



Image 2: “Cobblestones” project marking the residences and places where Jews were apprehended in Norway

On a website opened in 2015 with the following link, <https://www.snublestein.no/>, students are taken to a map of Norway with red markers. A pop up appears once a marker is clicked with biographical information about Norwegian-Jewish victims of the Holocaust. So far, 543 names have been registered. As the Museum notes:

“The passers-by who discover the stones become aware of the fact that the Holocaust also took place exactly where they are standing. In this way, the stones also have a clear pedagogical effect; they alert those who happen to look down when passing by”.

Not least, another “historical trace” is the young Ruth Maier, often called Norway’s Anne Frank. Ruth and her parents escaped to Norway from Austria after the Anschluss of 1938, but her hopes of finding refuge from racial hatred in Norway were not to be. She was the epitome of the well-integrated Norwegian-Jew that Levin (2015) alluded to in the introduction.

“Ruth spoke Norwegian fluently within a year, graduated from high school, and read Knut Hamsun’s classic “Hunger” (*Sult*) with ease. Ruth modeled for the sculptor Gustav Vigeland, and is immortalized in the statue “Surprised” which stands on permanent display in Frogner Park, Oslo (image 3)” (Thomas, 2016, p. 200).

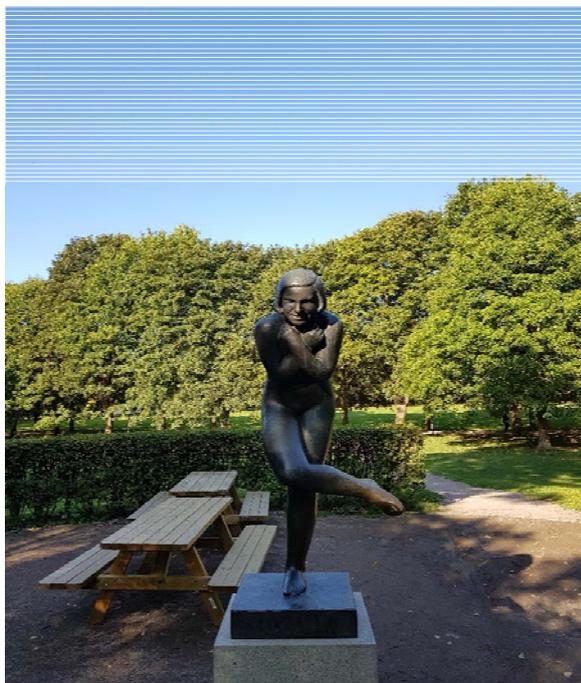


Image 3: “Surprised”: Ruth Maier modeled for Gustav Vigeland

We randomly asked three individuals – all long-time residents in the vicinity – about the whereabouts of the statue of Ruth Maier, “Surprised”: a mother on maternity leave, an elderly gentleman who had just parked his car not far from the statute, and an employee in a souvenir shop that sold memorabilia in connection with Vigeland Park. Although the mother and the employee had a vague inkling about seeing the statue somewhere, none of them knew who she was or information about the significance of the statue. Although these incidents are anecdotal, they appear to correspond with the disheartening survey among young people where less than half knew about the law that forbade Jews from entering Norway and more than one-third believed that only 600 000 Jews were killed in the Second World War (Vaagen & Gran, 2011, p. 53). That the three individuals at the park were adults raises further questions about general levels of knowledge about antisemitism and holocaust knowledge in Norway. Ruth wrote a diary that gave expression to the roller coaster of emotions she experienced as a result of her frustrations, joys and hopes. On November 26, 1942, she was arrested at her address in Oslo. The newspaper, *Aftenposten*, writes that two burly policemen apprehended her with many girls in pajamas observing the scene upset. One of them looked at the beautiful golden wristwatch on her skinny wrist and said, “Take off the watch. We can take care of it for you until you return,” to which Ruth replied, “I will never return” (Thomas, 2016, p. 201). Six months after she modelled for Gustav Vigeland, she was apprehended and deported to Auschwitz and killed. It was seventy years later, in 2012, on the occasion of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, that the then Prime Minister of Norway, Jens Stoltenberg, and now current NATO General Secretary, issued an official apology for the role played by Norwegians in the deportations. Poignantly, he chose to deliver this apology at the dock in the capital Os-

lo where 532 Jews boarded the cargo ship *Donau* on 26 November 1942. Among others, he said:

“The Holocaust came to Norway on Thursday 26 November 1942. Ruth Maier was one of the many who were arrested that day [...] What about the crimes against Ruth Maier and the other Jews? The murders were unquestionably carried out by the Nazis. But it was Norwegians who carried out the arrests. It was Norwegians who drove the trucks. And it happened in Norway. In the course of the war, 772 Norwegian Jews and Jewish refugees were arrested and deported. Only 34 survived” (Stoltenberg, 2012).

We had earlier noted the formulations on respect, tolerance and bullying which featured in Philosophy but was absent in Judaism. We argue that religious education teaching ought to acknowledge historical antisemitism, which conflated religion (Judaism), and ethnicity/race (Jews) as a more effective approach in confronting antisemitism. While we acknowledge the academic distinction between religion and race/ethnicity, anti-Semites have traditionally collapsed permutations of categories. The Stanford scholar, Fredrickson (2002, pp. 17–25), for instance, contends that historical and modern antisemitism had a racial/religious element unlike other forms of racism. He contrasts the Anglo-Saxon discrimination against Slavs and the Irish. What was lacking, in his view, in order for this discrimination to be labelled racist, was “an ideology or worldview that would persuasively justify such practices”. He concludes, “The notion that Jews in particular were malevolent beings in league with the Devil provided such an ideology and gave antisemitism an intensity and durability that prejudice against the peripheral Europeans would never quite attain” (Fredrickson, 2002, pp. 24–25). Commensurate with the above, we suggest a pedagogy that confronts antisemitism at its source. In this instance, the teacher would have to lock horns with medieval Christian antisemitism. As Fredrickson (2002, p. 23) states:

“Those medieval Christians who viewed Jews as children of the Devil in effect excluded them from membership in the human race for which Christ had died on the cross. (They also excluded non-Jewish witches and heretics, but not because of their ethnicity). The scriptural passage most often quoted to associate Jews as a collectivity with Satan was Christ’s denunciation of the Jews who rejected him: ‘You are of your father the Devil, and your will is to your father’s desires’ (John 8:44 RSV)”.

As an RE teacher in high school, the lead author can confirm that students shared unvarnished opinions to the effect that Jews are the Devil’s accomplices (Thomas 2016, p. 196). Given that such antisemitism emanates from medieval Christian anti-Judaism, teachers must grapple with the conundrum at its root. At the risk of overstating, and with due respect to the other great world religions and philosophies, it was a virulent anti-Judaism with its roots in Europe that transmogrified into antisemitism and culminated in the Holocaust. Hence, to craft an RE curriculum devoid of any reference to the trajectory of antisemitism in Judaism is to neglect an important aspect of the students’ education. As mentioned earlier, inclusive education is an education that seeks to, among others, support learners in their need to relate to their peers in all their diversity, and attends to the same in the curriculum (Mitchell, 2017, p. 11). As such, we argue that naming antisemitism explicitly and unravelling its historical machinations in Norway will send the signal that the authorities take inclusive education seriously.

Finally, we contend that the RE curriculum should deal specifically with antisemitism and the Norwegian holocaust as a “stand alone” historical prejudice that impacts Jewish people. Not naming antisemitism explicitly, or subsuming it within bullying and antiracism does a disservice to students. To quote Theodor Adorno, “The premier de-

mand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again” (Adorno, 1998). Pettigrew (2010, p. 54) builds on this principle when she demurs from the view that there is a “slippery slope from bullying to genocide” (Pettigrew, 2010, p. 53). She argues that such a viewpoint would deflect attention from “the wider context of a modern Europe and its long and convoluted histories of antisemitism and racialization, in which the Holocaust did in fact take place” (Pettigrew, 2010, p. 53). She concludes:

“This research again emphasizes the importance of understanding context. ‘Racism’, ‘prejudice’ and/or ‘intolerance’ are not fixed and consistent phenomena that can be used to explain events such as the Holocaust; rather there are different racisms and expressions of prejudice and intolerance in need of explanation and investigation themselves” (Pettigrew, 2010, p. 53).

The current decontextualization of the specific kind of racism that has afflicted Jews in Norway over centuries is being neglected. We argue that all racisms have a history and each one is best dealt with by understanding and confronting that specific history. This conundrum seems to afflict higher education too. Some scholars have bemoaned the fact that many institutions of higher education fail to include antisemitism in courses on multiculturalism and antiracism. Alexander (1994, p. 63) states, “The multiculturalists do not recognize antisemitism as a form of racism”, and “Despite evidence suggesting widespread negative stereotyping of Jews among secondary schools pupils, antiracist education has failed to address the issue of antisemitism in a number of respects” (Short, 1991, p. 33). In his aptly-titled and thought-provoking article, *Still Wandering: The Exclusion of Jews from Issues of Social Justice and Multicultural Thought*, Rubin (2013) draws attention to the sidelining of antisemitism in US multicultural studies:

“Jews have been fighting for social justice of people of color throughout modern history (e.g. during the Civil Rights movement) and they have walked side by side, hand in hand, with those who deserved recognition, fairness, and equality. Yet, due to a variety of reasons, Jews are not members of the multicultural club in this country” (Rubin, 2013, p. 218).

The degree to which the above may still be extant would vary from country to country, however, these voices buttress our argument for antisemitism and the holocaust to be taught in their own specific contexts, and not coopted into an amalgam of racisms where the history of antisemitism is denied.

6 Conclusion

This study has explored the religious education curriculum for primary and secondary school in Norway with a view towards ascertaining the extent to which the statutory curriculum engages with the topics of antisemitism and the Norwegian holocaust in the teaching of Judaism. We conclude that the historical contours of antisemitism in Norway and the Norwegian holocaust are conspicuous by their absence. As some have stated (Michelet, 2014), it is only in the last decade that research about the Norwegian holocaust has gained traction. We consider this to be a modest contribution in this regard. While buoyed by recent official efforts, such as the project DEMBRA (2016) (Democratic Preparedness against Racism and Antisemitism) and the white paper, *Action plan against antisemitism 2016–2020* (2016), we argue that these are non-binding documents which leave it to the discretion of teachers at the chalkface to solicit. The gravity and magnitude of the Norwegian holocaust, which devastated Norwegian Jewry, we contend, is sufficient to warrant an explicit and comprehensive engagement with these topics. Refraining from any mention of these seismic incidents in

recent Norwegian history sends the unfortunate signal to teachers that antisemitism and the Norwegian holocaust are not valorized by the architects of the curriculum.

The government discourse on antisemitism appears to be one which universalizes the experience of racism and hatred without paying due attention to the particular circumstances – historical, political, economic, social and religious, to name some – which spawned the Holocaust. This recalcitrance to name antisemitism and its subsequent crystallization into the Norwegian holocaust is evident in the statement, “For example, a provision has been proposed that all teaching materials and teaching shall be based on equality and non-discrimination, with regard to all the discrimination grounds in the Act” (*Action plan against antisemitism 2016–2020*; 2016, p. 7). It strikes us as odd in a document written for the express purpose of combatting antisemitism that the government adopts a stance that elects to approach all “hatreds as being equal” and, hence, administering the same remedy. While there are good reasons for seeking to understand and thus combat hate ideologies comparatively, we have argued that a more robust and pedagogically sound approach would be to study each phenomenon in its own right (Pettigrew, 2010). Once this is accomplished, and the pupils have been sensitized to the machinations of each form of bigotry, comparison would follow more seamlessly. For instance, when the din from some right-wing political parties became louder some years ago calling for a ban on halal food, we reminded our Muslim students that there was a ban on Jewish ritual slaughter in Norway in 1930 (Thomas & Selimovic, 2015).

In particular, and commensurate with the tenets of Inclusive education, we contend that to neglect teaching about antisemitism while studying about Judaism, is to miss a crucial opportunity to challenge a bigotry which often began as a distortion of religion. Anti-Semitic tropes, such as the blood libel and deicide were the illegitimate children of a Judeophobic Christendom. Any serious endeavor to successfully combat this distortion must recognize the RE curriculum and classroom as the appropriate domain. The current discourse that ostensibly seeks to treat all discrimination as a universal problem, and hence the aversion to explicitly name antisemitism and the Norwegian holocaust, is at loggerheads with surveys that show that the majority of students in Norway want these phenomena to be taught (Hoffman et al., 2012, p. 27). This, we argue, would resonate with inclusive education’s aim “to relate to their peers in all their diversity” (Mitchell, 2017, p. 11). In the spirit of contrapuntal pedagogy, we have also forwarded three examples etched into the landscape of Oslo as “traces of historical Judaism”. Further research could consider the extent to which the general public is aware of these memorials to the victims of the Norwegian holocaust.

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