

Докторантски дебюти
Doctoral Student Debuts

Antisemitism and Antiziganism: State of the Art and Challenges for Citizenship Education

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Abstract: The present article contributes to the theoretical and empirical work on antisemitism and antiziganism by outlining the state of art in the German scientific community on both phenomena. Although they differ in certain aspects, some key characteristics can be pointed out with the need to be tackled in educational contexts: both phenomena rely on racist world-views manifesting themselves in similar rhetorical claims and are socially transmitted via forms of communication. Historically, both “groups” were considered as symbols of the Other in European societies. Their function as societal “counter-images” reinforced identification and bonding processes within the majority population’s in-group. Hence, exclusion and persecution of alleged members of these groups was legitimized. The article presents the theoretical and empirical debates on each phenomenon and examines the educational approaches discussed in the German research community. Subsequently, the article concludes with suggestions for further national and international discussions and research projects on antisemitism and antiziganism

Keywords: antisemitism; antiziganism; racism; citizenship education; Othering; discrimination.

Introduction

The newest representative study “Rassistische Realitäten” (racist realities) focusing on how people in Germany perceive racism was released this year. Once again, the study indicates that the most minority group members in Germany experience exclusion and racism at some point in their lifetime. The study reports that 58 percent of minority group members (Black people, Muslims, Asians, Sinti and Roma, Jews and Eastern Europeans) reported having experienced racism at least once in the past. [1]

The present paper wants to investigate two phenomena of the six forms of group-related hatred measured by the study above: antisemitism and antiziganism. Both phenomena differ from each other in the way the majority group forms their prejudice: while the antisemite is legitimizing his/her hostility towards Jews by (wrongfully) allocating the role of a “puppet-master” to the Jewish collective, the person holding an antiziganist worldview operates with the claim of the inferiority of Sinti and Roma. However, both phenomena rely on a racist worldview [2] and manifest themselves in similar rhetorical claims and are socially transmitted via language.

In the following, we would like to contribute to the theoretical and empirical work on antisemitism and antiziganism by outlining the state of art in the German scientific community on both phenomena. The article will present the theoretical and empirical debates on each phenomenon and examine the educational approaches discussed in the German research community. Subsequently, the article draws a conclusion, which puts forward the first suggestions for further national and international discussions and research projects on antisemitism and antiziganism. While our outlook is based on a German perspective, the results and especially the considerations on the educational landscape can also be transferred to other national and international fields.

Please note, that the authors choose the terminology of *antisemitism* and *antiziganism* in the present paper both to reflect the recent discourse from a specifically German perspective (hence, we use *antiziganism* instead of *antigypsyism*) and from a linguistic point of view following Kyuchukov, who states that “writing the word ‘antigypsyism’ with a hyphen (anti-Gypsyism) means that the word ‘Gypsy’ is accepted and recognized. However, written without a hyphen, this word has almost exactly the same meaning as ‘antisemitism’. [...]” The argument against the hyphenated form is best shown by another text arguing against the hyphenated form of ‘antisemitism’ as follows: ‘If you use the hyphenated form, you consider the words ‘Semitism’, ‘Semite’, ‘Semitic’ as meaningful. They supposedly convey an image of a real substance, of a real group of people - the Semites, who are said to be a race.’ [3]

Defining Antisemitism

Antisemitism is a centuries-old tradition, which can be traced back to ancient times, connected to the claim of the deicide, continuing though the Middle Ages and the blame of the Jews for the black death with its peak during the Nazi era. Nowadays, the unfathomable tradition of discrimination and insulting Jews continues, thus the blame of Jews as those responsible for the spread of the COVID-19-virus and for government actions to contain the virus became loud globally in many conspiracy theories evolving around COVID-19.

Despite the well-known character of the phenomenon and several efforts of political actors and experts, there is still no generally accepted definition of antisemitism. The term and the exact phenomenon that this term is supposed to cover is much debated in the German and the international research. [4]; [5] However, the need for a definition that enables authorities, police forces and political actors to recognize what is meant by antisemitism was needed and demanded by civic and public stakeholders.

In 2016 the *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)* decided to adopt a (non-legally binding) “working-definition of antisemitism” that was previously developed and presented by a cooperation of the *Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)* and the *European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC)* as well as some experts on antisemitism. [6]

The definition is kept short and describes antisemitism as the hostility against Jews - a hostility towards Jews not based on their individual behavior but due to their actual or alleged belonging to the Jewish community:

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.” [7]

Antisemitism can be expressed in “speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits”. [8]

The IHRA working-definition was adopted and endorsed by 34 UN member states, including Germany and Bulgaria (as of April 2022).

Since antisemitic attitudes originate from different sources and historical references and are reflected in different expressions and beliefs, researchers of antisemitism differentiate between different facets of antisemitism.

The so-called traditional ideological forms of antisemitism involve the open devaluation of and discrimination of Jews based on negative traditional stereotypes which are based on historical and religious myths and instrumentalized for the discrimination against. [9] The beginnings of religious anti-semitism can be traced back to the New Testament, when Jews were described as “sons of the devil” and portrayed as persecutors of Jesus. In particular, the allegation that Jews were to blame for the death of Jesus, became deeply imprinted in the beliefs of most Christians. In the Middle Ages, other insinuations, such as the “ritual murder” were added. [10] Those narratives can be also found in modern variants of antisemitic prejudices, such as in the antisemitic conspiracy theory evolving around the QAnon conspiracy theory, whose

believers are convinced that abducted infants are being tortured and abused in underground facilities in America. According to some the conspiracy theorists, the kidnapers are broadly described as the “elites”, which is an antisemitic code for Jews. Other traditional forms of antisemitism are manifested in the assumption of a special social status of Jews in society (social antisemitism) or the claim that Jews are a homogeneous collective with influential power and the assumption Jews conspire through secret planning with the intention is to gain dominance in the world (political Antisemitism). [11] In the nationalistic and racist traditional antisemitic facets, Jews are seen as a minority, ethnically, culturally or socially not belonging to the respective nation. They do not necessarily appear as foreign, but as “different”. Jews are seen as something different and negative by nature and they cannot escape this evaluation either by renouncing their religion or by behaving differently. [12]; [13] While racist worldviews are usually connected with antisemitic beliefs, it is important to state that there is a difference between racism and antisemitism by design: while racism usually asserts the inferiority of “the others”, antisemitism assumes a “Jewish superiority” and legitimizes the hostility against Jews by (wrongfully) allocating the role of a “puppet-master” to the Jewish collective. However, several studies indicate that racism and antisemitism do correlate with each other: those who agree to racist statements also often agree with antisemitic statements, and vice versa. [14]; [15]

Modern forms of antisemitism are seen in the so-called “post-holocaust” antisemitism [16]), which is described as the insinuation that the public discussion of the mass murder of Jews in World War II only serves to defame the national identity of Germans, to grant reparations to Israel, and to legitimize Israeli policy in the Middle East. This form of hostility toward Jews, also called secondary antisemitism, is often accompanied by a perpetrator-victim reversal. Holocaust denial can be considered a special variant of modern antisemitism. It assumes that the mass murder of the Jews did not take place but was invented by the Jews for the sake of the moral humiliation of the Germans. [17] With the founding of the State of Israel and the ongoing unrest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the “post-holocaust” antisemitism has taken on another dimension, the facet of Israel-related antisemitism, which has particular relevance for the Middle East region, but is also effective beyond it as a facet of antisemitic attitudes worldwide. Israel-related antisemitism is defined as the transfer of antisemitic stereotypes and resentments to the state of Israel. It is thus seen as “the Jew among all states”, as the representative for Jews worldwide [18]. Jews are held collectively responsible for Israel’s policies without further differentiation. [19]; [20]

State of the Art on Antisemitism

The ADL Global 100 survey of the Anti-Defamation League monitors antisemitic attitudes in 101 countries, including Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza [21] and estimates a 26 percent index of antisemitism worldwide, meaning that 26 percent of people in the world harbor antisemitic attitudes. In Germany, the ADL estimates the percentage of antisemitic attitudes in 2019 to 15 percent. They also state that the approval rate of male and older (50+ y.o.) participants is higher than the approval rate of female and younger participants (18-34 and 35-49 y.o.) (ibid.). Considering the religious background of the participants, it is evident that Muslim (49 percent) and Christian (14 percent) participants hold more antisemitic beliefs than participants with none or atheist religious backgrounds (12 percent).

The finding that antisemitic attitudes are still prevalent in the German public correlates with other big opinion polls in Germany. An analysis of a nationwide opinion poll from 2020 showed that traditional forms of antisemitism still get high approval by the public). [22] For example, 10 percent of Germans fully or mostly agreed to the statement “Jews have still too much power”, further 25 percent agreed partially to that statement, accumulating to 35 percent in total of the survey participants that agreed with the statement fully to partially. The German population showed an even higher approval in items that measure secondary antisemitism. 41 percent of the poll participants responded that they agree fully or mostly with the statement that “the reparation claims against Germany often do not help the victims, but a Holocaust industry”, further 33 percent agreed to that statement partially (= 74 percent in total). A total of 70 percent agreed with the Israel-related antisemitic item “Israel’s policy in Palestine is as bad as the Nazis’ policy in World War II”, from which 30 percent agreed fully to mostly and 40 percent agreed partially to that statement. [23] The study also replicated the findings of the ADL-survey that older and male participants tend to agree more with antisemitic statements. Additionally, the study found that formal education as well as the experience of unemployment do impact the belief in antisemitic narratives. Among respondents who reported at least high school graduation as their highest educational qualification, the proportion of people with antisemitic attitudes was significantly lower in all dimensions of antisemitism. In contrast, unemployment experiences are related to increased antisemitism scores in all dimensions. [24]

Education against antisemitism

The findings presented in the previous part of the paper indicate that 77 years after World War II antisemitism is still prevalent in a large part of the German population. Antisemitism as a hatred against Jews as members of a Jewish collective presents itself in many different dimensions, which build their

foundation on historically grown narratives and conspiracy theories and also adapt to newer “post-holocaust” narratives that target Jews.

Because of the ongoing popularity of antisemitism, a discussion must take place about the question what effective education against antisemitism might look like. In the following, some ideas will be presented on how to address antisemitism in educational contexts and how different dimensions of antisemitism need to be tackled.

In order to understand today’s antisemitism, it is crucial to understand the multidimensional historical aspects that underly the hatred against Jews. Today’s antisemitism makes use of old symbols, stereotypes, and conspiracy theories. In updated but essentially identical narratives of the past “the Jews” are perceived as the enemy. They are seen as a power and conspirator that desires to destroy societies, cultures, religions, and thus collective identities, and that strives for or already possesses world domination. [25] By understanding the mechanisms, the historical past of antisemitism and the antisemitic framing (e.g., calling Jews “elites” or dilute Jews with Israel), the observer can train his or her own perception and sensitivity towards antisemitism. [26] Especially important is to understand the transformation of antisemitism in the “post-holocaust” era, which fulfils the important role of the liberation from one’s own guilty past as a perpetrator (especially in the European context). The demand to draw a line under the past and to focus on Israel’s deeds in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, framing Jews as the “new perpetrators” fulfils the function of a discharge of the own (family) history (which in Germany is often marked by complicity during the persecution of the Jews during World War II). [27] An education targeted to address today’s antisemitism needs to include that thought, establish the environment to acknowledge one’s own past as well as the own emotional involvement, not by creating a cult of guilt but by encouraging to acknowledge the own historical past but also accepting the own role in today’s context of the “post-holocaust” era. It is also important to acknowledge that even the individuals who strongly define themselves as anti-racists and antiantisemites are not immune to reproducing antisemitic stereotypes. Those teaching about tolerance are also enmeshed in culturally deeply embedded structures of thought and feeling. Psychoanalysis points out that emotional legacies are formed in processes of intergenerational transmission by perpetuating unconscious feelings of guilt. [28] In relation to antisemitism, this would mean that educators also are not completely free of traditional and often unconscious antisemitic beliefs and feelings. [29]

Finally, an education that really wants to target modern forms of antisemitism cannot walk on eggshells around the topic of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is a driving force for antisemitic attitudes. [30]; [31]; [32] Teaching about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is generally believed to provide a basis for reducing antisemitism or Israel-related antisemitism. [33] However,

educational settings on the conflict or Israel often become an occasion to articulate hostile attitudes towards Israel and resentment against Jews or against Palestinians. [34] An educational concept needs to provide a multilayered picture of the conflict, including a multidimensional view of the main actors in the conflict, which does not mean to replicate a diametrical picture of the conflict working with two narratives: Israelis versus Palestinians and the aggressor versus the defender, but to create an awareness and sensitivity towards the complexity and the historical, political, geographical and economic issues accompanying the conflict since its very beginning. Therefore, the generalization of groups (“the Jews”, “the Arabs”, “the Palestinians” etc.) must be avoided, as well the communication of a one-sided perspective (e.g., speaking about the Palestinian perspective, without including the perspective of Israeli Arabs). Different actors with different positions in Israel and the Palestinian territories and the Arab countries must become visible. [35] Therefore, a cooperation with Middle East peace organizations or institutes working in the field of the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue could be more promising, than an ad-hoc lesson on the history of Israel devoid of in-depth knowledge on the specific aspects and layers of the conflict.

Defining antiziganism

The following section is based on an article in print entitled “Perspektiven diskriminierungskritischer Bildung” highlighting the discussion of the term of antiziganism within the German research society with a special focus on the educational context. [36]

The term antiziganism (German: “Antiziganismus”) is by no means uncontroversial in academic and social discourse in Germany [37], but somewhat established in the sense of a critical view of the phenomenon. It describes the images and prejudices that people make of alleged ‘Gypsies’, as well as the stigmatization of people as ‘Gypsies’ and the subsequent discrimination, exclusion, and persecution. [38]

In a definition of the *Alliance against Antigypsyism*, it is further emphasized to understand antiziganism as a historically produced, stable complex of a socially established racism. Here, members of the supposed group are homogenized by attributing external and character traits, which in turn leads to the establishment of discriminatory social structures and violent practices. [39]

Antiziganism is not an exclusive phenomenon of our present, but can historically be traced back to the Middle Ages or further. Here, the so-called “Gypsies” (German: “Zigeuner”) are considered the central symbol of the *Other* of European societies. [40] This constructed notion is explained by different factors. An important role is played by the ascribed status of the “deterritorialized” [41] in an environment shaped by kingdoms, principalities and nations.

Stigmatization serves to legitimize exclusion and persecution and has continued throughout history, with a tragic climax in the era of National Socialism. [42]

Antiziganism is to be understood as a specific form of racism directed against Sinti and Roma. [43] Due to the linguistic difficulties in the use and in the genesis of the term, Messerschmidt speaks of “antiziganist racism”, while alternative forms such as Gadje racism or racism against Sinti and Roma are also used in the discourse. [44] Consensual is the connectivity to the concept of racism, which the author serves as follows: “Characteristic for old and new racism are origin-related mechanisms of *making foreign* [“Fremd machen”], which refer to ancestry, external appearance and cultural attributions. In the combination of these elements, a group is manufactured and addressed as not belonging to the inner part of society” (own translation). [45]

In the case of antiziganist racism, the mechanisms of *making others different*, or “Othering”, can be shown through historically developed elements that are composed of stereotypes and prejudices as well as structural forms of action. End speaks of different levels that condition antiziganism, dividing them into social interactions and practices, historical and political frameworks, prejudices and stereotypes, structures of meaning, and social norms and structures. [46] Severin lists frequently encountered attributions and stereotypes as non-sedentariness, inability to do regular (wage) work, exploitation of the majority society, cultural difference, and acting as a collective. [47] These attributions unite in the construction of the “*Zigeuner*”, a term, which is rejected by the majority of those affected by antiziganism and perceived as pejorative. The functionality of this construction becomes apparent when one considers the emergence of antiziganism against the background of European societies’ entry into modernity. Maciejewski recognizes the following function as the psychological core of this early form of antiziganism: “Sinti and Roma are not only used to embody the Other of modernity, they also - and this is the point of ‘counter-image’ and ‘counterculture’ - bring this Other to light in the eyes of non-Sinti and non-Roma as the own *Old* of European culture. Against their will, they become representatives of the vanished world of pre-modernity, a world of yesterday” (own translation). [48]

The archaic, civilizational remnant of the pre-modern order is thus projected onto a supposed group that is henceforth supposed to embody all that is unwanted and backward, which is supposed to be discarded under the impression of the emerging citizenship.

Historically, this has opened the door to discrimination and persecution of people affected by antiziganism and defamed as “*Zigeuner*”. The aforementioned attributions solidify in their function as counter-images and persist in varying degrees of intensity to the present day.

State of the art on Antiziganism in Germany

Antiziganist stereotypes are still present today and are reflected in social microcosms such as schools. With reference to Albert Scherr, it can be stated that the historical persecution and extermination of Roma is hardly present in school education. [49]

Attitudes of the population towards Sinti and Roma in Germany range “between pronounced indifference and clear rejection”. [50] According to a study by the Documentation Center for Antiziganism (DOSTA), the accompanying social exclusion has increased since the beginning of the Corona pandemic. [51] The incidents of antiziganism in Berlin collected in the project show that Sinti and Roma are disadvantaged in various areas of society, such as in public authorities, medical care, education and housing. [52]

The realization that antiziganism is structurally rampant and low-threshold, but at the same time not recognized by large parts of the so-called majority society as racism or at least as social discrimination of the groups of people affected by antiziganism, opens up more than ever discussions on how to counter antiziganist racism as a discriminatory practice, especially in educational contexts.

The current RomnoKher education study examines the unequal participation of Sinti and Roma in the education system in Germany. One of the researchers’ findings concerns the work of teachers, who need to be trained in specific measures to promote the educational success of Sinti and Roma: 62.7 percent of the respondents stated that they had been “insulted, hostile or similar because of their ethnic background as Sinti/Roma”. More than half of the respondents (53.8 percent) complained that violence had occurred. [...] Teachers and schools apparently lack effective and manageable concepts and methods to counteract antiziganist insults and violence in a decisive and sustainable way. [53]

Education against Antiziganism

The Independent Commission on Antiziganism (“Unabhängige Kommission Antiziganismus”), comes to similar conclusions in its report and identifies the education system as a site of experiences of discrimination and racism characterized by the structural denial of educational opportunities to members of the minority, by “racializing educational content” and lack of awareness-raising among pedagogical staff. [54] Therefore, there is a demand for increased visibility of antiziganist incidents, empowerment of students through support programs as well as a “reduction of deficit orientation in pedagogical action”. [55]

In order to counter antiziganism in educational contexts, a critical education on antiziganism formulates requirements for educational work in and out

of school, following concepts of migration pedagogy and racism-critical education. End [56] identifies the following core topics: Creating an awareness of the problem among teachers and learners, turning away from the preservation of a “special status” [57] of Sinti and Roma, for example in classroom-management, recognition of structural antiziganist racism, the causes of which are to be found in the “dominant culture of the society” [58], and the reflection and deconstruction of prejudice structures. Messerschmidt also emphasizes the actors’ own structural involvement in educational contexts and the necessary reflection of their own patterns of thinking and behavior:

In the mediation work on the critique of antiziganism, the critics themselves must confront the fact that their own theories and practices are also entangled in the dynamics that they criticize, and that they themselves profit from a certain kind of institutionalized racism and racist antiziganism. Criticism of racism emphasizes the general, and therefore critics’, involvement in socially embedded everyday racism (own translation). [59]

Racism towards Sinti and Roma must first be understood as a societal relationship, while the causes of exclusion are to be sought in the majority society. The desired processes of reflection go hand in hand with a critical analysis of the respective educational context and inevitably lead to dealing with questions of inclusion and exclusion.

Conclusion

As the article shows, antisemitism and antiziganism are widespread problems in society as a whole and must be confronted with a reflective attitude. Although they differ in certain aspects, some key characteristics were pointed out with the need to be tackled in educational contexts: both phenomena rely on racist worldviews manifesting themselves in similar rhetorical claims and are socially transmitted via forms of communication. Historically, both targeted “groups” were considered as symbols of the *Other* of European societies, marking people as bad “counter-images” for functions of identification and strengthening of the own in-group. Hence, exclusion and persecution of alleged members of these groups was legitimized.

When it comes to strategies combating the discrimination, the recognition of the self-involvement of actors plays a major role both for antisemitism and antiziganism. Therefore, education against antiziganism and antisemitism focuses not on the targeted “groups” but on the majority society, the actors of discrimination and racism themselves. This step marks a shift of paradigm in anti-racist educational work in the last years bringing new challenges to the field of education against antisemitism/antiziganism while often lacking a thorough implementation in the practical educational work in Germany.

Citizenship education that claims to be critically reflective needs a critical perspective on the increasingly diverse society and the inequality relations that go along with it. The growing heterogeneity in many areas of public life needs special attention - this includes the education system and especially the handling of heterogeneity in the classroom. Teachers and other educators have a crucial role to play here. For example in the extracurricular area of youth and adult education.

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Брой 52 на сп. „Реторика и комуникации“, юли 2022 г. се издава с финансовата помощ на Фонд научни изследвания, договор № КП-06-НП3/75 от 18 декември 2021 г.

Issue 52 of the Rhetoric and Communications Journal (July 2022) is published with the financial support of the Scientific Research Fund, Contract No. KP-06-NP3/75 of December 18, 2021.