‘But I still don’t get why the *Jews*’:

using cause and change to answer pupils’ demand for an overview of antisemitism

Research by the Centre for Holocaust Education has suggested that students need and want more help with building an overview of the historical roots of antisemitism and that they often lack knowledge of Jewish life prior to the Holocaust. Darius Jackson has attended to these problems with a lesson that examines the context of antisemitism in two contrasting settings: medieval England and Nazi-occupied Poland. After building their own analysis of the causes of antisemitism in both contexts, pupils then situate this within an overall question about historical change, looking at patterns of change and continuity across the causes of both events. The model can be expanded to embrace other historical events and situations.

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Introduction

In this article I present a series of activities for a lesson with three interlocking goals. The lesson was designed, first, to deepen students’ knowledge of the historical context of antisemitism, second, to teach them to shape their own arguments about the causes of antisemitism and, third, to show them how to think about how far and in what ways antisemitism changed over time and across different settings. The lesson is therefore designed to build substantive knowledge of more than one historical situation, separated in time and space, and also to use two second-order concepts – cause and change – to help pupils to shape and re-shape that knowledge analytically. The causation work is, in some ways, servant to the work on change, with the change focus being on how causes of a recurring phenomenon varied over time. It thus reverses Jenner’s interplay of change and cause, by making change into the overall focus.[1] This lesson is designed for pupils in Year 9 or above who would be studying Nazi Germany and who would already have studied medieval history lower down the school.

There were three inspirations for this lesson: first, the controversy surrounding the AQA GCSE RE question in the summer of 2012, ‘Explain briefly why some people are prejudiced against Jews’. Many comments on this question suggested that explaining an idea was tantamount to justifying it. If this were the case, then any attempt to explain, historically, the existence of antisemitism could be accused of rationalising it.[2] The second inspiration was the re-release of the Imperial War Museum’s classic DVD *The Way We Used To Live*. Included in the re-release is a twelve-minute film, *The Roots of Antisemitism*.[3] In this short film, the history of antisemitism is presented. The activities in my lesson are explicitly designed to build upon that intense short film. Although the DVD is useful, however, the lesson and activities are designed to work without it and provide a model applicable to other issues and topics in history. Third, and most important, was research carried out by the Centre for Holocaust Education, at the Institute of Education, University of London. The research was into the nature of Holocaust education, when, how, where and why it is taught in English state schools. It used an on-line questionnaire, with 2,108 respondents, and 68 interviews in 24 schools to explore the issues. This research showed that when teaching about the Holocaust, Jewish life prior to the Holocaust is often overlooked.[4] Other research, such as that by Short, has highlighted the risk that the Holocaust be seen as a result of religious rather than racial prejudice.[5] The research team at the Centre for Holocaust Education monitor the feedback we get from teachers on our courses, and this, along with anecdotal evidence from teachers, suggested that students wanted an overview to explain the historical roots of antisemitism. Consequently this lesson provides a framework to help pupils understand the factors that led to the Holocaust, placing these in an historical context and helping pupils to construct that analysis in a rigorous, historical way by using questions shaped by major historical concepts – cause and change – and doing so over long time-scales.

This last point is important. The events of the Holocaust took place during a specific phase of World War II. Focusing on the immediate context, however, can lead to pupils ignoring the longer historical context. This leaves them unable to construct an informed, historical answer to the question, ‘Why were the Jews murdered?’ This lesson aims to balance the relative importance of long-term factors and specific local contexts in deepening pupils’ understanding of the causes of antisemitism.

Figure 1: Factors that affected antisemitism for use in Stage I of the lesson

Ghettos	Social Darwinism	Jews segregated
Jews forced to live in the Pale	ignorance of the Jewish faith	Jews marginalised
Jews being blamed for communism because some Russian communist leaders were Jewish	overwhelming majority of people in Europe being Christian, so Jews deemed unusual and different	right-wing Germans blaming Jews for losing the Great War, even though German Jews had fought and died for their country
Russian Tsar (Emperor) in the late nineteenth century seeing the Jews as 'the enemies within'	Jews accused of murdering children in order to use their blood in making bread for the Passover	
Jews blamed for the Black Death	early Christians blaming Jews for the killing of Christ	Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion
rebellion against the Romans in the second century CE	Jews being forced to do unpopular jobs	Jews not being allowed to eat any blood or blood product
Jews seen as a race rather than a religion	the fact that Jews could convert to Christianity, and thereby stop being Jewish	the fact that if Jews changed their religion they did not stop being Jewish
Tax collecting	accusations of magic	money-lending
Nazis claiming that Aryans and Jews were in conflict all the time		Jewish people settling across Europe and the Middle East in small communities
Jewish migration to Poland in order to be safe	80% of Jewish people living in Poland	Russia taking over Poland in 1815
nineteenth-century argument that humans were divided into races	the fact that Jews did not give up being Jewish once they had gained rights in the nineteenth century	some people thinking that Jews secretly controlled the world economy and governments

The lesson

The lesson is driven by two second-order concepts, cause and change. Each of these has a long tradition in the history education community in the UK, with history teachers exploring and debating their role as frameworks for argument and analysis.[6] The lessons also explicitly teach key substantive concepts, such as Social Darwinism and antisemitism. Rogers argues that pupils' recurring encounter with such concepts is both engine and measure of their growing knowledge.[7] The lesson would therefore fit in but also need to be tailored by history teachers to whatever pattern of prior teaching using both substantive and second-order concepts that they had adopted before.

The first concept is causality. Across the course of the lesson, pupils will have opportunity to build on their existing work on the nature of causes and how they combine. As with virtually all published work by history teachers on causation, it is based on an assumption of multi-causality. Isolating 'the' cause is impossible in history for '…causation in history does not involve simple cause-effect relationships; instead there are many actions and events that occur over time which may play a role in producing historical events.'[8] Heavily influenced by E.H.Carr, most school history has attempted to introduce students to bundles of causes and then to allow pupils to connect, combine and prioritise.[9] Such approaches have been extensively refined by teachers such as Woodcock who challenged the over-use of routine, special causation language such as 'factor', 'reason' and so on, and argued for explicitly teaching pupils further language that would nuance the complex ways in which different causes enable or facilitate events.[10] Not dissimilar to the argument of Bhaskar, the philosopher of science, Woodcock, the history teacher, has reservations about explaining an event as if it were possible to isolate it like some form of laboratory experiment. Context and complexity are inescapable.[11]

The second main concept is 'change and continuity'. The students have to weigh up the changes within the ideas of antisemites over time. Again, pupils' prior work on change and continuity could be drawn upon. Students are likely to have examined, for example, how monarchy or stability in government changed over time, as illustrated in a wide range of published work by history teachers from McDougall to Fordham.[12]

The substantive concepts are many. Antisemitism at the heart of the lesson, but others such as segregation, prejudice and discrimination present throughout. Students' understanding of these concepts cannot be taken for granted. I have found that it is important to devote time to ensuring that each of these concepts – each one a cultural category that amounts to a way of seeing a phenomenon in history – are properly

understood by making pupils explore them carefully. Certain kinds of events, situations and developments 'fit' these concepts; while others fit less well. Haenen and Schrijnemakers have shown how thinking carefully about the boundaries of such concepts can be one and the same process as deepening knowledge.[13]

Stage 1

I designed this part of the lesson to give the pupils an overall, shared conception of the causes of antisemitism. The central task is categorisation. This is a concept-forming task, encouraging pupils to crystallise, from a wide range of material, a core issue or central factor that needs to be summed up in a single noun or nominal group. The Imperial War Museum's DVD provides a hook at the start of the lesson, but it is by no means essential. Students work in small groups to sort some pre-prepared factors (see Figure 1) into categories. The advantage of small groups here is not only that they are '...likely to lead to a better group product' but, given the complex array of factors, with careful teacher direction, one pupil's knowledge can be used address another's gaps or questions.[14] The set of factors is not exhaustive. Blank factor cards are provided for pupils to write on so that they can make additions wherever their prior or new knowledge generates factors they deem to be important yet missing.

As with any categorisation exercise in a causation enquiry, the necessary level of support can vary according to pupil need.[15] While some pupils will be able to develop their own categories, other groups of pupils will need guidance, perhaps by being given one or two possible, larger concepts into which their groups and clusters could fit. Generally three categories emerge and they usually revolve around money or wealth, power and beliefs. The last category often subdivides into general beliefs as opposed to specific myths about Jews. Where factors are relevant to two categories, this can be a good moment to encourage the pupils to resolve the issue themselves. When I have allowed the categories to develop from the sorting activity discussion, I have often found that there is an initial sense of uncertainty. If I firmly encourage pupils to embrace that uncertainty, however, and stick at the task, that uncertain phase can be profitable in yielding much more thought about the best possible wording for categories. In the feedback, my advice is to make sure that you get pupils to reflect on the way that *non-religious* factors often affect what appears to be a *religious* phenomenon. Help them, moreover, to see that they have developed an understanding of antisemitism as a general phenomenon. It is worth taking time to help them reflect on *how* they have shaped the concept of antisemitism through their historical analysis. During this stage of the lesson, they have carried out part of a causal analysis – grouping and classifying factors – and they have built their understanding of several substantive concepts, both the more specific ones embedded within the cards and the more general ones used to group them. Seeing how one substantive concept fits into another is one way of exploring the boundaries of each.

Stage 2

This is where the pupils refocus their thoughts in order to create historically-specific conceptions of the factors that lead to antisemitism. In this section, the focus remains on causation but also prepares the way for an analysis of change.

Figure 2: 'Keys' for explaining medieval antisemitism

Through this activity they will start to see that antisemitism itself changes over time, but the primary analytic lens remains causation. I achieve this by using case studies to show that events differ in the range or type of causes that led to them. To keep it to one lesson, I generally choose just two events. I get the pupils to compare the causes of the Clifford's Tower massacre in England in 1190 with the causes of the events at Treblinka in Nazi-occupied Poland in 1942. The Clifford's Tower massacre took place in the city of York in England. Richard I had recently been crowned. He made no secret of his intention to go on a Crusade and there were rumours that he had called for all Jews in England to be killed. This inspired anti-Jewish sentiment. In York, a man called Richard de Malbis, who owed money to a Jewish man, Aaron of Lincoln, instigated the attack. The Jews took sanctuary in Clifford's Tower but they were soon besieged and eventually killed by the sheriff's men. These two events, separated by over eight centuries and quite different cultural, political and social circumstances, lead to a fruitful comparison.

Many other events or situations would similarly allow for a comparison of events and a comparison of causes. It would be possible to build into such a comparison other events such

Figure 3: 'Keys' for explaining Nazi antisemitism

as those that occurred in Seville in 1391,[16] Uman in 1768[17] or the Christmas Pogrom in Warsaw 1881.[18] My choice of medieval England and Nazi Germany arises from the fact that it is easier to tease out certain differences between these two periods. While in Nazi Germany a racist ideology was the driving force, there was a strongly religious dimension to medieval antisemitism. There are elements of continuity, but my intent is to show that antisemitisms are not identical; they change over time.

Still working in groups, the pupils use 'keys' as a metaphor for naming the causal factors that 'unlocked' antisemitism. Each group gets a diagram with an old-looking lock and three elderly-looking keys (Figure 2). Having only three keys encourages pupils to synthesise information and, in so doing, to make decisions about the relative importance of the various factors in each situation.[19] First the pupils select from their collection of factors those that are relevant to antisemitism in the Middle Ages. This allows them to highlight the nature of medieval antisemitism so that they can later compare it with Nazi antisemitism. As they are constructing their own interpretations of the roots of medieval antisemitism, they need to try out different ideas. In their groups they make links, wherever they consider there to be one, between the different causes. Thus they explore how these causes might combine. Slowly, through this activity, they decide what their 'key' labels are. There are three important rules to this activity:

- Labels must be written as full sentences. This ensures that they are developing ideas and arguments rather than snatches and rough ideas not properly thought through. In my experience, making pupils write a sentence makes them take more care. At first I was happy for short phrases to be used to explain the causes. It became apparent, however, that this was the point at which pupils began to *combine* causes and to construct their own interpretations. I therefore tend to advise teachers to demand sentences that synthesise groups of causes. It is an important stage in the embedding and formation of substantive concepts and in causal reasoning, so it is worth investing time in making pupils do it thoughtfully and carefully.
- Pupils are not allowed to use the same wording as that on the cards that they have just sorted. This makes them formulate their own explanations.
- They are allowed to introduce other information to support their arguments.

From running this in a number of contexts the most commonly emerging labels tend to be these:

- Religion: either how the Jews were an isolated minority in an overwhelmingly Christian Europe and/or Christians blaming Jews for killing Christ.
- Isolation: Jews being in small isolated communities speckled throughout Europe and therefore an easy target for persecution.
- Marginalisation and ignorance: how Jews were marginalised socially or geographically leading to ignorance of their religious beliefs. This is sometimes turned on its head, with marginalisation growing from ignorance.
- Jews being blamed for a variety of misfortunes and disasters, such as the Black Death, infanticide, magic.
- Jews being forced to do unpopular jobs.

The last two are sometimes related to the way that Jews were marginalised socially. Because Jews were segregated, it was easy to believe wild stories such as the myths that spread both in Seville and in York. Sometimes students put the argument about unpopular jobs the other way around: it was the jobs that led to Jewish marginalisation. One Year 10 girl reversed this, however, by using her knowledge from geography lessons to comment that migrant workers today still end up doing the 'dirty jobs'.

The activity is then repeated for the second case study, Nazi antisemitism. Each group has a sheet with a more modern lock and keys (Figure 3). Once again, slowly from the discussion certain factors emerge as being more important

Figure 4: Woodcock's criteria for student success in causal explanation activities

- pertinent selection and deployment of evidence and examples;
- sorting and categorising evidence and ideas into broader themes and factors;
- informed and logical explanation of how a particular point answers the question;
- drawing causal links between events and themes;
- deciding upon a hierarchy of causes;
- sustaining an argument which is consistent, persuasive and logical;
- addressing alternative views and interpretations of events or particular pieces of evidence.

Woodcock J. (2011) 'Causal explanation' in Davies I. (ed.) *Debates in History Teaching*, London: Routledge, p.125

than others. The following usually become the important 'keys':

- Racism: Jews being seen as a separate race; students sometimes link this to imperialism.
- Social Darwinism: always linked to the growth of racism.
- Jews being blamed for specific German problems such as losing WWI or the Treaty of Versailles. Anti-communism is occasionally put in this grouping.
- The Protocols of the Elders of Zion and how Jews were blamed for capitalism, communism and the state of the world in general.
- The Nazis having control over a large Jewish population as a result of the conquest of Eastern Europe.

Drawing on both historians and history teachers' work, Woodcock extracts seven criteria (Figure 4) to assess the success of pupils working on causality. In Stage 1 and Stage 2 pupils will have had opportunity to address each of these, although teachers may wish to emphasise one or more of them as specific objectives.[20]

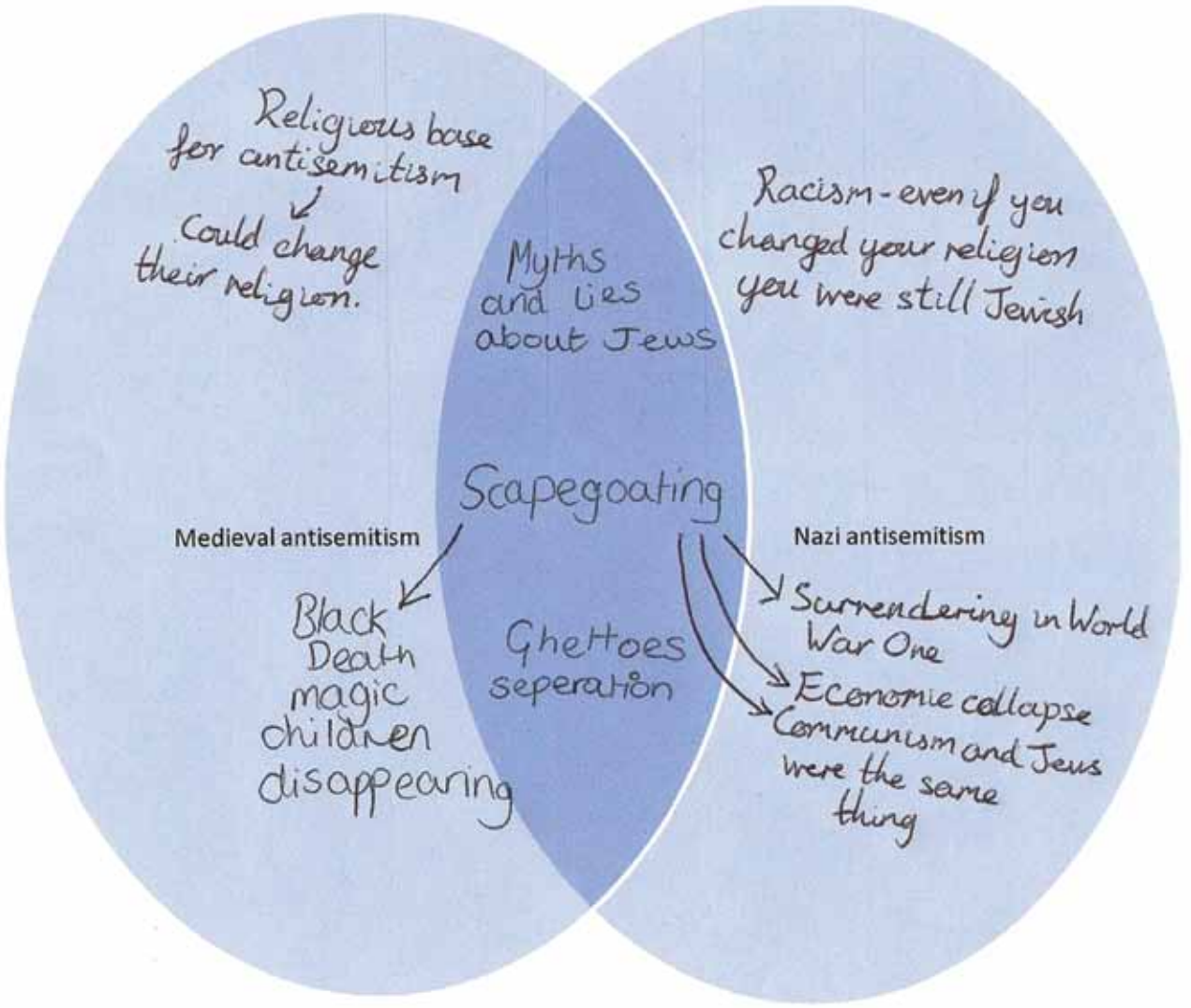
Stage 3

The conceptual framework changes with this activity. Instead of analysing causality, we now shift to continuity and change in the history of antisemitism. The pupils explore how antisemitism both changed and stayed the same. Counsell argues that it is important to work out what we want pupils to *do* when we ask them to examine 'continuity and change'. The historical problems that change and continuity throw up do not suggest *types* of argument as neatly as those thrown up by causation, but clearly there is no one fixed account of continuity and change so something must be problematised and explored.[21] By focusing on a deceptively simple, concrete activity – listing key features of specific types of antisemitism – I found that I was able to move students into the complex and abstract question, 'What is different about antisemitism at these times?' This question requires an argument characterising both *extent* and *nature* of change. Foster, basing her approach on the work of academic historians, reminds us that pupils need to attend to continuity and change occurring simultaneously.[22] My activity is designed to highlight continuities in antisemitism between the medieval and Nazi periods so that pupils can build hypotheses concerning both their nature and their extent. Foster also suggests that the writing of academic historians frequently problematises both 'direction' and 'significance' of change. My activity creates opportunity for the first and possibly for the second by highlighting the transition from a religious to a racially-motivated antisemitism and by exploring different manifestations of antisemitism, which, together, could be characterised as showing a number of possible 'directions' of change.

These notions are initially presented very simply, using a Venn diagram, where one circle represents the factors specific to medieval antisemitsm and the other to Nazi anti-semitism. The overlap will contain features that are common to both (Figure 5). This can be done by getting pupils to write their ideas in the circles but as this is a complex issue it can be easier and more productive of valid argument to run this as a whole-class feedback so the teacher leads the questioning. Thus the teacher can ensure that pupils are using adequate information accurately and appropriately, that they are thinking rigorously about continuity and change in antisemitism and that they are teasing out its possible configurations. It is useful for a teacher to model the emergence of such a conceptual framework, for example, by 'thinking out loud' about their own decision-making as an exemplar. In that way, pupils can see how historians consider alternative possibilities and weigh them up before reaching a claim about continuity or change.

Three big issues usually become apparent quite quickly, driving the discussion and allowing the teacher to press

Figure 5: Venn diagram for comparing causes of antisemitism



Venn Diagram filled in by Freya and Inga

pupils to nuance each more carefully and to insist on appropriate factual support:

- religion as a factor in the Middle Ages;
- racism as a factor in the Nazi period;
- scapegoating as common to both.

This difference between a religious and a racial base for antisemitism has significant implications. A medieval Jew who converted to Christianity would no longer be persecuted. Under the Nazi racial definition of a Jew, any religious conversion made no difference at all. This helps pupils to understand that the Holocaust was not about religious persecution; it was racially motivated. It was an attempted genocide.

It is in the discussion of scapegoating that the understanding of the complexities of change and continuity come to the fore. In both medieval and Nazi versions of antisemitism, when Jews were scapegoated the difference was what they blamed *for*. In the Middle Ages, antisemites blamed Jews for the Black Death, child-murdering and magic. In the twentieth century, Jews were blamed for a variety of modern ills. This can be broadened out into wider features of twentieth-century antisemitism. Preston points out the role of antisemitism in modern Spain, for example:

> *Spanish antisemitism without Jews was not about Real Jews but about an abstract construction of a perceived threat...given a burning contemporary relevance by the fear of revolution… all those belonging to left-wing parties were the stooges of the Jews...urbanism to industrialism to liberalism and capitalism all ideologies associated with Jews and Freemasons.* [23]

This leads us to the final, more substantive point of the whole lesson and one that it is important to reinforce at the end. It is a point that draws together the pupils' learning of substantive knowledge and their use of second-order conceptual frameworks. Fear of the Jews both in medieval York and in Nazi Europe was based on the fantasies of the perpetrators, not on anything Jews actually did. To understand antisemitism it is important to examine the context in which it appeared.

I would like to thank the Imperial War Museum (IWM) for the opportunity to try out these ideas and for generously providing what seems to be a never-ending supply of their DVD. I recommend that readers contact the IWM for a copy of the DVD. I would also like to thank my colleagues at the Centre for Holocaust Education and the teachers and students who have given me feedback on these activities.

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16 The Seville events took place in a context of increasing religious intolerance. When King and Archbishop died in quick succession, the dead king's young son had to rule under the guidance of a committee of regents. His widow's confessor, Archdeacon Ferrand Martinez, who had been making anti-Jewish sermons for years, used the death of the Archbishop to allow him to unleash an attack on the Jewish community. He ignored the regents' pleas to stop. The massacre finally ended when aristocrats raised an army to enter the city and put down the anti-Jewish mob.

17 Uman was a well-fortified city in central Ukraine, garrisoned by Polish troops. There had been numerous Ukrainian rebellions against the Poles (1734, 1750 and 1768). The Jewish community were seen by the rebels as Polish colonisers. When rebellious Cossacks captured the city, the Polish commander betrayed the Jews in exchange for clemency towards the city's Polish Catholic settlers.

18 In a crush at a Christmas church service, 29 people died. Jews were blamed for causing the panic and for picking pockets during the service. This triggered a three-day pogrom in which two people were killed, 24 injured and over a thousand made homeless. The Russian authorities called in troops to put down the pogrom. There is an historiographical debate about the role of the Russian authorities in initiating the pogrom but growing tension between Polish Jewish and Catholic communities may have been a deeper cause.

19 I saw Chris Culpin use this idea at a Schools History Project course at the British Museum in June 2002 and have found it a useful way to get pupils to think about the relative importance of causes.

20 Woodcock, *op. cit.* p.125.

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