



LAILAW UNDERGRADUATE LEADERSHIP AND RESEARCH PROGRAMME
APPLICATION – 2023 COHORT

Name	Luke Pätzold
Programme	Middle Eastern and European Languages and Cultures
Year of Study	2 nd year
Research Project Title	A study on the influence of Holocaust fiction on public memory and the spread of misinformation
Proposed Supervisor(s)	Prof Zuleika Rodgers – Department of Near and Middle Eastern Studies

Before completing this submission, you should review the [Laidlaw Programme Application Guide](#) sections and “Leadership-in-action experience proposal (Summer 2)”

<p>Research Project Proposal (750-1000 words max.)</p> <p><i>See Self-defined research project proposal (Summer 1) in the guidance for more information</i></p>
<p><u>Introduction</u></p>
<p>I am planning on conducting my research project on “The influence of Holocaust fiction on public memory and the spread of misinformation” in the Research Department of the Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau in Oświęcim, Poland.</p> <p>Public memory today is influenced and shaped by a multitude of factors, one of the biggest ones being social media. While the influence of social media on the spread of misinformation in the public sphere has been analysed extensively, I want to focus my research on the influence of formally published/released fiction on public memory, specifically Holocaust fiction.</p> <p>A big proportion of misinformation spread today relates to Holocaust distortion and antisemitism which are becoming a more frequent issue once again, influenced by the rise of right-wing and left-wing extremism, the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the popularisation of medieval antisemitic stereotypes through the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Dr. Wanda Witek-Malicka of the Research Department of the Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau has observed a “boom” in Holocaust fiction and has analysed examples, including, e.g., “The Tattooist of Auschwitz” by Heather Morris (2018), and concludes that many exhibit errors which create ambiguity and falsify the events of the Shoah. These errors include, e.g., that prisoners were able to live autonomous lives within concentration camps, were allowed to move</p>



freely, and that romantic relationships between SS guards and prisoners existed. Witek-Malicka describes these presentations not only as false but as “poeticized”, creating a false, romanticised image of the Holocaust and life inside of the camp. Additionally, many examples present an overstated number of victims, which might lead to the belief that because there were fewer victims in reality it “was not as terrible as it could have been.”

With “The Tattooist of Auschwitz” alone having been sold over three million times, these sources reach a wide audience and carry the potential to spread misinformation globally.

Therefore, I want to research the effect of Holocaust fiction on public memory as a case study of the wider problem of the spread of misinformation.

Project Methodology & Timeline

Methodology:

To conduct my research on the influence of Holocaust fiction on public memory, I will be using self-administered questionnaires.

The questionnaire will be split into four parts: Firstly, the participant’s background regarding nationality, gender, religion, highest attained level of education, occupation, and their background in Holocaust education specifically, will be explored through open-ended and close-ended questions.

The second part of the questionnaire consists of questions specifically relating to errors within the books and movies and both persons who are familiar with the source as well as those who are not, will be asked to answer these questions.

The third part consists of statements that explore the participants’ perception of fiction and their ability to critically engage with fiction.

The participant has to react to each statement based on the five-point Likert scale, which offers the participant five levels of, here agreement or frequency e.g.:

		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1.	When I consume Holocaust fiction, I ask myself which parts of the content are real and which parts are fiction.					

The last part of the questionnaire, will provide the participant again with a list of popular Holocaust fiction and asks them to tick the ones they have either read or seen if any, and then categorise them on the Likert scale based on, e.g., the following statements:



		Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important
3.	The content of this book/ movie is important for my understanding of the Holocaust.					

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
4.	I would recommend this book or movie to someone who wants to gain knowledge of the Holocaust.					

The questionnaires will be distributed online and to visitors of the museum, using QR codes and tablets on-site. While not targeting a specific sample group, the distribution in front of the museum could potentially lead to accumulations of participants with heightened interest and possibly above-average understanding of the topic hence their visit to the museum, which will be taken into account through the first part of the questionnaire, addressing the educational and national background of each participant.

The questionnaire will be available in the museum’s four languages: English, Polish, German, and Hebrew. The translation into Polish will be conducted in cooperation with the museum, while the translation into English, German, and Hebrew will be conducted by myself.

The data will be evaluated quantitatively and qualitatively concerning possible demographic correlations and to analyse the relationship between misinformation presented in books/movies addressed in part two of the questionnaire and the participants’ ability to critically engage.

Timeline:

The questionnaire will be ready before the start of my research and I will spend the full six weeks in Poland gathering data while constantly evaluating and refining the questionnaire. With around 5,400 visitors per day and distribution online, I can expect a sufficient number of participants who have engaged with Holocaust fiction.

Intended Outcomes



Through my research I want to establish:

- i. whether the participants are able to and differentiate between fact and fiction,
- ii. whether Holocaust fiction is perceived as a reliable source of information on the Holocaust,
- iii. whether demographic correlations, concerning, e.g., education, nationality, or religion exist,
- iv. and whether certain books have a heightened influence on the spread of misinformation.

Thereby, Holocaust fiction's potential influence on aiding Holocaust distortion within public memory can be assessed.

My research can serve as a basis to show the importance of further study of this field and aids further analysis of sources that distort the public's memory of the Holocaust. Further, it can make authors, publishers, and readers aware of their responsibility and of the effect their fiction has on the spread of misinformation and public memory.

Additionally, I hope to have developed my skills as a researcher to aid my future development within and outside of the academic framework.

Planning for pre-approval requirements (if relevant e.g., ethics approval, Garda vetting)

I am currently seeking ethics approval as it is required for questionnaires and because it potentially classifies as "Research of [...] sensitive nature" according to Trinity College's Policy on Good Research Practice.

Planning for expected additional project costs (if relevant e.g., lab expenses, subscriptions, software, project-related travel)



Expected additional project costs can be broken down into the following estimates:

- a) Travel and accommodation:
 - i. Train from Bielefeld to Düsseldorf (return): 50€
 - ii. Flight from Düsseldorf to Krakow (return): 200€
 - iii. Coach from Krakow to Oświęcim (return): 40€
 - iv. Accommodation (six weeks): 850€
- b) Materials:
 - i. Literature: 150€
 - ii. Survey tools: 50€

Are there any other relevant details to your proposal e.g., interdisciplinary collaborations, potential for international travel, or links to existing projects or organisations?

My project will take place in collaboration with the Research Department of the Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland, and therefore, requires international travel as outlined above.

Leadership-in-Action experience proposal (500 words max.)

See *Leadership in Action Proposal (Summer 2)* in the guidance for more information

LiA Category Insert x as appropriate	Category A: Central Laidlaw Foundation Project	
	Category B: Leadership Placement	
	Category C: In-field application of research	X



I would like my Leadership-in-Action experience to fall into Category C: The in-field application of research.

If the outcome of my research allows for it to be applied in this way, I would like to intern with either an NGO, such as the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, the Holocaust Educational Trust United Kingdom, or the Education Department of the Museum and Memorial Auschwitz-Birkenau in order to publish my results and further develop resources to inform oneself of the credibility of popular Holocaust fiction and to promote and work on educational measures needed to foster awareness of the distortion of facts and misrepresentation of actual events within Holocaust fiction. Similarly, I would use this chance to reach out to authors and publishers to make them aware of the consequences of their wrong presentation of the Holocaust and their insufficient process of fact-checking.

A similar route would be an internship within the Office of the Federal Government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and for the Fight against Antisemitism to see how education on the Holocaust and the effort against distortion works on a governmental and policy level. This would also include being able to see how these efforts on governmental and policy levels then work with and for the affected communities and how this work is embraced by the wider society.

My main goal for the Leadership-in-Action experience is to take on responsibility within these institutions and to use the research experience and in-depth knowledge I will have gained through the summer one project, to work on promoting self-education on the Holocaust through the right sources. Thereby, I want to help protect the Jewish communities that are the ones most affected by the spread of misinformation and antisemitism today, as well as protect the legacy and remembrance of the victims.

Are there any other relevant details to your proposal e.g., interdisciplinary collaborations, potential for international travel, or links to existing projects or organisations, plans to apply to a Study Abroad / Erasmus opportunity?



My course entails two mandatory semesters abroad, therefore, I will be spending my third year (2023/2024) in Granada, Spain and Jerusalem, Israel.

While abroad, especially during my stay in Jerusalem, I am hoping to further develop my experience within the field of Holocaust studies as well as make valuable connections in light of the proposed Leadership-in-Action Summer Project.